



**Economic and Social
Council**

Distr.
GENERAL

7 February 2003

ENGLISH ONLY

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY
(Special session, Geneva, 18-19 February 2003)

Item 3 of the provisional agenda

**CHALLENGES AND EMERGING DIRECTIONS OF AN
ECE ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGY¹**

1. With both the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe” on the agenda, the 2002-2003 biennium offers an exceptional opportunity for the ECE member States and their Committee on Environmental Policy to take stock and reflect on: the achievements of the ECE environmental activities in the past five to ten years; the challenge of the principles of sustainable development to the Committee’s core business and the strategic options for the future; and the cooperation between the Committee and the governing bodies of the conventions and other players in implementing these options.

2. Moreover, after years of expansion of the work programmes, serviced by the ECE Environment and Human Settlements Division, the way in which the Committee on Environmental Policy works has also changed. It is engaged in regional and national policy dialogues, for example through the peer reviews of environmental performance reviews. Together with the governing bodies of the legally binding ECE conventions, the Committee now represents a unique and powerful consensus-based policy forum for discussing environmental issues and setting regional priorities.

¹ Prepared by the secretariat, in response to the Committee’s request (ECE/CEP/80, para. 26). The present paper takes into account the discussion of an earlier version (CEP/2002/2) that took place on 4 November 2002 during the 9th session of the Committee on Environmental Policy.

3. A strategy is expected to help the Committee tackle the above issues. However, it is unlikely to be an instant solution: its preparation would require consultation to reflect the views of ECE Governments. The strategy would also need to take into account the Plan of Implementation of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg (South Africa) and the decisions of the 2003 Ministerial Conference in Kiev. It is envisaged that the strategy would become a guide for the Committee on Environmental Policy for the five to ten years following its adoption to structure and continuously adapt its programme of work.

4. This paper clusters its main issues around three recurrent themes that also provide a link with the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the preparatory process for the Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe". These are: pan-European harmonization and governance; programmes and strategies; and cross-sectoral cooperation and integration. Furthermore, the paper puts forward suggestions for future work.

I. PAN-EUROPEAN HARMONIZATION AND GOVERNANCE

6. Within the region several factors have played an important role in the coordination and harmonization of policy responses to environmental problems and the need for sustainable development.

A. The "Environment for Europe" process

7. During the past decade a variety of institutional mechanisms and instruments have been established in the region to address specific environmental issues. Each of these mechanisms requires a machinery, efforts on the part of member States, financing and coordination. Some institutional mechanisms have been created without due consideration of how they might interact with the overall system. Questions have arisen concerning the coordination, within the "Environment for Europe" process, of this multifaceted institutional and instrumental architecture. There is a risk that environmental meetings, processes and legal documents in the region deal with similar issues, leading to competition and contradiction. The challenge to the "Environment for Europe" process is to find a way to ensure continued coherence – both in principle and through coordinated implementation of activities – within the multitude of institutions and mechanisms that have been built since the early 1990s.

8. There is a need to reconsider all the processes that take place and their interaction with other actors in the region, so that they can be orchestrated and streamlined to improve environmental governance regionwide. While the future of the "Environment for Europe" process will be on the agenda of the Kiev Conference and proposals will be put forward, the Committee on Environmental Policy should review and clarify its role within this process.

B. The European Union and its enlargement

9. The upcoming enlargement of the European Union (EU) is a regional challenge. Some 25 countries will soon be applying the same environmental policies, standards and rules. New EU members that require financial or technical support will have access to EU funding. There will be implications also for EU internal policy development and for technical cooperation with the countries in transition in South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

10. Some economic aspects of EU integration pose a challenge to environmental legislation and projects. For instance, certain transport projects are likely to inflict further damage on already fragile ecosystems. Agriculture, which is important for the economies and employment in most applicant States, is another example. The environmental consequences of the current agricultural, forestry and fisheries policies and practices call for a rethinking both at the pan-European level and within the EU.

C. ECE conventions and environmental policy

11. The ECE conventions and their subsequent protocols were at the origin of many successful programmes and initiatives to improve the environment. The work leading to the adoption of the conventions, and the ongoing work under the conventions form a highly dynamic policy development process, which has identified and addressed a number of policy, institutional and legal issues that are being further developed. Important synergies can be derived from interlinkages among the conventions regarding ratification, financing of implementation, compliance, public participation and access to information, information gathering and management, capacity building, institutional aspects and outreach.

