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Report of the regional implementation meeting for Europe

I. Introduction

1. The present report contains a summary of the discussions on the follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and the post-2015 development agenda in the context of the sixty-fifth session of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), held in Geneva from 9 to 11 April 2013.
2. The summary captures the main points made by the participants in the session and should not be understood as reflecting positions agreed upon by ECE member States.

II. Follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and the post-2015 development agenda

3. In his keynote speech, Mark Halle, Executive Director of the European Office of the International Institute for Sustainable Development, summarized some key lessons from the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 2012, and explained what their implications were for sustainable development and the ongoing process of formulating a post-2015 development agenda. Much more than the intergovernmental outcome document had been achieved in Rio de Janeiro. Those who had taken part in the processes and the processes themselves were of critical importance in creating a sustainable world. The momentum for sustainable development was no longer principally in the hands of central Governments but also in those of subnational jurisdictions, the private sector and civil society. As a result, the prospects for making progress towards sustainable development were becoming more complicated but at the same time more likely to succeed. Intergovernmental processes needed to place more emphasis on equity. There was an increasing need for Europe and North America to provide leadership on the issue. The potential for unilateral action was enormous. For example, firms could act unilaterally and thereby obtain early comparative advantages in developing green technologies.



A. Panel on the future of sustainability: from transition to transformation

4. The panel discussion was moderated by Claire Doole.

5. Adnan Amin, Director General of the International Renewable Energy Agency, stressed that the energy sector was key for making the transition to a green economy. Demand for energy was likely to increase substantially in the future and investment decisions being made to meet that demand would have far-ranging implications for decades. Renewables were increasingly becoming an important component of the energy supply mix, as their costs were declining rapidly. Although a majority of the world's economies already had a national policy on renewables, there was no one set of policies; rather, existing policies had to be adapted to the needs and situations of each country. Significant investments were being made in these technologies throughout the world, including in emerging economies such as China, Africa and, especially, the fossil fuel-rich economies of the Middle East. The Europe 2020 initiative of the European Union was an important framework for promoting renewables. The further development of renewables for achieving sustainable development required an increase in cooperation, more innovative thinking and a long-term commitment.

6. David Stanners, Head of International Cooperation at the European Environment Agency, stressed that a green and healthy future depended on the three pillars of the green economy: resource efficiency, ecosystem resilience and human well-being. To date, the environmental policy implemented in the European Union had substantially improved the state of the environment. Major environmental challenges remained, however. Moreover, some environmental gains had been undermined by macrotrends such as economic development, population growth and changing trade and consumption patterns. Europe's demand for natural resources was not being met from the continent's own resource base and worldwide consumption was exceeding global capacity. In this context, the European Commission proposed, at the end of 2012, a new, 10-year environment action programme entitled "Living well, within the limits of our planet". The objectives of the action programme were to protect and enhance the European Union's natural capital, switch to a green and low-carbon economy and safeguard citizens from environment-related pressures and health risks. In addition, Mr. Stanners emphasized that, in developing a new policy agenda, it was important to learn the lessons of the past and use all the information that was available. Adaptive management practices and feedback loops should be designed into policies in order to enable course adjustments.

7. Tim Campbell, Chair of the Urban Age Institute, pointed to the importance of cities as partners in moving towards sustainable development. Cities, including many in the ECE region, were looking for innovative solutions to urban challenges and to engage in a very active and continuous exchange of good practices. The learning process was being facilitated by networks that involved stakeholders such as civil society organizations, private sector representatives and neighbourhood groups. Information on good practices on a wide range of issues, such as rapid transport systems, climate change policies at the local level and waste management, was being exchanged. As a result, cities were at the forefront of developing policies that would help to address current sustainable development challenges, as they were often closer to the problem and could act with fewer constraints. In addition, cities

served as laboratories for new approaches. The experiences of cities could help national Governments and international organizations to identify effective policies.

8. Olivier Cattaneo, Adjunct Professor at the Institut d'études politiques de Paris (SciencesPo) and former Adviser on the Group of 20 to the Minister of Agriculture of France, focused on the linkages between food security and trade. He said that while there was no single instrument to address hunger and undernourishment, trade supported different dimensions of food security, such as the availability of food, access to food, food safety and the stability of the food supply, especially in times of crisis. Trade connected farmers to markets, whereas inefficient trade adversely affected the entire food production chain. Mr. Cattaneo added that the face of trade had been changing, as more than half of all trade was now taking place within global value chains. It was necessary to enhance the efficiency of such global value chains to enhance food security and contribute to the transfer of capital and know-how to agricultural sectors in developing countries. Food security was important for achieving political and social security.

