



**Economic and Social
Council**

Distr.
GENERAL

CEP/2003/17
30 July 2003

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

Tenth session

(Geneva, 20-22 October 2003)

(Item 2 of the provisional agenda)

**MATTERS ARISING FROM THE FIFTY-EIGHTH SESSION OF
THE ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE (ECE)**

Note by the secretariat

Introduction

1. The fifty-eighth session of the Commission took place from 4 to 6 March 2003 (E/2003/37 - E/ECE/1406). The following main topics and issues were examined and debated at the session: economic development in the ECE region; sustainable development in the ECE region; ECE reform; major policy directions of the ECE work; ECE achievements and constraints during 2002 and the outlook for 2003; preparations for and follow-up to world and regional conferences, in particular the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the World Summit on the Information Society; technical cooperation and coordination with other organizations; report of the Group of Experts on the Programme of Work. All documents discussed at the session may be downloaded from the ECE web site http://www.unece.org/commission/2003/58th_index.htm.

2. The secretariat has summarized some of the issues and decisions taken during the session and relevant to the work of the Committee on Environmental Policy.

Sustainable development in the ECE region

3. The discussion on sustainable development was organized around two round tables: progress in national strategies for sustainable development; and implementation strategy at regional level: the role of ECE. During the discussion, the following main points emerged as of key importance to the development of national sustainable development strategies:

(a) It is advisable not to try to comprehensively tackle all issues raised by Agenda 21 but to limit action to carefully selected areas of concern;

(b) The selection of these concerns must come through a process of consultation with all stakeholders, including local governments, local communities, broader civil society, academics, NGOs;

(c) Efforts must be made to ensure that all three pillars of sustainable development are addressed and on an equal footing;

(d) Among the priorities are the following: decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation; changing production and consumption patterns; science and technology development; fighting poverty and ensuring social cohesion; improving people's quality of life and well-being; health; sound management of natural resources; sustainable energy policy; environmental protection; research, technology and innovation; land use, urban planning and development; environment-friendly mobility;

(e) The process and the plan need to be supported by a legislative framework and a commitment from the highest level of government;

(f) In the experience of several countries, the establishment of an appropriate institutional framework is necessary, such as the creation of inter-ministerial committees and national councils for the purpose of developing and subsequently refining the national strategy;

(g) The establishment of sustainable development focal points in each government department and related organization is also felt to be a useful means of ensuring multidisciplinary involvement;

(h) The national sustainable development plan should be a living document, with reviews and monitoring mechanisms put in place; its development and implementation should be a continual learning process; and

(i) Progress in implementation should be measured through the use of concrete indicators, with clearly identified targets and a set timetable.

The importance of subregional and regional cooperation was highlighted. It was suggested that United Nations institutions should support follow-up to the Johannesburg Summit at country level. The international governance of sustainable development was underlined as an important issue, taking into account cultural diversity, global public goals and the social dimension of globalization.

4. Concerning the items on the UNECE follow-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development, a number of points were made during the discussion:

- (i) The World Summit gave a clear mandate to the United Nations regional commissions in its Plan of Implementation;
- (ii) UNECE had already done important work in the area of sustainable development before the World Summit. The follow-up should build upon well-developed UNECE activities and the expertise already available in sustainable development should be fully used;
- (iii) Delegations expressed appreciation for the efforts of the UNECE secretariat to mainstream sustainable development within the different subprogrammes. All areas in which UNECE is active have importance in relation to sustainable development. All activities should therefore be scrutinized with a view to ensuring that they are supportive of sustainable development;
- (iv) UNECE activities should be coherent with ongoing programmes and processes, such as the sustainable development activities carried out in the framework of the Commission on Sustainable Development, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the "Environment for Europe" process. It is advisable for UNECE to pursue coordinated approaches with other regional organizations and subregional processes;
- (v) UNECE should play an active role in implementing sustainable development strategies, reviewing national sustainable development programmes, reviewing the Johannesburg partnerships and creating new partnerships.

5. Following the discussion, during which divergent views were expressed, the Commission agreed in general with a role for UNECE in follow-up to the World Summit on the understanding that the specific format and modalities would be decided following the debate and possible decisions by the Commission on Sustainable Development and at an ad hoc informal meeting of the Economic Commission for Europe.

6. A number of other relevant points cutting across all areas of ECE work were made. They are summarized below:

Substantive issues

7. All principal subsidiary bodies (PSBs) should:

- (a) Continue to regularly review their strategic directions and priorities. In particular, during the budget submission year, future directions for the programme of work should be discussed in preparation for the next programme budget and medium-term plan cycles;
- (b) Regularly review forthcoming activities in order to consider what might be dropped and replaced by new activities;
- (c) Ensure a balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development into all sectors of activity;
- (d) Further develop their intersectoral cooperation and activities, e.g. by scheduling bureau meetings of two or three PSBs in the same week in order to hold a joint meeting of these PSB bureaux;

- (e) Further incorporate cross-sectoral concerns into the work of all subprogrammes: gender issues, security, information and communication technologies (ICT) and knowledge-based economy;
- (f) Ensure coordination with other organizations involved in the same fields of activity.

Strengthening the Organization – review of the intergovernmental structure

8. Principal subsidiary bodies and their subsidiary bodies should regularly review their intergovernmental structure, in particular:

- (a) Some future streamlining and restructuring of the subsidiary bodies and related expert groups need to be considered, to ensure their continued relevance and effectiveness;
- (b) Sunset clauses should be introduced when appropriate, with an evaluation of the work achieved at the end of the period;
- (c) The frequency of meetings and number and length of reports produced should be reviewed.

Technical cooperation

9. Technical cooperation activities need to be reviewed and streamlined with the involvement of PSBs. In this review, PSBs should pay particular attention to the following conclusions of the Commission:

- (a) The priority-setting mechanism for technical cooperation needs to be strengthened to ensure that technical assistance projects are carried out in response to the real needs of member countries and that they are within the ECE expertise and do not overlap with the work of other organizations. (See in particular, paragraphs 35-36 of the paper on UNECE reform (E/ECE/1399), chapter V of which addresses these issues as well as those outlined below);
- (b) Technical cooperation should be demand-driven and action-oriented, with emphasis given to less advanced, low-income countries with economies in transition;
- (c) Therefore, technical cooperation with Central Asia, Southeast Europe and the Caucasus should be strengthened;
- (d) Financial assistance should be made available to low-income countries with economies in transition to enable them to participate in ECE activities such as workshops and seminars;
- (e) Evaluating technical cooperation activities, though difficult, complex and demanding, is important and necessary.