12. Moreover, international environmental agreements, in particular the ECE conventions, can play an important role in preventing conflict and promoting cooperation. Many conventions contain provisions for dispute settlement and for establishing cooperation mechanisms. Transboundary (or multi-ethnic) environmental projects can, moreover, help to rebuild confidence among different communities.

13. Despite the remarkable progress achieved so far, much effort on the part of the Committee on Environmental Policy and the governing bodies of the conventions is still needed in three major areas: facilitating implementation of the instruments, forging coherence by strengthening interlinkages, and developing new instruments where needed.

QUESTIONS

- (a) Is the ECE environmental work continuing on the right track?
- (b) How will the work under the “Environment for Europe” process relate to the work of ECE in the future?
- (c) What impact will EU enlargement have on the role of the ECE multilateral environmental work?
- (d) How can the strategic elements of the work of the Committee, the conventions’ governing bodies and cross-sectoral bodies be pulled together more effectively?
- (e) Are the present efforts to promote synergies between the ECE environmental conventions sufficient?
- (f) How could fund-raising for the ECE environmental activities be improved?

II. PROGRAMMES AND STRATEGIES

A. The Environmental Performance Review programme

14. The main objectives of the report on the lessons learned from ten years of UNECE Environmental Performance Reviews (CEP/2003/2) were to: highlight the achievements by the

countries in transition over the past decade in environmental policy and management; describe the most significant obstacles and problems encountered; identify key areas that require further attention; look at the relationship between international cooperation and national policy development and implementation; and draw lessons and make recommendations for future policies. It is envisaged that the Environmental Performance Reviews should continue, focusing on a limited set of priorities, such as implementation and financing, and give greater emphasis to the integration of the environment with other sectors at all decision-making levels.

15. On the basis of the recommendations, the Committee will decide on the future of the EPR programme, as a tool for the systematic analysis of sectoral and cross-sectoral issues that are important to the environment, including policy development, the legal institutional structure and the integration of the environment with other sectors.

B. Subregional programmes and strategies

16. Many of the region's environmental problems remain unsolved mainly owing to the difficult economic situation. And reconciling basic environmental and health concerns with severe social constraints looks very difficult for some countries in transition. Environmental problems were not considered to be a priority in South-eastern Europe, Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. It is therefore essential to closely monitor such disparities and their evolution, and to design measures to prevent subregions drifting apart. Any further divergence might have undesirable repercussions for the environment and security.

17. Important initiatives for the environment and sustainable development have been taken or are under way. One example is the environmental strategy for Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia which is being developed in cooperation with donors and international organizations within the "Environment for Europe" process.

18. Technical assistance to member States mostly in Central Asia, the Southern Caucasus and South-Eastern Europe) has also been a tool for responding to their particular challenges. Workshops, pilot projects and advisory missions have taken place to help countries implement relevant policies and receive advisory services on particular issues for which they need expertise. This assistance is reported to the Committee on Environmental Policy and the governing bodies of the conventions, but is not always designed or provided under their direct responsibility. Technical assistance is provided increasingly in cooperation with other regional commissions, and with other players providing such assistance, especially at subregional level, to ensure that it is cost-efficient and uses all available synergies; meets the requests from member countries; and focuses on clearly stated objectives (such as the implementation of conventions).

QUESTIONS

- (a) Could ECE provide a more efficient and flexible forum for subregional debates on the environment?
- (b) Are the changes proposed for the Environmental Performance Review programme supportive enough for the countries concerned and the overall thrust of ECE environmental work?
- (c) Should more be done to help countries put EPR recommendations into practice?
- (d) How can lessons learned at national level be used to identify subregional and regional trends and needs, e.g. for selected sectors?

(e) Is it possible to strengthen cooperation and harmonization, at national and regional decision-making levels, between environmental monitoring and environmental policy and performance analysis?

(f) Is there a need to reassess the process of transition to a market economy from the environmental point of view based on the achievements and problems encountered?

(g) What is the role of the regional adviser in technical cooperation and capacity building?

III. CROSS-SECTORAL COOPERATION AND INTEGRATION

19. There is a consensus that significant efforts need still to be made to integrate environmental concerns into other sectors, both economic and social, through a wide range of policy, legal, institutional and financial measures and incentives. During the ten years since the Rio Conference, actions and programmes in the ECE region have moved towards that goal, but sustainable development is still in its infancy. The Plan of Implementation of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development reiterated the need to promote the integration of the three components of sustainable development into the work of the regional commissions in a balanced way.

