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Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the ECE Region

First session

Geneva, 25 April 2017

Report of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE region on its first session

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I. Attendance

1. The first session of the regional forum was held on 25 April 2017 and was chaired by Laurence Monnoyer-Smith, Commissioner General for Sustainable Development and Interministerial Delegate for Sustainable Development for the Ministry of Environment, Energy and Seas of France.
2. The session was attended by representatives of the following 46 member States of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE): Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Israel, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America and Uzbekistan.
3. The European Union was represented by the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations and other international organizations in Geneva, the European Environment Agency and Eurostat.
4. Representatives of the following United Nations departments, funds and programmes, specialized agencies and related organizations attended the meeting: the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the International Labour Organization, the International Organization for Migration, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Development Group, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Headquarters in New York, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, the United Nations Office at Geneva, the United Nations Office for Project Services, the United Nations Population Fund and the World Health Organization (WHO).
5. Representatives of the following intergovernmental and regional organizations also took part in the session: the Asia-Europe Foundation, the Black Sea Trade and Development Bank, the Council of Europe, the Eurasian Economic Commission, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the Interstate Commission on Sustainable Development, the Nordic Council of Ministers, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation and Scaling Up Nutrition.
6. Representatives of 97 non-governmental organizations as well as of other organizations also participated. A complete list of participants can be found on the website of the regional forum (www.unece.org/rfsd2017.html).

II. Opening and adoption of the agenda (agenda item 1)

Documentation: ECE/AC.25/2017/1

7. The regional forum adopted the provisional agenda (ECE/AC.25/2017/1).

8. The Executive Secretary of ECE welcomed all participants and acknowledged progress in many countries towards sustainable development, including national strategies, stakeholder involvement and the fact that some countries now measured new legislation based on their impact on the Sustainable Development Goals. He stressed how the Goals were pushing all members of the United Nations family and other international organizations to work together in new and effective ways. At the opening session, a group of young students associated with the Eduki Foundation, a Geneva-based organization that promotes the education and awareness of youth of the work of international organizations, offered their views on the need for a strong and broad commitment to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and indicated that the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals should involve youth, including through practical projects carried out by young people. In her opening remarks, the Chair emphasized the diversity of the ECE region and underlined the importance of mobilizing all sectors for success.

9. Several representatives of the United Nations system addressed the forum at the opening session. The Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations emphasized that the United Nations system needed to engage with countries at different levels and that regional commissions were instrumental in mobilizing political leadership and facilitating partnerships, and, through them, could lead to regional and global public goods. The Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs drew attention to the importance of the regional dimension and the need to improve coherence, strengthen collaboration and facilitate communication as part of the overall efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Assistant Secretary-General of UNDP, who also serves as the Assistant Administrator and Regional Director for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States and as Chair of the regional United Nations Development Group team for Europe and Central Asia, outlined the multiple risks that the region is facing and stressed the role of the 2030 Agenda in addressing those challenges. She emphasized the need to focus efforts on the most vulnerable and identify accelerators to drive forward the implementation of the Goals, and that gender equality was a key accelerator of progress across the 2030 Agenda and the multiple Sustainable Development Goals and targets.

III. Policy segment: the second year of the Sustainable Development Goals in the region — knowing where we stand and moving on to prosperity and well-being for all (agenda item 2)

Documentation: ECE/AC.25/2017/INF2

10. The policy segment, which was moderated by the Executive Secretary of ECE, provided a platform for a cross-sectoral exchange and discussion on progress thus far and pending challenges for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in the ECE region, with a particular focus on

prosperity, health and well-being and gender, within the broader theme of the high-level political forum of 2017.

11. The policy segment was introduced by a keynote speech by the President of the International Institute for Sustainable Development and followed by a panel discussion that included the Minister for Agriculture, Rural Development and Water Administration of Albania; the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs for Non-European Countries, Economic and Development Cooperation of Czechia; the Commissioner General for Sustainable Development and Interministerial Delegate for Sustainable Development for the Ministry of Environment, Energy and Seas of France; the Deputy Secretary-General of OECD; the Director of the WHO Regional Office for Europe; the Secretary-General of the International Chamber of Commerce; and the President of the Forum of Women's NGOs of Kyrgyzstan. The President of the Forum of Women's NGOs of Kyrgyzstan conveyed to the forum the outcome of a preparatory civil society consultation that took place in Geneva on 24 April 2017. Interventions from the floor, including from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Hungary, Slovenia and Tajikistan, also contributed to the discussions at the policy segment.

12. The Chair's summary, included in annex I, presents the main issues raised. Written statements are available on the website of the regional forum.

