

## **45th meeting**

**Monday, 19 July 1982, at 11.15 a.m.**

*President:* Mr. Miljan KOMATINA (Yugoslavia)

E/1982/SR.45

### **AGENDA ITEM 7**

**Revitalization of the Economic and Social Council  
(E/1982/28, E/1982/60; E/1982/L.9; Working Paper  
No. 1982/1; Conference Room Papers 1982/3–5)**

1. Mr. REPSDORPH (Denmark), speaking on behalf of the States members of the European Economic Community, said that the provisions of General Assembly resolution 32/197 on the restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system

which applied to the Economic and Social Council had remained virtually a dead letter. On several occasions, the countries of the Community had stressed the need to revitalize the Council, so that it could play its proper central role in the consideration of international economic and social matters. In particular, it had the task of ensuring and evaluating the implementation of the strategies and policies defined by the General Assembly and of co-ordinating all the activities of the United Nations bodies in the economic and social field.

2. Revitalization was undoubtedly a long-term undertaking, but means of rationalizing its current activities and making them more effective could be studied at once. In that connection, the European Economic Community warmly welcomed the draft resolution reproduced in the note by the President (Conference Room Paper 1982/4), which reflected a genuine effort to divide work between the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly, and it hoped that, when the Council decided what matters should be given priority, it would take care to see that its work did not duplicate that of the Assembly.

3. Apart from a few details, including the proposal that meetings of subsidiary bodies of the Council should end at least 10 weeks before the Council Session, the States members of the European Economic Community were in favour of the draft resolution. They were in favour of organizing subject-oriented sessions which they hoped would encourage all States Members of the United Nations to participate more actively in the Council's work. Nevertheless, the draft resolution was only a first step towards the revitalization of the Council and left unsettled such matters as the rationalization of the subsidiary bodies. The States members of the Community, however, were fully aware of the need for compromise. They hoped that the Council would adopt the draft resolution, and they were ready to pursue the consideration of those matters which had not yet been settled.

4. Mr. SMIRNOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics), recalling his delegation's position on improving and rationalizing the work of the Economic and Social Council, said that the Soviet Union shared the general anxiety over the situation in the Council but thought that, instead of revising the Charter of the United Nations or amending the existing structures, an effort should be made to exploit fully the vast possibilities offered by Article 55 of the Charter, which defined the purposes of economic and social co-operation. Recent experience had shown that the so-called restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system had not resulted in any improvement in the work of the Council and other United Nations bodies but had merely helped to strengthen the position of certain countries within the Secretariat, at the expense of the principle of equitable geographical distribution. If the role of the Economic and Social Council had been weakened, it was in particular through the increase in the number of United Nations bodies dealing with economic and social matters. It must be recognized that it was not numbers that gave strength in that field but rather

political will on the part of Member States. It was therefore essential for all countries, including the developing countries, to change their attitude towards the Council, which should remain the principal body in the United Nations system responsible for economic and social matters. The Soviet delegation noted with dismay that some countries, while advocating the revitalization of the Economic and Social Council, were doing all that they could to distract attention from such important questions as unemployment and the situation of workers in the capitalist countries, the world economic crisis, the repercussions of the activities of transnational corporations, and protectionism, concealing behind high-sounding speeches a determination to reduce the Council's role to that of a mere conveyor belt.

5. It had been claimed in some quarters that subject-oriented sessions would help to make the Council more effective, but the danger was that they would speedily take on the character of "mini-conferences", requiring long and complicated preparations. At its fifty-first session, the Council had adopted resolution 1622 (LI), which had been intended to lighten the General Assembly's agenda, particularly that of the Second Committee, and to hand over certain matters directly to the Economic and Social Council. The implementation of that resolution would also help to lighten the Council's agenda, in that technical and procedural decisions would be taken by subsidiary bodies and thus help to make it more effective.

6. Any decision on revitalizing the Economic and Social Council must be adopted by consensus. If the amendments suggested by the Soviet Union (Conference Room Paper 1982/5) to the draft resolution in Conference Room Paper 1982/4 were approved, the Soviet delegation would not oppose the adoption of the draft resolution, but if they were not, it would be unable to join in the consensus.