20. Experience in cross-sectoral cooperation shows how difficult it is to achieve results. The difficulties arise for a variety of reasons, such as the different professional cultures in individual sectors or the compartmentalized approaches in both the national administrations and international organizations. Cooperation between the different levels of government within the environmental sector also needs to be closer. Cross-sectoral cooperation projects have become important starting points and testing grounds for the responses to the widely accepted need to integrate environmental concerns into other sectoral policies. These projects offer opportunities both for achieving substantive goals and for replacing purely compartmentalized thinking by comprehensive and integral approaches.

21. The current ECE environmental cross-sectoral programmes do not suitably address agriculture, forestry, tourism, coastal zone management and solid waste management (urban, rural, industrial) – policy areas that received much attention in the recent report on the lessons learnt from ten years of UNECE Environmental Performance Reviews (CEP/2003/2). Yet, strengthening cross-sectoral cooperation is fully in line with the requirements and principles of sustainable development.

22. It is expected that the relationship between the Committee on Environmental Policy and other bodies will need to be reinforced to facilitate the implementation of relevant instruments and policies.

QUESTIONS

(a) How should elements of the social and economic pillars of sustainable development be reflected in the environmental work?

(b) Should more emphasis be given to new items or should the present framework of activities continue to be used?

(c) Is there a need for new initiatives on cross-sectoral cooperation, including cooperation with other ECE committees and divisions?

- (d) What could the role of ECE be in supporting environmental partnerships in the region?
- (e) Should the ECE environmental work pay more attention to cooperation with other United Nations regions and the global level?

IV. THE WAY FORWARD

23. As mentioned earlier, the ECE environmental work is not done in a vacuum. The changing scene is providing new challenges that have to be addressed carefully. The gaps and deficiencies in the activities have to be tackled using the experience and expertise that ECE has acquired over the years. The particular competitive advantages of ECE have to be built on and a realistic assessment must be made of the resources available to it.

24. The following strategic options might be considered:

- (a) The EPR programme should continue to give policy and practical advice to the reviewed countries, support the implementation of the recommendations given in the first round of reviews and inform more directly the international financing institutions about its findings. It should also be more geared towards strengthening the implementation of the ECE legal instruments and assess key environment-related aspects of economic and social development. The assessments across countries should be deepened and used increasingly in support of the peer-review debates;

- (b) The cooperation among the ECE conventions' governing bodies should continue in order to use all synergies available. At certain intervals, e.g. every three years, the bureaux of Committee on Environmental Policy and the conventions' governing bodies should discuss the strategic directions of their work to encourage the sharing of information and the dissemination of new ideas;

- (c) The Committee should, in cooperation with the conventions' bodies, consider how it could most effectively participate in the implementation of a possible environmental strategy for Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, and other environmental partnerships in the region;

- (d) The Committee should invite subregional environmental organizations to participate in round tables to debate issues particularly relevant to their subregions;

- (e) The Committee should study the feasibility of including some new items such as solid waste, the environmental impact of tourism, coastal management and agriculture in its work programme;

- (f) The achievements and challenges in the cross-sectoral work should be examined with a view to making it more effective;

- (g) The fund-raising activities should be further strengthened to provide extrabudgetary resources for the longer term;

- (h) Cooperation with the other regional commissions should be more structured and the sharing of experience more substantive;

- (i) The Regional Adviser should be further integrated in the key priority areas of work in the Division and the Committee should assess the impact of the Regional Adviser's activities every other year.

25. The recent discussion by Committee on Environmental Policy revealed a clear preference to conserve its core mandate, and at the same time expand and strengthen its lead role in the environmental pillar of the sustainable development process within ECE. This is fully in line

with the need to further develop the cross-sectoral cooperation activities that have been launched by the Committee in recent years, thus harvesting synergies.

26. This strategic choice could, nevertheless, imply putting some more emphasis on the social and economic aspects of environmental policy. The social and economic dimensions of existing activities including those of a cross-sectoral nature can be strengthened, some new activities could be considered. As mentioned above, the current ECE environmental cross-sectoral programmes do not suitably address agriculture, forestry, tourism, coastal zone management and solid waste management. These policy areas require a comprehensive approach to their economic, environmental and social aspects, in particular where underprivileged groups and communities are involved.