IV. Peer learning segment (agenda item 3)

Documentation: ECE/AC.25/2017/INF3, ECE/AC.25/2017/INF4 and ECE/AC.25/2017/INF5

13. The peer learning segment was structured as three parallel regional round tables, covering three different topics, to facilitate more in-depth practical exchanges of experiences and best practices.

A. Regional round table I: national and local adaptation of the Sustainable Development Goals

14. Round table I focused on the ongoing process of adapting the global Sustainable Development Goals to national and local circumstances. Reviewing and adjusting national strategies, plans and instruments is a major first step to be taken by governments in the region to start implementing the Goals.

15. Round table I was moderated by the President of the AtKisson Group. Switzerland served as the rapporteur.

B. Regional round table II: subregional cooperation for Sustainable Development Goal implementation

16. The subregional level is important to the creation of a multilayered system of Sustainable Development Goal implementation and follow-up. Neighbouring countries working together can help address issues of common concern, including those of a transboundary nature. The round table shared experiences and discussed how cooperation within the various ECE subregions could help advance the Goals.

17. Round table II was moderated by the Director of the UNEP Regional Office for Europe. Portugal served as the rapporteur.

C. Regional round table III: data and monitoring

18. Improving the data situation and building statistical capacities for the monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals remains a significant challenge for all countries in the region and beyond. The round table provided an opportunity for dialogue between policymakers and statisticians on the needs, feasibility and limitations of Sustainable Development Goal data.

19. Round table III was moderated by France. The United States of America served as the rapporteur.

20. The Chair's summary (see annex I) presents main issues raised in the discussions at each round table. Written statements are available on the website of the regional forum.

V. Reporting back and closing (agenda item 4)

21. The rapporteurs reported back to the plenary of the regional forum the main messages resulting from the discussions at each round table (see annex I).

22. The regional forum heard a closing address by students facilitated by the Eduki Foundation. In her closing remarks, a civil society representative emphasized that the space for civil society was shrinking and stressed the importance of meaningful participation of civil society organizations in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the need to provide an institutional mechanism for that participation. The Executive Secretary of ECE remarked on how ideas are now becoming actions that advance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. He emphasized the ways in which a multi-stakeholder approach had been critical for the development of the Goals and now was even more important to their implementation. The Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva acknowledged the convening power of ECE and its historical role in bridging divides. He introduced the work of the Sustainable Development Goals labs in bringing together various Geneva-based actors and tapping into different sources of knowledge, as well as in taking forward the discussions at the regional forum.

23. Before closing the meeting, the Chair informed participants that the Chair's summary would be circulated for comments by participants. The final version would constitute the official input from the ECE region to the high-level political forum of 2017.

Annex

Chair's summary of the policy segment and the peer learning segment

Policy segment: the second year of the Sustainable Development Goals in the region — knowing where we stand and moving on to prosperity and well-being for all

1. The policy segment provided an opportunity to take stock of the current situation and exchange views on major factors influencing the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Within the overall context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the broader theme of the high-level political forum of 2017, discussions had a particular focus on the key themes of prosperity, health and well-being and gender.
2. Sustainable Development Goals are universal, so they concern all member States without distinction. An Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) pilot study showed that in many countries significant progress was required to meet the goals by 2030. Civil society organizations drew attention to the fact that, even in advanced economies, multidimensional inequality, precarious forms of labour market participation and homelessness remain pressing concerns.
3. Despite progress, there are multiple fragilities in the region, including the looming challenges posed by climate change and large migration movements, in a context in which economic expansion remains moderate. Some participants pointed out that inequality is a serious threat to growth and social cohesion. In order to rally all parties to Sustainable Development Goal implementation efforts, it is necessary to demonstrably show the benefits that advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development brings for all and to emphasize that the Goals are a positive framework for change that can effectively address environmental and inequality concerns. Effective delivery is critical at the current stage so that there can be visible results from policy action. Moreover, some participants stressed that, given the scale of the challenges ahead, the available time is limited.
4. The ambition of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, including the different trade-offs and synergies involved, and the need to ensure balance between the three pillars of sustainable development, has led to new mechanisms of coordination. Different institutional solutions to steer Sustainable Development Goal implementation and facilitate coordination have been deployed throughout the region. In Czechia, for example, the Prime Minister is in charge of preparing the new strategic framework for sustainable development. Innovative mechanisms for the involvement of parliament have also been put in place. In Hungary, a parliamentary ombudsman for future generations provides inputs on initiatives that can affect the quality of life of future generations.
5. While new bodies and mechanisms for Sustainable Development Goal implementation have been or are being created, efforts to mainstream the Goals within existing policy frameworks are critical in order to ensure effective implementation and cope with resource limitations.
6. In some countries, experiences with the Millennium Development Goals provide a starting point. In Tajikistan, long-term development strategies incorporating the Sustainable Development Goals have been developed on the

basis of the lessons learned during the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. In Armenia, gaps in Millennium Development Goal implementation have been identified to inform Sustainable Development Goal strategies, which are based on a systematic screening of legislation in order to define a road map.