9. The discussion that followed, during which representatives of over a dozen ECE member States and major groups made statements, revealed a wide variety of additional perspectives. Some key themes also emerged. The following points were made:

(a) The messages contained in the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development provided a sound basis for carrying out further work on achieving sustainable development. Next steps included creating a set of sustainable development goals, beginning to address the financing needs of developing countries, establishing institutions to focus on sustainable development and forming a range of new partnerships. The above-mentioned sustainable development goals should build on existing goals and targets;

(b) Poverty reduction and environmental sustainability were interdependent and should be combined, as suggested by the Secretary-General, into a unified post-2015 framework;

(c) The importance of innovation in contributing to a green economy was emphasized;

(d) The diversity of the ECE region in terms of level of development, range of economic models, climatic conditions, natural resource endowments and the overall challenges facing each country needed to be recognized in any policy framework, as no one size fit all. In addition, that diversity could act as a laboratory for testing different approaches to addressing the challenges;

(e) The need to create inclusive and equitable societies, including with regard to gender equality, was underscored;

(f) The public sector had limited resources and much attention needed to be paid to the important role of the private sector; nevertheless, Government policy was essential for providing the institutional framework and investment incentives necessary to ensure that the private sector made its proper contribution;

(g) The interlinkages between environmental, economic and social development and health were also highlighted, and climate change and urbanization were cited as potential triggers for increasing health risks. The detrimental effects of

the austerity policies regarding health that had been implemented in some of the region's economies were cited as examples of such interlinkages;

(h) Specific examples were provided of various environmental, employment and educational policies that had been implemented recently to make economies more sustainable, some of which fell within the Europe 2020 framework;

(i) The need to eliminate or reduce fossil fuel subsidies was highlighted as a quick policy change that could have an immediate impact by changing consumer behaviour;

(j) Promoting sustainability by increasing energy efficiency and developing renewables would increase energy security, a worthy goal in itself. In that regard, the Sustainable Energy for All initiative of the Secretary-General was important;

(k) The Zero Hunger Challenge of the Secretary-General, the aim of which was to make the elimination of hunger a top priority for global governance, was acknowledged. The need to develop local and regional value chains, rather than only global value chains, to ensure food security was mentioned;

(l) The role of food security and the importance of eliminating poverty, hunger and malnutrition, as well as of sustainable agriculture, were highlighted;

(m) The importance of the forest sector for creating a sustainable model and the role of that sector in the post-2015 agenda were underlined;

(n) It was mentioned that, despite being important, the connection between environmental sustainability and political security had been omitted from the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. Some speakers mentioned the importance of including human rights in formulating the post-2015 development framework;

(o) It was suggested that the challenges were more than technological and that solutions needed to encompass social innovation and a paradigm shift involving other business models;

(p) The high level of urbanization in the region was acknowledged and the specific challenges raised by urbanization with regard to sustainable development were highlighted;

(q) It was important for ECE to continue to share knowledge about urban environmental management, sustainable urban transport, construction and urban design;

(r) The need for a regional approach to sustainable development was underscored. In that regard, references were made to the role of ECE in assisting its member States to achieve sustainable development, including in the areas of access to green technologies and investment in the environmentally friendly technologies and infrastructure needed to green all sectors of the economy;

(s) The importance of the work of ECE on statistical indicators was underlined and the Commission's future role in developing new indicators in partnership with Eurostat and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) was acknowledged;

(t) The usefulness of the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters as a model for addressing regional issues by increasing public participation was noted;

(u) The importance of the ECE Education for Sustainable Development initiative for increasing awareness of sustainability issues was recognized;

(v) The contribution made by both the ECE environmental and innovation performance reviews and other programme activities to the promotion of sustainable development issues such as pollution, environmental impact assessments, waste processing, water management, agricultural standards and sustainable transport was cited;

(w) Several organizations expressed an interest in working with ECE in promoting a green economy;

(x) More generally, there was a need for ECE to concentrate on concrete and results-oriented activities and focus its work on exchanging experiences between all member States and sharing best practices.

B. Panel on sustainable development governance: regional implications and perspectives for the post-United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development institutional set-up

10. The panel discussion was moderated by Ms. Doole.

11. Nebojša Kaludjerović, Adviser for Foreign Affairs to the Prime Minister of Montenegro, emphasized the need to ensure the efficient integration of all three pillars of sustainable development in the process of establishing a high-level political forum. A greater vertical integration within the institutional framework for sustainable development was required. In other words, it was necessary to ensure stronger and more effective coordination and coherence in the national, subregional, regional and international deliberations on sustainable development. A universal monitoring system should be set up to monitor regularly the national and global implementation of sustainable development. In that context, the regional commissions had a role to play in achieving two important objectives: (a) the greater consolidation of national inputs into global deliberations; and (b) the continuous monitoring of progress made by member States in achieving sustainability. In order to make progress towards achieving sustainable development, all countries in the region needed to actively engage in and contribute to the sustainable development process in a practical manner. Montenegro, in cooperation with countries in the region, the relevant organizations of the United Nations system, international development agencies, bilateral donors and a wide range of national stakeholders, was committed to establishing a centre for sustainable development.