27. By implementing such a strategy, the Committee on Environmental Policy should ensure and strengthen synergies with other players, and in particular with the governing bodies of the conventions and, when appropriate, with other committees within ECE, and encourage cooperation with other regional commissions, relevant United Nations bodies, other global, regional and subregional international organizations and with different actors in the governmental and private segments of society and the economy.

Annex

A CHANGING REGION

This annex provides a review and analysis of past and present ECE environmental protection activities. It is intended as background information to help delegations determine the scope and direction of the Committee's future work.

1. During the past 15 years, the outlook for global political, economic, social and security development has changed profoundly under the influence of the increasingly widespread acceptance of democratic institutions and market-based economic systems, the liberalization of trade and international capital flows, the rise in the number and influence of transnational corporations and the rapid technological innovation, in particular in information and communication technology.
2. Environmental pressures from consumption have intensified in many areas as a result of rising incomes and resource- and pollution-intensive lifestyles. Although there are still large differences between Western countries and countries in transition, consumption patterns in Central and Eastern Europe and the newly independent States are expected to follow a similar path as in the West.
3. Poverty continues to be a major social problem in many parts of the region. Relatively high unemployment in Europe raises questions about the sustainability of economic growth and human development. Poverty and unemployment often lead to human insecurity, ill health, loss of self-respect, a sense of failure and social exclusion. Sweeping corruption and criminality hamper economic reform and prevent the introduction of adequate and efficient environmental legislation. Such difficult social conditions are not conducive to the introduction and implementation of important elements of environmental policy as the polluter-pays principle.
4. With some notable exceptions, most countries in transition suffered a steep decline in living standards. In the meantime, countries moved at different paces. However, a number of common characteristics can be found. The choice between short-term economic gains and longer-term environmental concerns poses a much more difficult challenge for the countries in transition than for the more developed countries in the region. Nonetheless, many countries in transition have passed important new laws to improve environmental protection, established new agencies and developed new sources of public information.
5. Establishing democratic and transparent government that is both equitable and efficient has been a major and ongoing challenge. In the early 1990s many reformers advocated a minimalist State, and thus encouraged a sharp reduction in government and public expenditure, leading to a loss of highly qualified people. The result was often a weak State where the public and private services needed for human development and in particular for environmental protection were not provided.
6. Whereas the establishment of environment ministries in several countries was hailed as an important step in the right direction, these ministries were rarely provided with the necessary political power and financial resources.

7. The ECE region has been undergoing political, economic and social changes that had profound effects on the environment. The ECE, through its Committee on Environmental Policy, played a crucial role by taking a flexible approach to developing tools and processes to deal with emerging issues, as described below.

A. “Environment for Europe”

8. The “Environment for Europe” process, launched during the 1991 Dobris ministerial meeting, marked a new departure for the ECE region: it replaced the former East-West focus by a pan-European approach, leading to the possibility of harmonizing policies region-wide. This harmonized approach implied that the countries in transition required help to attain the standards of environmental protection established in the West and, at the same time, that work needed to be done to raise these standards throughout the region. Two elements became particularly important in the “Environment for Europe” process: cooperation among major players and public participation. The main driving forces of the process have been: the engagement by countries in all parts of the region; the engagement by international organizations and NGOs to draw attention to their own agenda in a unique cooperative setting; the ministerial conferences themselves, the organization of which has required the selection of the most demanding policy issues and tight deadlines for producing substantive results.

9. Through the series of environmental ministerial conferences since 1991, the “Environment for Europe” process has involved all countries of Europe, North America, the Caucasus and Central Asia, and initiated important policy decisions and priority actions. The process initiated the extension of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) programme of environmental performance reviews to countries in transition by the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy. The periodic region-wide assessment reports on the state of the environment, published by the European Environment Agency (EEA), are another achievement of the process.

10. The successes of the “Environment for Europe” process would not have been possible without the contributions from ECE. The programmes of work of the Committee on Environmental Policy and of the conventions’ governing bodies include various elements that contribute to the process:

- The Environmental Performance Review (EPR) programme for countries in transition, adopted in Lucerne (Switzerland) in 1993, and executed by the ECE secretariat;
- Development of the Environmental Programme for Europe, adopted in Sofia in 1995;
- The negotiation of the Aarhus Convention and the Protocols on Heavy Metals and Persistent Organic Pollutants, adopted in Aarhus (Denmark) in 1998;
- The negotiations on new legal instruments (strategic environmental assessment, civil liability, pollutant release and transfer registers) in view of the forthcoming Ministerial Conference in Kiev in 2003;
- Adoption of the “Guidelines on strengthening compliance with and implementation of MEAs in the ECE region”;

- Environmental assessment and monitoring;
- Energy and environment: reforming energy pricing.