7. Mr. JOSEPH (Australia) said that efforts had been made to revitalize the Economic and Social Council for 20 years. It had been thought that the aim had been achieved in 1971, when its membership and terms of reference were expanded, but it must be admitted that by the end of the 1970s the Council was even less dynamic than it had been at the beginning of the decade.

8. The draft resolution submitted in Conference Room Paper 1982/4 represented the first few steps towards revitalizing the Council, and the provisions of annex II were particularly important in that regard. His delegation believed, however, that revitalization should not end there and that much more radical steps should be taken. If the Council was to regain its full credibility, all States Members of the United Nations must be represented in it.

9. Until that happened, talk of the need for reform would continue, because its member States would not have the confidence in the Council that was needed before it could be used in the way envisaged by the authors of the Charter in 1945. Australia, as it had indicated in a letter addressed to the previous President of the Council, was in favour of a radical approach, although it might not be opportune for the time being.

10. The Australian delegation was a little disturbed by subparagraph (d) of operative paragraph 1 of the draft resolution in Conference Room Paper 1982/4, calling on the Council, as part of its general discussion of international economic and social policy, to formulate conclusions and recommendations for the General Assembly, Member States and organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system concerned. The danger was that that might become the Council's sole object, at the expense of other important activities. Moreover, conclusions and policy recommendations formulated for the General Assembly should be those on which there was consensus. If not, in other words, if a debate was envisaged that would lead to a series of recommendations on which a vote would be taken, the Council might create a great deal of trouble for itself.

11. His delegation hoped that further consultations would be held on the draft resolution in Conference Room Paper 1982/4, leading to operative paragraph 1(d) being seen not as an invitation to controversy but rather as a means of strengthening economic debate within the United Nations system, in a context which would enable the Council to influence directly and indirectly the policy debates and decisions taking place in other quarters.

12. The PRESIDENT said that the informal consultations would continue. He was personally particularly in favour of a consensus, which was the basis of the entire Yugoslav system of government. However, the consensus rule must not be used as a roundabout way of exercising a veto.

13. Mrs. CAO-PINNA (Italy) said that, in view of the heavy programme of work for plenary meetings of the Council in the third week of the session (see E/1982/L.43), there was little chance of reaching a consensus, even on a few of the various proposals put forward in the note by the President of the Council (Conference Room Paper 1982/4) and in the note by the Secretary-General (E/1982/28). In her delegation's opinion, the revitalization of the Council was a very difficult task, not only because the measures decided upon on several occasions—in 1954, 1968, 1973 and 1977—had not been applied, but also in large part because of the wide scope of the Council's field of competence. It was important, therefore, to avoid any decision which would be tantamount simply to postponing the consideration of the revitalization of the Council still further.

14. Accordingly, her delegation was ready to express its views on each of the proposals in the President's note (Conference Room Paper 1982/4) within an open-ended working group.

15. In the same spirit, the Italian delegation drew the attention of the members of the Council to the fact that, more than four years after the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 32/197 on the restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system, no "subject-oriented" Council session had been organized. That was sufficient indication that, as matters stood, the convening of subject-oriented sessions would probably have made the situation with regard to documentation and the calendar of conferences worse. In that

connection, the note by the Secretariat (Working Paper No. 1982/1) on the documentation to be submitted to the Economic and Social Council in 1982 and 1983 was highly instructive. The number of reports was far too large, both for the Secretariat and for Member States.

16. On the question of revitalization of the Council, however, the necessary documentation was already available. Her delegation therefore suggested giving thought to convening a session on the subject of the revitalization of the Council, a procedure which would be far preferable to organizing an open-ended working group to study so complex a subject. Such a session, lasting for five working days, would make it possible to study each of the proposals before the Council individually, instead of holding a general debate on them together with informal consultations of a general nature.