12. Enrico Giovannini, President of the Italian National Institute of Statistics and Chair of the Conference of European Statisticians, noted that substantial improvement in statistical and monitoring systems was required. In order to establish an adequate monitoring and assessment system for measuring progress towards sustainable development, it was necessary, as a first step, to have in place an appropriate methodology and adequate expertise and financial and human resources. There were still many countries and statistical areas for which even basic data were lacking or

were of poor quality. It was crucial for statisticians to be involved in the development of sustainable development goals at an early stage. The experience gained with Millennium Development Goals had demonstrated that a lack of investment in statistics may result in a lack of comparable data. Since 1992, many countries and international organizations had used different approaches to develop sets of indicators to measure sustainable development, which had made the results harder to compare and made it difficult to conclude whether a country was on a sustainable path or not. To address this challenge, ECE, jointly with the European Commission (Eurostat) and OECD, had developed a conceptual framework to harmonize the existing approaches. The heads of statistical offices of countries in the region planned to adopt that framework, along with suggested indicators for sustainable development, in June 2013. That work represented a valuable contribution to the ongoing process of developing sustainable development goals and related targets and indicators. It was of crucial importance that the sustainable development goals and their targets be measurable. It would be more complicated to measure sustainable development than the Millennium Development Goals. Therefore, it was important that the conceptual work done by ECE, together with Eurostat and OECD, be taken into account. Once the sustainable development goals had been established, ECE should continue to align the framework and the indicators with the actual targets linked to the goals. It was also vital to find simple ways to explain complex issues (e.g. intergenerational equity) to non-specialist audiences and to link the concept of long-term sustainability to issues of current policy interest, such as vulnerability and sustainable and equitable welfare.

13. Vladimir Zakharov, Director of the Institute of Sustainable Development of the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation, highlighted the need to strengthen a broad sustainable development movement for tangible progress at the national, regional and international levels. Government, businesses and civil society had to be involved. In particular, the active involvement of civil society, including broad-based public organizations and expert sustainable development institutions, should be ensured. Activities should be carried out to raise awareness among the general public and create incentives for participation. Awareness could be raised in innovative ways, for example by using cultural as well as environmental heritage as a motivator and by delivering key messages through big events like the Olympic Games or through business practices. The sustainable development goals should be incorporated into general, social and economic strategies and action plans. At the same time, the concept of “windows of opportunity” for specific actions should be used. The sustainable development agenda and the related indicators needed to be adapted to the regional and national contexts, keeping in mind the special situation of countries rich in natural resources like Brazil and the Russian Federation.

14. Jan Dusik, Acting Director and Regional Representative of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Regional Office for Europe, underlined the new strengthened format of UNEP, with the United Nations Environment Assembly of UNEP as the new governing body. It was expected that, through its programme of work for 2014-2015 and its new mandate, UNEP would broaden the scope of its activities at the regional and national levels on policy dialogue, capacity-building and the implementation of concrete projects. UNEP would deliver more policies and products by enhancing its cooperation with countries and other partners in the United Nations system, including the regional commissions, ECE among them. The joint work would focus on defining areas and priorities aimed at empowering

countries in the European region on the path towards greater environmental sustainability. Regarding the high-level political forum, Mr. Dusik said that it should be developed in such a way as to attract high-level participants from countries, as well as other stakeholders, and that it should be interactive. The regional component of the high-level political forum should be developed on the basis of existing platforms and forums to avoid establishing new forums and duplicating activities. The “Environment for Europe” process, which could be used for this purpose, could be broadened to cover the other two pillars of sustainable development. Mr. Dusik also said that the sustainable development goals should be measurable and take into account existing relevant goals and indicators, including those already in multilateral environmental agreements and sustainable consumption and production goals. Identifying the most efficient ways to link the sustainable development goals with the post-2015 development agenda was one of the main challenges facing the international community in its deliberations.

