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COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY
(Eleventh session, 13-15 October 2004)
Item 3 of the provisional agenda

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
BUREAU OF THE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY**

(Geneva, 14 January 2004)

Prepared by the secretariat in consultation with the Chairman

I. OPENING OF THE MEETING AND ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

1. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Zaal Lomtadze (Georgia), and attended by Mrs. Narin Panariti (Albania), Mrs. Helena Cizkova (Czech Republic), Mr. Bert-Axel Szelinski (Germany), Mr. Sergey Tveritinov (Russian Federation), Mr. Jon Kahn (Sweden) and Ms. Lynette Poulton (United States of America).

2. The Bureau adopted its agenda as prepared by the secretariat in consultation with the Chairman.

II. REGIONAL CONTRIBUTION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

**A. Information on the Regional Implementation Forum on Sustainable
Development**

3. Mr. Bärlund, Director of the UNECE Environment and Human Settlements Division, informed the Bureau of the latest developments in the organization of the Regional Implementation Forum on Sustainable Development to be held on 15 and 16 January 2004.

4. The Bureau was informed in particular of the panel discussions organized for each of the three thematic clusters, namely human settlements, water and sanitation, as well as their cross-cutting issues. It was expected that the Forum would highlight the progress in meeting sustainable development goals and identify obstacles and constraints in the three substantive areas. The Chairpersons of the sessions, Ms. Szolgayova (Slovakia), Mr. Roch (Switzerland) and Mr. Lomtadze (Georgia), respectively, would sum up the discussions with the assistance of the

secretariat. The Chair's summary, building on the sessions' summaries, would then be presented to the Commission on Sustainable Development at its 12th session in April 2004 by the Chair of the Forum, Ms. Margaret Becket (United Kingdom), Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

5. Bureau members exchanged views on the organizational matters and also invited their Chairman, Mr. Lomtadze, to speak during the session on cross-cutting issues and highlight the relevance of the Committee's activities and the outcome of the Kiev Ministerial Conference. The Bureau also concluded that the outcome of the Forum should be further discussed and requested the secretariat to put that item on the agenda of its next meeting.

B. The role of the Committee on Environmental Policy in the regional process for sustainable development

6. The Bureau was invited to discuss the Committee's role in the regional implementation process, and in particular the ways in which the Committee could promote and facilitate the interlinking of the environment with the other dimensions of sustainable development, in collaboration with other regional and subregional organizations and bodies.

7. Considering the substantive themes that had been chosen for the next biennial implementation cycle, namely energy, industry and air pollution, the Bureau stressed the importance of cooperating with the other subsidiary bodies of UNECE, as well as with other organizations, to strengthen cross-sectoral cooperation. In particular the UNECE Senior Management Group for Sustainable Development should oversee the integration of sustainable development in all the main sectors of UNECE as well as the meetings of the UNECE Steering Group, with the participation of the Commission's Bureau, UNECE senior management and the Chairs of the UNECE principal subsidiary bodies, were referred to as appropriate forums for taking up issues of coordination.

8. The Bureau also discussed ways in which it could assist Environment Ministers in assessing progress in the implementation of environmental commitments within the region emanating from Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation as well as from the UNECE Regional Preparatory Meeting for the World Summit on Sustainable Development. The Bureau emphasized the importance of making use of the environmental performance review processes of UNECE and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in assessing the environmental performance of the countries in the region and gradually adjusting them to assess sustainable development goals. Ministries of the Environment should share the responsibility for promoting sustainable development goals with other ministries. To that end it was considered important to involve the Prime Ministers and other representatives of the highest political level, as well as the ministries responsible for economic and social affairs.

9. Provided that the organization of regional implementation meetings became a permanent activity in the future, these forums were considered to be an efficient tool for promoting interlinkages between the sectors through the substantive discussions.

III. THIRD MEETING OF THE BUREAUX OF THE COMMITTEE AND OF THE UNECE CONVENTIONS ON FOLLOW-UP AND SUPPORT TO THE REGIONAL CONVENTIONS AND PROTOCOLS

10. The Bureau discussed its third informal meeting with the Bureaux of the UNECE conventions scheduled for June 2004 to share experiences and ideas on issues that were common to the conventions to support demand-driven interlinkages and, in particular, on the implementation of the UNECE conventions and their protocols and the need for capacity-building. The secretaries of the UNECE conventions informed the Bureau of the major achievements and obstacles encountered in the implementation of the conventions and their protocols, completing the information that had been made available in writing for the 10th session of the Committee.

