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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

Twenty-fourth session

LONG-TERM PROGRAMME AND THE ORGANIZATION OF THE
ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMISSION

(Resolution 3 (LXIII))

Report by the Executive Secretary

ADDENDUM

1. Since the publication of the report by the Executive Secretary (E/ECE/717) containing in annex I the text of the replies received up to the date of the report, the Executive Secretary has received the reply reproduced below.

FRANCE

(Reply dated 11 December 1968; original: French)

(a) Commission's long-term programme of work and order of priorities

The preparation of the Commission's long-term programme of work and the establishment of an order of priorities for that work are activities in which considerable progress is certainly possible.

One way in which it might be achieved would be to attempt to define criteria permitting of a choice among several alternatives. It does not seem probable that such a method would be easy to apply. The French authorities believe that the decision taken at the twenty-third session to include in the agenda for the next session a separate item on the long-term programme of work will enable more specific discussions to be held on that occasion than hitherto and the work of the subsidiary bodies to be rendered more coherent.

The French authorities attach particular importance to the work undertaken by the Senior Economic Advisers in connexion with the implementation of resolutions on the development of economic, scientific and technical co-operation,

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and to the work put in hand by the Committee on the Development of Trade under the resolution adopted at the twenty-third session.

(b) Organizational structure, methods of work and calendar of meetings

At the meetings of the Commission's subsidiary bodies held since the twenty-third session, most interesting exchanges of views have taken place, at the instance of the Executive Secretary, on ways and means of improving the various committees' structure and methods of work.

The French representatives participating in these exchanges of views took an active part in the discussions, as the Government had asked them to do, and submitted suggestions for improving methods of work. The principal observations made relate to the following points:

It was emphasized that in many cases the progress of work is retarded because documents in French are not received early enough. Furthermore, the volume of documentation and correspondence is increasing to such an extent that it is becoming difficult to reply to all enquiries received. It therefore seems desirable to limit, for example, the number of questionnaires and requests addressed to the various bodies.

The preparation of reports likewise gave rise to certain comments. It would be a good thing if, in future, the reasons for any decision to prepare a report were explained, and if studies were undertaken only on subjects really of interest to a substantial number of member countries. However, once such a decision had been taken, the procedures applied in preparing the report should be speeded and the time elapsing before its publication shortened, so as to avoid there being - as at present there sometimes is - too long an interval between the beginning and the end of the operation.

The officers of several committees stated that it might be useful to carry out work jointly on topics which are common to several wider fields, and suggested that consideration should be given to the possibility of "inter-committee" work.

In several cases, committees tend to concern themselves with questions of technology. It is desirable that the Commission's subsidiary bodies should confine themselves to economic questions and that any technical questions arising should be referred, for study, to bodies specializing in the particular field.

With regard to the calendar of meetings, the period generally adopted for the Timber Committee's sessions should be put back to enable the Committee to meet at a time when it is better able to judge the situation in the sphere with which it is concerned.

(c) Organization and methods of work of the annual sessions of the Commission

The French authorities believe that the progress of sessions of the Commission would be greatly facilitated if the documentation in the various languages were received early enough to enable administrative services to make a more thorough study of the problems to be discussed at the session.

Generally speaking, it is desirable that statements by delegations should, more than has hitherto been the case, enable exchanges of views to be held on the items on the agenda. This should be possible if delegations would confine their interventions to particularly important aspects of the problems under discussion. This suggestion would be particularly easy to apply to the consideration of the economic situation in Europe. It might be useful, as has already been suggested at previous sessions of the Commission, to devote a part of the survey of the economic situation in Europe to topical problems of general interest to all members of the Commission. This might prompt comments by delegations and enable them to open a discussion on specific problems. Information on the economic situation in each member country could be circulated in documentary form, only the salient aspects of that situation being brought out in delegations' statements.

Furthermore, in the view of the French Government it would be possible to organize the work of the Commission's annual sessions better if a Sessional Committee were set up. The Committee could be set up immediately after the agenda for the session had been adopted and the officers elected. The Commission would take up the item on the economic situation in Europe in plenary meeting on the second day of the session. Meanwhile the Sessional Committee would consider the subsidiary bodies' reports and discuss them in detail. The Chairman of the Sessional Committee would submit a consolidated report on the work of the subsidiary bodies when the Commission was considering the agenda items traditionally devoted to the work of the Commission and to the report by the Executive Secretary on action taken under Commission resolutions.

Provision should be made for setting up a Sessional Committee as from the twenty-fourth session. It seems to the French authorities that this innovation would not make it necessary either to increase the number of delegates or to lengthen the session. It is even possible that performing simultaneously tasks hitherto performed successively would, while not substantially curtailing the session, enable it to be shortened by a few days."