11. ECE has had the focal role of bringing together the main players and stakeholders at pan-European level. It has helped to develop a sense of cohesion among the member States and an awareness of the urgent need to act jointly.

B. Development of legally binding and non-binding standards and environmental policies

12. Many environment-related legally binding instruments have been initiated and developed under the auspices of the Committee on Environmental Policy. Five conventions are now in force. The political will that their Parties and Signatories show to adhere to these conventions is proof of the importance that they attach to them. In addition, the process of negotiation that led to the adoption of the standards, and the ensuing technical cooperation resulted in the establishment of active networks of experts.

13. Although adopted at different times, the conventions and protocols have been developed in the same spirit, under very similar negotiation and working rules. They do not contradict each other, and there are several examples where there are links and cross-references between the various instruments. The conventions and protocols are governed by independent treaty bodies, and only these bodies can take binding decisions concerning the instruments. Although the Committee in Environmental Policy fully respects this independence, it provides support to the treaty bodies in the areas where their work is interlinked. The fact that the secretariats of all ECE conventions are under the same roof makes cooperation easier.

14. The repercussions of the ECE conventions have been felt both regionally and nationally. Some of their achievements are: a large cut in air pollution; a pilot project for monitoring transboundary waters, with visible results at the water basin and country level; an early-warning system for industrial accidents with transboundary effects; cross-border environmental impact assessments resulting in increased communication between Governments and the public, a better understanding of the possible impacts, and subsequent measures to avoid or mitigate them.

15. The work leading to the adoption of the conventions and the ongoing work under the conventions form a highly dynamic policy development process, which has identified and addressed a number of policy, institutional and legal issues that are now being further developed. Major interlinking issues include: ratification, financing of implementation, compliance, public participation and access to information, information gathering and management, capacity building, institutional aspects and outreach. The work initiated by the Ad Hoc Working Group on Environmental Monitoring for building synergies between regional environmental conventions should also be seen in this context. Interlinkages may arise in the process of developing new instruments under one or more conventions. Examples are the new protocol on civil liability for transboundary damage under the Water and Industrial Accidents Conventions, and to a lesser extent the protocol on strategic environmental assessment (SEA) to the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a

Transboundary Context, as well as the protocol on pollutant release and transfer registers (PRTR) to the Aarhus Convention.

16. EU environmental policy and legislation have developed over the past decades by adapting pieces of national legislation and negotiating completely new legislation. The development of ECE environmental conventions with a region-wide perspective has also had a great impact, the EU being a Party to all ECE conventions but one.

17. Progress achieved so far in developing, adopting and ratifying conventions and protocols has been accompanied by, and made possible through, a profound change in working practices towards a participatory and interactive culture. In fact, the meetings of the Signatories or Parties, as well as of many working groups, are now attended by representatives of numerous non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders. These factors have undoubtedly enriched the work under the conventions.

C. Policy and performance analyses

18. At the second Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe”, UNECE was mandated to review the environmental performance of countries in transition. The objectives of the EPR programme, carried out under the overall supervision of the Committee on Environmental Policy, are: to assist countries in transition to improve their management of the environment; to promote dialogue between ECE member countries; to integrate environmental policies into sectoral policies; to integrate further health aspects into environmental performance; to harmonize environmental conditions and policies throughout the region and to contribute to sustainable development.

19. The EPR is undertaken only at the request of the country itself. During the assessment mission the international team of experts meets national experts to discuss the problems encountered in environmental management and integration, and its final report contains recommendations for further improvement.

20. It has been important for the environmental institutions in the countries to receive an independent and authoritative review from an international organization like UNECE that strengthens their position inside the country. The process also provides for an exchange of experience and dialogue among stakeholders in the country and between different countries in transition.

21. The ad hoc Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews, established under the Committee on Environmental Policy, conducts an expert review of each country. The Committee has the important task to carry out peer reviews and to discuss major policy issues emerging from the reviews during its annual session. Since 1994, the first round of reviews has been carried out in 16 countries, second reviews were undertaken in two countries and follow-up reviews were done for four countries.