11. The Bureau was reminded about the letter that Mr. Berger, the Chairman of the Meeting of the Parties to the Industrial Accidents Convention, had sent to the heads of delegation to the Committee asking for support in promoting the implementation of the Convention. In his letter, Mr. Berger had wished in particular to raise the awareness of the Committee's delegates, and through them that of their Governments, of the internationally supported assistance programme established under the Convention for the UNECE Caucasian and Central Asian member countries.

12. The Parties to the Aarhus Convention had established an ad hoc expert group to explore the scope, format and content of possible guidelines on public participation in international forums. An invitation to the first meeting of this group, to be held on 3-4 June 2004, had also been sent to the other conventions and to the Committee's bureau.

13. At the third meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention (November 2003), the Parties decided to amend the Convention in order to enable all United Nations member States to accede to it. As a follow-up to the Kiev Ministerial Conference, work was being undertaken to prepare an action programme on integrated water resources management (IWRM) for Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA). It would be composed of two parts: one on IWRM in a transboundary context and the other on IWRM in the national context. To implement this action programme, additional human resources would be needed, in particular for activities dealing with IWRM at the national level.

14. The Air Pollution Convention addressed compliance issues mainly through its Implementation Committee. Although the mechanism in use had proven to be effective, some areas of concern remained. Encouraging the ratification of the protocols in EECCA was deemed particularly important. It was also pointed out that the involvement of EECCA scientists in the technical work should be strengthened, since scientific work was a major step for countries towards ratifying the protocols.

15. The review of the implementation under the Espoo Convention was not yet complete or fully representative. Some 60 per cent of the Parties to the Convention had so far completed their reporting. Particular attention would be given to the EECCA countries, as few of them had ratified the Espoo Convention and/or signed the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment

and some had indicated problems with implementation.

16. The system of national focal points under the Water Convention was not always in place and the need to have an updated list of focal points was essential for streamlining the information to a country and coordination within it. Other convention secretaries confirmed that communication with effective national focal points was essential and that ways to improve the systems of national focal points needed to be looked into further. The difficulty in finding the right people was pointed out in this regard. Establishing common criteria for the appointment and performance of the focal points, developing terms of reference for them, as well as defining a reporting format not only to meet the requirements of the conventions but also to be useful for the Governments, were among the proposals put forward for further consideration.

17. The Bureau affirmed that countries that had problems meeting their legal obligations needed more guidance to know how to approach the issue of implementation. This was considered to be a domain where the Committee could help. Capacity-building was seen as a key element for promoting implementation, which was particularly necessary in the pre-ratification phase as well as for properly reporting on implementation. It was considered useful to have focused capacity-building activities to support the implementation of the legally binding instruments.

18. It was also pointed out that reporting on the implementation of the legal obligations under the UNECE conventions took place for each of the conventions separately. However, the effectiveness of the different actions taken by a country were not brought together under one heading to yield a comprehensive view on its effectiveness in some areas as opposed to others, and also vis-à-vis other countries. The Committee could consider having a role in finding an effective way to provide an overall picture on the conventions' implementation.

19. Other cross-cutting issues common to all the conventions that were proposed for joint discussions included environmental impact assessments and public participation in international forums.

20. The Bureau concluded that the next joint informal meeting, on 7 June 2004, would be devoted to a discussion on implementation and capacity-building.

IV. EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

21. Mr. Kahn (Sweden) and Mr. Tveritinov (Russian Federation) informed the Bureau about the first meeting of the Task Force on Education for Sustainable Development, which would be held on 19 –20 February 2004, to prepare a UNECE strategy on education for sustainable development. The two-day meeting would be devoted to sharing experiences in education and sustainable development and to discussing a draft strategy prepared by the secretariat. A small drafting group would also be established. It was expected to meet twice before the summer.

22. The Bureau recommended that the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Council of Europe should be given a particularly prominent role in the process.

23. Mr. Bärlund informed the Bureau of the high interest expressed by member countries in this activity. He also highlighted the importance of securing sufficient resources for the secretariat to service it, as well as to assist eligible countries to participate in the Task Force's and the drafting group's meetings. It was pointed out that for the time being this additional programme element had not received sufficient resources. He also reported that the United Nations General Assembly had decided to reduce the secretarial resources in the UNECE for the next biennium, putting more strain onto the available human resources. The work would nevertheless be started and pursued at least on a short-term basis by means of flexible solutions involving extrabudgetary funding.

V. OTHER BUSINESS

24. The work plan for 2004 of the Regional Adviser for the environment was distributed to the Bureau for comment. Any comments were to be provided to the secretariat in writing. The Regional Adviser was requested to report on his activities to the Committee at its next session in October 2004.

VI. NEXT MEETING

25. The Bureau decided to hold its next meeting on 8 June 2004 back to back with its meeting with the Bureaux of the conventions, which would take place on 7 June.
