

## **Sub-Group 1: Structure, composition and methods of work of the Governing Bodies (General Conference and Executive Board)**

### **Informal Summary** **2 June 2016**

#### **1. Adoption of the agenda**

The agenda was adopted without changes.

#### **2. Programme of work**

The Co-Chairs highlighted that this was the first working group on governance established by the General Conference wherein all Member States could participate in an open-ended manner. The Co-Chairs also conveyed the importance of adopting a pragmatic approach with a view to improving the practical functioning of the governing bodies of UNESCO.

Delegations that took the floor expressed appreciation for the organization of the meeting, the methods of work of the Working Group on Governance, the preparatory work of its Bureau, the quality and timeliness of documents, as well as the flow of information.

The Co-Chairs indicated that concrete written proposals in the form of amendments to the reference texts may be presented by Member States.

#### **3. Optimizing the efficiency of the decision-making process and working methods within the Governing Bodies of UNESCO: General Conference**

##### **a. Mandate**

The Co-Chairs focused on Article IV B. of the Constitution of UNESCO, and also referred to the Executive Board's Ad Hoc Working Group on the Independent External Evaluation of UNESCO, the Report on the relations between the three organs released in 2005, as well as 38 C/Resolution 101 and the Terms of Reference of the Working Group. They recalled previous recommendations to strengthen the role of the General Conference and enhance the participation of all Member States in the strategic decision-making of the Organization.

- Several Member States emphasised the need to address the imbalance in the relations between the General Conference and the Executive Board, since it is observed that many of the items discussed and agreed upon in the Executive Board leave the General Conference with very limited margin for substantive debate and reduce its influence.

- According to them, the short duration of the General Conference and the overlap of meetings of the General Policy Debate and the various Commissions limit the ability of the supreme governing body to exercise its constitutional mandate. Improving the quality of the debates and ensuring a more inclusive decision-making process, especially for non-members of the Executive Board, are the prerequisites for strengthening the General Conference.
- The view that the Executive Board was performing well and that its subsidiary work was sufficient enough to allow reduction of the length and debates in the General Conference was also articulated by one Member State.

While reaffirming the mandate of the General Conference as stipulated in the Constitution of UNESCO, it was generally felt that there was a need to continue to explore ways and means to better operationalize its Art.IV B.2. in order to strengthen the General Conference and make it more effective and efficient.

#### **b. Structure**

Several proposals and observations were put forward and discussed:

- Establishment of Permanent Commissions of the General Conference, similar to those of the UN General Assembly. Delegations supporting this proposal stated that permanent commissions could enhance the coordination among subsidiary bodies, the provision of guidance to the Secretariat, and the implementation and follow up to decisions of the General Conference. They were requested by the Co-Chairs to circulate their proposal in writing to all Member States.
- A number of delegations expressed their concerns and reservations on the proposal, citing the role of the Executive Board as a kind of standing commission of the General Conference, financial implications, and difficulties of small delegations to attend additional meetings.
- The possibility of establishing ad hoc commissions on strategic issues according to Rule 43 of the Rules of Procedures was raised in this connection.
- The schedules of meetings and cycles of the different UNESCO Governing Bodies, not only of the General Conference and Executive Board, have to be taken into account to build synergies and improve coherence of governance.
- Holding of intersessional meetings of the General Conference on strategic programme issues, such as the C/5, and/or on the organization of the General Conference. These could take the form of working-level information

or organizational meetings, that could be held under the auspices of the President of the General Conference at the beginning of the second year of the biennium, or take place in conjunction with the intersessional meetings of the members of the Executive Board.

- The reinforcement of resources and staff of the Secretariat of the General Conference was advocated by a number of delegations to balance resources and staff available for the Secretariat of the Executive Board.

The Secretariat informed that for the 2014-2015 budget, overall costs of the General Conference amounted roughly to USD 3.6 million, while the budget for the Executive Board was USD 4.2 million. There was no budget increase in the current budget cycle thereby causing a loss in real terms. Also, there has been a steady decline of GBS resources over the past decade.

In response to a query from the floor, the Secretariat stated that the cost of each intersessional meeting of the Executive Board will be analysed and reported on in December 2016. However, at this initial stage, the Secretariat evaluated the cost of each at approximately US\$ 12,000, essentially for interpretation services (as there have been no documents to be prepared and no travel per diem costs to cover).

The Co-Chairs, in reference to Rules 32-42 of the Rules of Procedure of the General Conference, also touched upon the Committees of the General Conference and noted their varying functions and compositions. The Co-Chairs informed that they may present a proposal regarding the Committees for consideration of the Sub-Group at a later stage.

### **c. Rules of Procedure**

One Member State introduced a proposal to modify Rule 3 (a) to the Appendix 1 of the Rules of Procedures of the General Conference on the deadline for submission of candidatures to the subsidiary bodies of the General Conference, other than the Executive Board, bringing it forward from 48 hours to 7 days before elections.