22. A report of the lessons learned from ten years of UNECE Environmental Performance Reviews of the transition countries was recently prepared by the ECE secretariat. It also emphasized the importance of environmental policy integration in a

number of sectors including agriculture, forestry, energy, transport, tourism, coastal zone management, industry and human health (in particular with respect to water and solid waste).

23. The usefulness of the Reviews has been articulated by national policy makers and civil society. The environmental review process has provided a framework for systematic analysis of sectoral and cross-sectoral issues of importance to the environment, including policy development, the legal and institutional structure, and integration of the environment with other sectors

D. Operational support and capacity building

24. It is in line with the basic mandate of ECE – standard setting, analysis and advisory assistance to its member States – to provide operational support and capacity building in particular to countries in transition. These activities are thus complementary to the development of instruments and performance reviews. In the area of technical assistance UNECE has so far played a relatively limited role. Whereas the ECE member States fully and actively participate in the work of the Committee and of the governing bodies of the conventions, some of them have difficulties in applying the policies and instruments agreed upon. The difficulties are often related to the lack of financial and human resources. With an increasing number of policy tools and instruments in place, such as conventions, guidelines and policy recommendations, their implementation has increasingly become a challenge for the Committee on Environmental Policy and the governing bodies of the conventions. Operational activities and technical assistance to member States have been a tool for responding to this challenge through programmes of work. Activities such as workshops, pilot projects and advisory missions have been carried out to assist countries to implement relevant policies, and to receive advisory services on particular issues for which they need expertise. For example, a subregional workshop will be organized for the Caucasian and Central Asian UNECE member countries to identify the key obstacles to implementing/acceding to the Industrial Accidents Convention and to establish a follow-up assistance programme. This work aimed at assisting countries is one of the priorities in the work plan of the Conference of the Convention's Parties. The other conventions carry out similar activities under their work programmes.

25. Moreover, the Regional Adviser has also been providing technical assistance, mostly in a subregional context (Central Asia, Southern Caucasus, South-Eastern Europe).

E. Cross-sectoral cooperation

26. Many of the most complex environmental problems are of a cross-sectoral nature. The concrete actions for improvement have to be taken outside the environmental administration, although cross-sectoral cooperation could also take place between different segments of environmental policy. The Committee has established cross-sectoral linkages, activities and cooperation with other ECE committees (e.g. human settlements, transport, and sustainable energy), and between the Committee on Environmental Policy and the conventions' governing bodies, and

also with other international organizations such as the World Health Organization. Examples of cooperation between different sectors are:

- Joint development, by ECE and the WHO Regional Office for Europe, of the Protocol on Water and Health, adopted at the Third Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, London, June 1999;
- Establishment of a ECE-WHO Transport, Environment and Health, Pan-European Programme, coordinated and implemented by a newly established tripartite Steering Committee;
- Establishment of a Task Force on Environment and Energy jointly with the Committee on Sustainable Energy;
 - Joint ECE/Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) project “Rational and efficient use of water and energy resources in Central Asia” in the context of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA).

27. Cross-sectoral cooperation involving environment, health and transport may serve as an example of the challenges encountered. The adoption of Agenda 21 and the identification of transport as one of the priorities for action at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) in 1992 highlighted the necessity and importance of cross-sectoral cooperation. The preparatory process launched subsequently by the UNECE transport and environment constituencies culminated in the adoption of the Programme of Joint Action at the Regional Conference on Transport and the Environment in Vienna in 1997. It was followed two years later by the adoption of the London Charter on Transport, Environment and Health, at the WHO Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health. The Vienna and London follow-up processes initiated closer cooperation among national and international authorities and organizations dealing with transport, environment and health throughout Europe.

28. Faced with the increasing unsustainability of current transport trends, UNECE and WHO carried out work to define how to best improve the international cooperation and responses. The Second High-level Meeting on Transport, Environment and Health decided in July 2002 to establish a Transport, Environment and Health Pan-European Programme (THE PEP) which brings together and focuses the relevant activities of ECE and WHO/Euro on a few selected priorities, where international action is estimated to have the most impact. Activities in these key areas will be coordinated and implemented through a Steering Committee, which replaces the intergovernmental bodies created under the London and Vienna processes, in cooperation with other relevant intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. The process is serviced jointly by the ECE and WHO/Euro secretariats. Particular attention will be given to the needs of the countries in transition that are not EU applicants. For the success of the THE PEP much work needs still to be done to harness the committed and active cooperative efforts of the all the relevant actors at international, national as well as regional levels from the three sectors concerned.