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REFORM OF THE “ENVIRONMENT FOR EUROPE” PROCESS

**REPORT ON THE MEETING OF THE EXTENDED BUREAU OF THE COMMITTEE
ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY**

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The Extended Bureau of the Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) discussed the reform of the “Environment for Europe” (EfE) process on the basis of the outline of the EfE process reform plan prepared by the secretariat in consultation with the CEP Bureau pursuant to the request made by the Committee at its fifteenth session (21–23 April 2008; ECE/CEP/148, paras. 17 and 18).

The Extended CEP Bureau agreed that the draft EfE reform plan should be prepared for further discussion at the special session of the CEP scheduled to be held from 13 to 15 October 2008, with the purpose of finalizing the plan and submitting it to the Economic Commission for Europe for endorsement.

I. OPENING OF THE MEETING AND PARTICIPATION

1. The meeting of the Extended Bureau of the Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) was held on 23 and 24 June 2008 in Geneva. Mr. Zaal Lomtadze (Georgia) chaired the session. It was attended by delegates from 29 UNECE member countries: Armenia, Austria, Belgium, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and the United States of America. The European Commission also participated.

2. Representatives of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the European Environment Agency, and European ECO-Forum also took part.

II. REFORM OF THE “ENVIRONMENT FOR EUROPE” PROCESS

3. The Chairman informed the Extended Bureau that following the discussions at the fifteenth CEP session held in Geneva from 21 to 23 April 2008, and at the request by CEP, the UNECE secretariat in consultation with the CEP Bureau had prepared an outline of the “Environment for Europe” process reform plan. The Chairman underlined that the structure of the outline document followed the clusters that were presented at the end of the CEP fifteenth session and agreed upon with the CEP Bureau. He also pointed out that some of the elements highlighted by ministers in the Belgrade Declaration were not covered in the document, as they had not been discussed.

4. Following the proposal by the Chairman to discuss the “Environment for Europe” (EfE) process reform on the basis of the current outline document, there was a round of general comments on the paper. The Extended Bureau then moved to a more focused discussion of each paragraph of the “Introduction”, “General principles”, “Preparatory process” and “Outcomes”. Discussion of the section titled “Format of the Conference” was postponed to a later stage.

5. Delegations generally agreed that the draft of the EfE reform plan could follow the structure of the current outline document, provided that more details were included in order to reflect all necessary aspects of the reform.

6. Several delegations expressed an opinion that special emphasis should be given to implementation, i.e. appropriate measures should be foreseen to ensure implementation of commitments undertaken at the EfE Ministerial Conferences. In this context, mid-term reviews were proposed. It was also suggested that the possibility be considered of adding a new chapter dedicated to implementation in the draft EfE reform plan.

7. Some issues, such as a possible negotiated outcome of the future EfE Ministerial Conferences and the appropriate body to convene the preparatory process for the Conferences (e.g. CEP or the Ad Hoc Working Group of Senior Officials) triggered major discussion. Some delegations also pointed out that there was a need to reflect in the EfE reform plan not only the format and scope of future conferences, but the objectives and goals of the reformed process as

well as its political priorities. A number of proposals regarding these issues were made and discussed; however, the final decision was postponed until the special session of the CEP (13–15 October 2008), where the EfE reform plan should be finalized.

8. The Extended Bureau also discussed a number of possible additions to the draft EfE reform plan, which included, inter alia, the role of subregional offices of various international organizations in the implementation of commitments taken within the EfE process, the need to focus on the implementation of multilateral environmental agreements, and the utilization of the Environmental Performance Reviews (EPRs) as an important instrument for assisting reviewed countries in implementing recommendations.

9. Extensive discussions were also held regarding the preparation of the pan-European assessment report and the possibility of using it as a basis for priority-setting for upcoming EfE Ministerial Conferences. It was pointed out that finalization of the report 18 months before the Conference was not possible due to timing and financial implications. It was suggested that, provided adequate financial resources were available, a pre-report might be ready about 12 months in advance of the Conference, and that it could contribute to the priority-setting. It was also agreed that other assessments and reports that might be produced for the Conference, including the findings of the EPRs, could be used for this purpose.

10. It was decided that at the special session of the CEP in October additional discussions would be needed on the draft reform plan, with a possibility that the meeting would split into smaller groups to tackle issues in a more informal way.

11. On the basis of the above discussions, delegations were requested to provide their inputs in writing regarding the draft EfE reform plan to the UNECE secretariat before 30 June 2008.

12. The UNECE secretariat was requested to prepare a first draft of the EfE reform plan based on the comments received and to circulate it to the CEP Bureau for comments within two weeks of the closure of the current meeting.

13. The draft EfE reform plan would then be revised in the light of CEP Bureau members' comments and submitted to become an official document. The English version of the draft EfE reform plan would be circulated to the CEP in August 2008 as advance copy.

III. COOPERATION WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR

14. The Bureau met with selected representatives of the private sector at a working lunch. The aim of the working lunch was to strengthen the involvement of the private sector in the work of the CEP and in the EfE reform process.

15. The meeting included private sector representatives from the International Chamber of Commerce, the World Savings Bank Institute/European Savings Banks Group (Brussels), the World Wildlife Fund and the Ethos Fund for Sustainable Development. The secretariat was represented by Mr. Patrice Robineau, Ms. Christina von Schweinichen, Ms. Monika Linn and Mr. George Georgiadis.

16. Discussions were constructive and helped to identify key priority areas for possible future engagement. Key areas of concern were the format of participation of private sector representatives – effectively seeking a dialogue on par with governments – and the time horizon of their engagement, expressing a clear preference for long-term engagement rather than ad hoc participation in CEP activities. Water, chemicals and waste management were the priority areas that attracted the most attention during the discussion.

17. Following the working lunch, the Chairman reported the results to the Extended Bureau and future steps for enhancing the engagement of the private sector were discussed.

18. OECD noted that the private sector had shown much interest in future changes in national regulatory or legislative frameworks – for example, water, waste, air quality and transport – as these frameworks helped business to make informed decisions. Experience had shown that better results were achieved through meeting with umbrella business associations rather than with individual private companies.

19. The Extended Bureau agreed to arrange a roundtable meeting with representatives of the private sector in October during the special session of the CEP. The roundtable should be well-focused and would include representatives of both umbrella associations and individual companies. Two sessions have been envisaged: a general session on the nature and modalities of participation and a more focused session examining a specific area where CEP could offer expertise and demonstrate its comparative advantage, e.g. water and water services (delivery, sanitation, etc.).

IV. OTHER BUSINESS

20. UNEP mentioned that it was undertaking a feasibility study on a potential Balkans Outlook report, similar to the Carpathian Environmental Outlook (KEO) report launched at the Belgrade Ministerial Conference. It would provide further information at the October meeting.