7. The implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals requires the adaptation of both domestic and foreign policy strategies. Some countries have already revised or developed new development cooperation initiatives that are aligned with the Goals. Policy coherence between domestic and international actions has been recognized as an important element of sustainable development strategic frameworks. The efforts of small countries also matter, as shown by the efforts of Slovenia to strengthen its international development cooperation.

8. Some participants stressed that the Sustainable Development Goals open a new role for international cooperation, creating new opportunities to work together. In some areas, cross-border cooperation is particularly important, including, for example, the public health dimension of the ongoing refugee and migrant crises, or the many implications of climate change, including on health.

9. The United Nations system has provided direct assistance to programme countries in the region, including through rapid integrated assessments and guidance on mainstreaming, acceleration and policy support. Various participants emphasized the importance of that support by the regional United Nations system. For example, Georgia counts on help from the United Nations to develop a monitoring and evaluation system for Sustainable Development Goals, which is still missing in that country. Some participants stressed the positive role that a strengthened United Nations at the regional level will continue to play in assisting member countries in advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

10. Given the complexity of the Sustainable Development Goals and the numerous policy areas involved, many actors need to be engaged in implementation. Breaking down silos and bringing together stakeholders that may have opposing interests shows the central challenge to implementing the Goals: dealing with complexities and identifying interrelations to find durable solutions with the agreement of partners. Effective policy action requires attracting new allies and actors, for example, engaging municipalities and mayors in health-related interventions. However, it was emphasized that the ultimate responsibility for the Goals lies with governments and that concrete policies reflect different national choices.

11. New ways to cooperate are emerging, based on reciprocity and shared benefits. Technological possibilities are opening different channels to exchange knowledge, tapping into new constituencies and reaching out to different demographic groups. Some participants mentioned that the concentration of development partners in Geneva working on multiple aspects of the Sustainable Development Goals provides a favourable ecosystem that facilitates collaboration and information exchange.

12. There was a strong recognition of the role of civil society in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. While the engagement of civil society is taking place mainly through organized groups, individual citizens, through their own initiatives and personal commitments, also have a role to play. To facilitate dialogue and encourage involvement, communication remains a critical factor. In Azerbaijan, the importance of awareness campaigns, including in schools, has been stressed. Strengthening ownership by society at large will

promote increased public participation. Civil society organizations called for effective and meaningful engagement of civil society in all its diversity in the regional and national Sustainable Development Goal processes and are seeking the creation of a regional engagement mechanism.

13. In France, the mobilization of civil society has been a defining feature of its plans for Sustainable Development Goal implementation, which include a highly structured programme of identification and engagement of partners across different goals, sometimes building on existing processes and carrying on the impetus stemming from the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Agreement on Climate Change. In that context, the strong synergies between the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as the contribution of the multi-stakeholder coalitions under the Global Climate Action Agenda for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, were highlighted.

14. Some participants emphasized that all stakeholders should be involved, including those that are profit-oriented, and that it was important to reach a common understanding of the needs and possibilities of both the public and the private sectors in Sustainable Development Goal implementation, which will require the use of a language that the business sector understands. Business opportunities have emerged in connection with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the private sector is increasingly aware that addressing sustainability is necessary and can be profitable. At the institutional level, business associations such as the International Chamber of Commerce are committed to working with the United Nations to advance the Goals. However, a meaningful contribution to sustainable development requires businesses to respect social, labour and environmental standards.

15. Putting in place the necessary infrastructure will require tapping into appropriate sources of financing. The rapid growth of green finance, including green bonds, was singled out as an auspicious trend. It was remarked that incentive structures in financial markets need to be changed, so they appropriately reflect sustainability issues. Blended finance, where public resources are used to de-risk investments, can be deployed to involve the private sector in pursuing public goals, including those related to infrastructure. It is clear that official development assistance (ODA) is insufficient to meet development goals and that the private sector needs to be involved, therefore new partnerships are required. However, civil society organizations called for ODA commitments to be upheld while including civil society organizations in public-private partnerships and other mechanisms that blend private and public finance. Clear accountability frameworks covering all development actors should be in place.

16. Health and well-being are outcomes, determinants and enablers for

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