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COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

(Tenth session, Geneva, 20 - 22 October 2003)

(Item 7 (a) of the provisional agenda)

**MINUTES OF THE INFORMAL MEETING BETWEEN THE BUREAUX OF THE  
COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY AND OF THE GOVERNING BODIES  
OF THE ECE ENVIRONMENTAL CONVENTIONS  
(Geneva, 3 July 2003)**

**Introduction**

1. An informal meeting between the Bureaux of the Committee on Environmental Policy and of the governing bodies of the ECE environmental conventions, namely the Conventions on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution, on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context, on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents and on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, was organized on 3 July 2003, at the invitation of the Chairman of the Committee on Environmental Policy.
2. It followed up to the first informal meeting of 2 July 2002 (CEP/2002/8) to continue sharing experiences and finding synergies and areas of cooperation to promote and assess the implementation of the conventions in the region.
3. The informal discussions focused on the outcome of the Kiev Conference, the draft ECE environment strategy and the Guidelines on Compliance (ECE/CEP/107) and their implementation.
4. The meeting was chaired by Mr. H. von Meijenfeldt (Netherlands), Chairman of the Committee on Environmental Policy.
5. The list of participants to the meeting is annexed to the present document.

## I. OUTCOME OF THE KIEV CONFERENCE

6. Owing to the close involvement of the members of the Bureaux of the Committee and the governing bodies in the Kiev preparatory process as well as in the Conference itself, it was decided to refer to the decisions taken at the Kiev Conference within the discussions on the ECE environment strategy.

## II. THE ECE ENVIRONMENT STRATEGY

7. The Meeting discussed the draft ECE environment strategy, which had been prepared by the secretariat at the Committee's request to provide guidance to its work for the next five to ten years (ECE/CEP/80, para. 26). The Committee had discussed the draft strategy at its previous sessions in November 2002 and February 2003, and suggested involving also the ECE conventions in the definition of the future environmental priorities, prior to the final adoption of the strategy at its tenth session in November 2003.

8. In a round of general comments on the Strategy, the participants raised issues to be taken into account or further emphasized in the document.

### A Implications of EU enlargement

9. The enlargement of the European Union should not be seen as a threat to ECE, but as a challenge, an opportunity for partnerships and a possibility of gains for the region's environment. The mutual benefit obtained from the normative interaction between the ECE instruments and the EU legislation was emphasized in this regard. The strong commitment of the EU to the "Environment for Europe" process, which had been reaffirmed at the Kiev Conference, was also pointed out.

10. The need to tailor the ECE environmental activities more to the countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) ought to be further highlighted. These activities should not be limited to legal assistance but also include capacity-building and financing. The importance of using Russian when addressing the subregion should be fully acknowledged. However, the Eastern subregion is not the sole focus of the ECE work. The role of ECE in the regional implementation of global goals should also be emphasized.

11. The transatlantic dimension of ECE needs to be further underlined.

12. Relations with other United Nations regional commissions are an important additional element to focus on, for instance with a view to promoting interest in the ECE environmental conventions within the other regions. ECE could play a role in actively supporting common positions with the other regions on global issues. The Committee should promote interregional cooperation.

## **B ECE environmental conventions**

13. The value of the ECE conventions for the environment in the region needs to be further demonstrated to the member States in order to prompt the allocation of more national resources to fulfilling their commitments under the conventions.

14. Finding synergies between the conventions must be demand-driven. The “bottom-up” approach to the cooperation was thought to be appropriate. The need to work together should stem from the common nature of concrete problems. The concrete issues to be tackled together could include public participation, compliance, technical assistance, capacity-building and financial issues.

15. The Committee on Environmental Policy could contribute to the work of the conventions in particular in the field of capacity-building as well as through strengthening coordination among the various bodies. Furthermore, the Committee should use its influence to promote the national implementation of the conventions through its delegates. The role of the regional adviser in this regard was also highlighted.

16. Following a general discussion on the draft strategy, the Meeting reviewed the proposed goals for the Committee on Environmental Policy for the coming five to ten years. Based on the deliberations, the Meeting agreed that:

- The goals should be somewhat streamlined, and reduced in number by combining and reformulating some of them. Some of the “goals” were seen rather as “tools” for achieving the goals;
- The issues raised in the informal meeting would be discussed the following day at the meeting of the Bureau of the Committee on Environmental Policy. The consultant, together with the secretariat, would then revise the document in accordance with the comments. The revised version of the document would be submitted to the Committee at its tenth session.

## **III. GUIDELINES ON COMPLIANCE AND THEIR IMPLEMENTATION**

17. The Meeting had before it the Guidelines for Strengthening Compliance with and Implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) in the ECE Region (ECE/CEP/107), which had been adopted in Kiev. The participants exchanged views on how the Committee and the governing bodies could promote the implementation of treaty obligations, through the use of the Guidelines and by assisting the countries to build capacity. In addition, the Chairman gave the Meeting some suggestions for further improving implementation and compliance.

18. The participants welcomed the Guidelines. They recommended that the Guidelines should be posted on the web sites of each of the conventions for easy access. Presentation and discussion of the Guidelines at future meetings of the Parties was also thought to be useful. It was suggested that the member States should be invited to translate the document into their languages to

facilitate its dissemination and use at the national level.

19. The Meeting debated the appropriate mechanism and format for reporting on the ECE conventions at the sessions of the Committee on Environmental Policy. The participants favoured the continuation of the individual reporting on the conventions instead of creating any new reporting schemes. From the substantive point of view, it was agreed that in order to best serve the Committee's work, for instance in formulating priorities of action, the reports should concentrate on the concrete accomplishments as well as on the obstacles encountered in the implementation of the conventions and their protocols. It was suggested, furthermore, that the reports would refer to the concrete ways in which the Committee could be of assistance to the work under the conventions.

#### **IV. NEXT MEETING**

20. The participants agreed that it was useful to continue holding informal discussions on a yearly basis with a view to sharing experiences and ideas on issues that were concrete and common to the conventions. It was suggested that at the next informal meeting the implementation issues should be discussed further, possibly with the participation of the chairpersons of the implementation committees. There was a consensus on the need to organize the informal meetings back to back with other relevant meetings and to the extent possible on a fixed date. At this stage, it was agreed tentatively to hold the next meeting in the first week of July 2004.

21. The invitation to the next informal meeting together with an agenda would be prepared in advance by the ECE secretariat and sent out for comments to the Bureaux of the governing bodies and of the Committee.

Annex

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