15. During the ensuing discussions, the participants addressed the following issues: the modalities of the high-level political forum; the development of sustainable development goals and related indicators, as well as linkages with the post-2015 development agenda; the regional dimension of the high-level political forum and the sustainable development goals; and stakeholder participation. The following points were raised:

(a) In establishing the high-level political forum, consideration should be given to the lessons learned from the Commission on Sustainable Development. The Commission addressed environmental, social and economic aspects of sustainable development in an integrated manner, provided the only global interactive meeting place for governmental and non-governmental actors and agreed on policy recommendations to further implement the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development and Agenda 21;

(b) Any failures of the Commission on Sustainable Development should not, however, be repeated in setting up the high-level political forum. Often, ministries of the environment took the lead, hindering a balanced integration of the sustainable development pillars. The Commission had been ineffective in ensuring the full implementation and monitoring of the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development and Agenda 21;

(c) The high-level political forum should serve as a dynamic platform directly linked with the Economic and Social Council and work at a higher political level (General Assembly) at regular intervals (a hybrid model) to ensure the highest level of political guidance, which was needed to address the challenges of sustainable development and realize the balanced integration of its three dimensions;

(d) The high-level political forum should have an action-oriented agenda and a strong review mechanism;

(e) The exact modalities for making the link with the Economic and Social Council still had to be discussed in the framework of ongoing negotiations in New York. Possible options included that the high-level political forum meet at the ministerial level as a special session of the Economic and Social Council and, at regular intervals, at the General Assembly level, immediately after the general debate of the Assembly in September, to facilitate high-level participation. The forum should not seek to become another Council or issue directives to Member States;

(f) The high-level political forum should not be created as a new, heavily bureaucratic structure. Existing United Nations processes and institutions should be better used to achieve policy coherence and set the stage for more integrated, coherent and substantive debates. UNEP should introduce environmental issues into the discussions of the high-level political forum;

(g) The Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals and the post-2015 development agenda process should ultimately converge into a single framework. Concerning the substance, any proposal for sustainable development goals should reflect the three overarching objectives and essential requirements for sustainable development, namely poverty eradication, changing unsustainable patterns of production and consumption and protecting and managing the natural resources base of economic and social development;

(h) The sustainable development goals should be global in nature, applicable to all countries, limited in number, action-oriented and easy to communicate. A reservation was made against broadening the concept of sustainable development by including issues like peace and security in the post-2015 development agenda;

(i) The importance of taking into account ways to measure progress in implementing the sustainable development goals and targets was highlighted. A regular mechanism needed to be established to monitor the achievement of the goals and the regional commissions could have an important role to play in this endeavour;

(j) It might not be possible to measure regional and global dimensions with the same indicators. Some flexibility would be required to take into account regional and national circumstances when developing targets and indicators for the post-2015 development agenda;

(k) The regional implementation meetings organized by the regional commissions provided a useful platform for the exchange of viewpoints on sustainable development and experiences with regard to best practices. The lessons learned from those meetings should be taken into account when addressing the institutional structure for regional inputs to the high-level political forum;

(l) The regional commissions should assume a strong and active role in both the high-level political forum and the sustainable development goals processes, and act as a conductor between the global and national levels. ECE could continue to facilitate discussions on issues that are specific to the region with a view to contributing to the work of the forum;

(m) The role of ECE in the implementation of policy decisions should also be considered. ECE was well equipped with tools (including innovation performance reviews, housing profiles and environmental performance reviews) that could efficiently facilitate the implementation of policy decisions. ECE was leading the implementation of Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (through the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters), and thus served as a model that other regions, such as the region of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, could replicate;

(n) The efficient cooperation with UNEP and other partners in the region should be continued;

(o) Regarding the organization of regional meetings for contributing to the high-level political forum, various opinions were expressed. Some participants supported the continued organization of regional meetings convened by ECE in partnership with UNEP and others. It was stressed that ECE regional meetings could provide a unique opportunity to address, at an early stage, potentially critical issues in advance of the global discussions;

(p) In principle, a proliferation of regional meetings should be avoided. It was also suggested that the setting up of a regional mechanism be considered only after the high-level political forum had been finalized. The value of organizing regional meetings at all was questioned; it was suggested that existing processes and forums be used instead;

(q) The high-level political forum should attract representatives involved in the three dimensions of sustainable development. The inclusive, participatory model of the Commission on Sustainable Development could be taken as a starting point and other models of civil society participation and consultation could also be explored, thus avoiding duplication by making use of existing structures (e.g. Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters);

(r) The idea of having a representative for future generations in the high-level political forum and of promoting intergenerational equity was voiced;

(s) The importance of the active involvement and participation by the major groups in the ECE regional implementation meetings and other meetings was highlighted. It was suggested that this approach continue;

(t) The high-level political forum should involve all relevant State and non-State actors, as well as organizations of the United Nations system, so that they can take ownership of the decisions and implement them in their work, thus increasing the role of partnerships and voluntary commitments and enhancing implementation. The particular roles of stakeholders such as businesses, local communities and women were emphasized.