The same delegation proposed the use of gender-neutral language in the Rules of Procedure of the General Conference. The Co-Chairs invited the Member State to circulate the two proposals in writing to all delegations.

#### **i. Voting Rights Working Group amendments**

The proposal contained in document 38 C/WG/1/4 prepared by the Voting Rights Working Group at the 38<sup>th</sup> General Conference was widely supported and endorsed by the Sub-Group. The amendments to Rule 82 of the Rules of Procedure advance the deadline for submission of

communications from Member States invoking Art.IV.C paragraph 8(c) of the Constitution, from three days after the start of the General Conference, to the first day of the Executive Board preceding the session of the General Conference. The amendments also establish a permanent working group, under the APX Commission, composed of six members (one Member State per electoral group) for a four-year period, so as to facilitate continuity.

Some Member States presented additional amendments to Rule 82, proposing that countries in arrears which have lost their right to vote in the General Conference should also lose the right to present candidatures to the subsidiary bodies under the General Conference. A number of Member States expressed serious concerns and questions regarding this proposal, citing political sensitivities. One Member State also felt that each body should be allowed to decide for itself. As with other proposals put forward during the meeting, the Co-Chairs invited the proponents of the proposal to circulate it in writing to all delegations.

## **ii. Frequency of meetings**

- A number of Member States proposed the holding of annual sessions of the General Conference, stating that this would allow for greater oversight of the General Conference and enhance participation of all Member States.
- In correlation, the possibility of holding extraordinary sessions of the General Conference, as provided for in the Rules of Procedures of the General Conference, [was raised](#).
- Other Member States favoured the current governance model and were of the view that an annual session would not allow the Secretariat to fully implement and report on approved resolutions. Some delegations voiced that the General Conference should remain at the strategic level and recalled budgetary limitations.

## **iii. Role of the Bureau**

Two Member States called for more transparency in the work of the Bureau of the General Conference, and asked that minutes of the meeting of the Bureau be distributed to all Member States. The Secretariat informed that the President of the General Conference reports to the Plenary immediately after each meeting of the Bureau.

d. **Working Methods**

- Organization of the General Policy Debate; Ministerial Roundtables to focus on strategic issues

The Secretariat recalled that the C/2 document, containing the programme of the work of the General Conference is presented at the preceding spring and autumn sessions of the Executive Board.

The idea of a pre-general conference where the general policy debate (GPD) and the elections could take place was raised by one Member State. Other Member States suggested that the GPD be organized as a more interactive debate with exchanges amongst Ministers. One Member State recalled recommendations of previous working groups with a view to enhancing the quality of debate and decision-making in the General Conference.

- Schedule and Preparation of the General Conference

Considering the 4-year programme budget cycle, there was a recommendation to review and clarify the content and organization of the “intermediary” session of the General Conference that does not approve the programme.

Some delegations highlighted the importance of harnessing the potential of the General Conference through organization of more meaningful and beneficial side events and bilateral meetings, including high-level dignitaries, as well as the opportunity to increase the visibility of UNESCO’s impact in the field, through presentations by the Secretariat.

- Simplification and clustering of agenda items; annotated agenda

The Co-Chairs recalled that the agenda of the General Conference remained relatively long with 89 different sub-items during the 38<sup>th</sup> General Conference. The Secretariat informed that one of the roles of the Executive Board as set forth in the Constitution is to prepare the agenda of the General Conference and that the duration of each Commission depends on the number of items on their agenda.

Some delegations recommended that the quality of work and time devoted by the Executive Board to the formulation of the agenda of the General Conference should be improved. One Member State suggested that the Special Committee could be more involved in the preparation of the agenda of the General Conference and that an information meeting could be organized. Others suggested that the Bureau of the General Conference could assist on a permanent basis in this respect.

The Secretariat recalled that such information meetings are organised for all Permanent Delegations prior to the General Conference and that the Director-General also organises regular thematic information meetings which can be additional platforms to prepare the debates of the governing bodies. The additional workload placed on the support services and the possibility of outsourcing these services (translation of documents, interpretation services, reinforced security of premises, etc...) was also raised by the Secretariat.

A recommendation to extend (e.g. by one week) the current duration (13.5 working days) of the General Conference to avoid overlapping meetings was made. In this regard, the co-Chairs requested the Secretariat to prepare a simulation with cost estimates before the next Sub-Group meeting.

#### **e. Relationship with Executive Board and Secretariat**

The importance of the relations between the three organs in previous reports related to the governance of UNESCO was recalled. The impact of the “Japanese amendment” on the composition of the Executive Board since 1991 was also called to mind.

The Co-Chairs proposed to reintroduce the practice of a dedicated General Conference resolution to guide the work of the Executive Board and of the Secretariat in the preparation of the C/5.

Under this item, the need to secure a better balance between the General Conference and the Executive Board and a C/5 document that reflects more accurately the orientation given by Member States was reiterated by some Member States.

#### **f. Other issues**

No other issues were raised. The meeting was adjourned.

**Participants:** 81 Member States and one intergovernmental organisation