17. At the moment, a number of matters were dealt with successively at three levels in the United Nations system: by the subsidiary bodies of the Council, by the Council itself, and by the General Assembly. The subsidiary organs of the Council were legion: a few years earlier there had already been more than 250. Nothing had been done, however, to rationalize that extremely complicated network of intergovernmental and expert bodies. On the contrary, it had been necessary to create more. If the Council were to resume direct responsibility for the matters now within the jurisdiction of subsidiary bodies, the three levels of consideration would be reduced to two, as far as certain matters were concerned. The Council would do the work of the subsidiary bodies that had been discontinued, in short subject-oriented sessions. If the Council's functional commissions were considered, for example, it would appear that the work of the various commissions—except for the Commission on Human Rights—could be done at subject-oriented Council sessions. She noted, too, that the Council's functional commissions, which had originally held annual sessions, would in future be meeting only one year out of two, and that the duration of their sessions had been reduced from three weeks to nine working days. Those two Council decisions had in no way been intended to minimize the importance of the matters coming within the jurisdiction of the commissions, but it must be recognized that the situation within their fields of competence was evolving rather slowly.

18. If the Italian delegation's proposal was accepted, matters relating to sectors already defined, such as social development, the status of women, and so on, would be examined at two levels instead of three. At a single stroke, repetition of the general debate would be avoided and the volume of documentation needed would be reduced.

19. The PRESIDENT said that the proposals before the Council would be examined one by one, and that all delegations would have an opportunity to make their views known on each proposal.

20. Mr. HERRERA VEGAS (Argentina) said that there were several of the provisions of section II of the annex to General Assembly resolution 32/197, on the Economic and Social Council, which it had never been

possible to apply, despite the fact that the resolution had been adopted by consensus. His delegation fully appreciated, therefore, the effort the President had had to make to prepare the draft resolution contained in his note (Conference Room Paper 1982/4). Although it was in favour of amending the Charter of the United Nations, his delegation recognized that such a step would meet with objections on the part of many countries of all groups: developed countries, socialist countries, and the Group of 77. It felt, therefore, that the ideas contained in the note would meet the wishes of those delegations that were in favour of radical measures, as well as those which thought that revitalization was necessary but did not go so far as to advocate amending the Charter.

21. The note by the President contained some new and useful ideas, for example the idea of having the first regular session of the Council begin on the first Tuesday in May of each year. That would lengthen the time between the end of the session of the Commission on Human Rights and the beginning of the Council's first regular session and make it possible for the Council to have the complete documentation in time.

22. The idea of subject-oriented Council sessions was linked, in the opinion of the Argentine delegation, to that of amending the composition of the Council. Unless that was done, it would be difficult to abolish its subsidiary bodies. The main advantage of subject-oriented sessions would be to enable the Council to resume direct responsibility for the functions currently entrusted to subsidiary bodies that would have been discontinued. If the subsidiary bodies were not abolished, the usefulness of subject-oriented sessions would not disappear, but it would be greatly reduced.

23. His delegation was not in favour of all the ideas in annex II of Conference Room Paper 1982/4, which the Soviet delegation proposed should be deleted (see

Conference Room Paper 1982/5). In particular, it was not in favour of the idea of convening one annual session of the Council to take place alternately in New York and Geneva, put forward in paragraph 4, but it did believe that the matters listed in that annex called for a speedy solution and thus merited the attention of Member States. Sooner or later, the Council would have to resort to the radical solution of amending the Charter, if only because some of its provisions, such as those concerning trusteeship, were no longer applied. It was perhaps too soon to embark on that task, but, when it was undertaken, all the provisions relating to the Economic and Social Council should be carefully reviewed. For the time being, however, the Argentine delegation would support the draft resolution in the note by the President.

24. Mr. MILLER (United States of America) considered that useful work had been done in the year that had just elapsed and that the Council would henceforward be much closer to a consensus than had seemed possible a year earlier. In particular, subject to a few amendments which it would propose in the informal consultations, the United States delegation was ready to accept the draft resolution contained in the President's note.

25. The PRESIDENT hoped that the new informal consultations, during which the proposals would be examined paragraph by paragraph, would make it possible to arrive at a text that could be adopted by consensus. He recalled, however, the saying that the best must not be the enemy of the good. If the measures proposed for the revitalization of the Council were adopted, they could hardly be described as "hasty", since it was now 31 years since the question of such a revitalization had first arisen.

*The meeting rose at 12.20 p.m.*