

MEETING OF THE EXTENDED BUREAU OF THE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

Geneva, 19 May 2009

PAN-EUROPEAN AND OTHER ASSESSMENT REPORTS FOR THE NEXT “ENVIRONMENT FOR EUROPE” CONFERENCE

Note by the UNECE secretariat

1. The present note presents various options for the preparation of a Pan-European assessment for the “Environment for Europe” (EfE) Conference to be held in Astana (Kazakhstan). It also refers to various assessments and statistical reports on environment that could be drawn to the attention of the CEP when it will be selecting themes for the next EfE Conference.

I. BACKGROUND

A. Role of Pan-European assessments in EfE process

2. The publication of periodic pan-European assessment reports on the state of the environment is an achievement of the “Environment for Europe” (EfE) process. The reports that were produced by the European Environment Agency (EEA) in 1995, 1998, 2003 and 2007 for the respective EfE Ministerial Conferences helped to identify major threats and challenges for the development of regional environmental policies. For instance, the last report, submitted to the Belgrade, 2007 EfE Conference, highlighted priority areas such as environment-related health concerns (issues related to air quality, inland waters, soil, hazardous chemicals), climate change, biodiversity loss, overuse of marine resources, the current patterns of production and consumption, and pressures caused by agriculture, tourism, transport and energy¹.

3. While the first two reports covered countries in Western and Central Europe as well as in South Eastern Europe (SEE) only, the subsequent reports covered 53 countries in the UNECE region including those in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA). The EEA produced the last two reports in partnership with the UNECE Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment (WGEMA) and other partners.

4. The Ministers, at their Sofia, Aarhus, Kiev and Belgrade Conferences held specific sessions to discuss the Pan-European report findings. They focussed on key challenges and possible actions that EfE participating countries should take collectively and individually to address these challenges in between the Conferences. The agreed results of the discussions were reflected extensively in the respective EfE Ministerial Declarations².

¹ *Europe's environment — The fourth assessment*

www.eea.europa.eu/publications/state_of_environment_report_2007_1.

² For the texts of the Declarations, see www.unece.org/env/efe/history%20of%20EFE/fromDobtoBelg.htm.

B. Other assessments

5. Other assessment documents were also submitted to the EfE Conferences either for discussion and decision-making or for information. At the Belgrade EfE Conference in 2007, for instance, these included the reports on:

- (a) *Implementation of UNECE multilateral environmental agreements*³;
- (b) *Critical issues in implementation of environmental policies highlighted by the UNECE Environmental Performance Review [EPR] Programme*⁴;
- (c) *Policies for a better environment — Progress in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia*⁵;
- (d) *Assessment of transboundary waters in the UNECE region*⁶;
- (e) *Environmental policy in South-Eastern Europe*⁷.

6. Only the transboundary water assessment contained environmental data. Other reports assessed policy implementation issues. The first four of the above assessment reports were discussed, to a various extent, by the Ministers and acknowledged in their Declaration. The last one provided useful background information for the discussion under a SEE session.

C. Assessments for the next EfE Conference

7. At the Belgrade EfE Conference in 2007, the Ministers called on EEA to consider preparing the fifth report for the next EfE Ministerial Conference. They invited UNECE to report to their next Conference on the results of the second round of its EPRs and invited the Meeting of the Parties to the Transboundary Water Convention to prepare the second assessment of transboundary waters for the same instance⁸. As they also agreed that the EAP Task Force should continue its activities, the Task Force intends to produce several outputs on environmental policy reform and water supply and sanitation sector in EECCA for the next EfE Conference⁹. In view of the importance that the EfE Ministers assign to the implementation of environmental agreements and to subregional cooperation, relevant assessments on these issues might also be taken into account for the preparations of the next EfE Conference.

³ (ECE/BELGRADE.CONF/2007/12) by the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy (<http://www.unece.org/env/documents/2007/ece/ece.belgrade.conf.2007.12.e.pdf>).

⁴ (ECE/BELGRADE.CONF/2007/13, Corrigendum 1 and Addendum 1) by the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy (www.unece.org/env/efe/Belgrade/Proceedings/Item2b/Item2b.html#Documents).

⁵ (ECE/BELGRADE.CONF/2007/16) by the Task Force for the Implementation of the Environmental Action Programme (EAP) for Central and Eastern Europe (www.unece.org/env/documents/2007/ece/ece.belgrade.conf.2007.16.e.pdf).

⁶ (ECE/BELGRADE.CONF/2007/INF/1) by Finland on behalf of the Bureau of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (www.unece.org/env/documents/2007/ece/ece.belgrade.conf.2007.inf.1.e.pdf).

⁷ (ECE/BELGRADE.CONF/2007/INF/22) by the United Nations Development Programme -UNDP (www.unece.org/env/documents/2007/ece/ece.belgrade.conf.2007.inf.22.e.pdf).

⁸ *Declaration "Building Bridges to the Future" by Ministers of the region of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe* (UNECE) (ECE/BELGRADE.CONF/2007/8, paras. 7, 6, 10 and 39(b), respectively). (www.unece.org/env/documents/2007/ece/ece.belgrade.conf.2007.8.e.pdf).

⁹ See *Main outputs of The EAP Task Force that will be available at the time of the Astana "Environment For Europe" Ministerial Conference* (ENV/EPOC/EAP(2008)4) (www.oecd.org/dataoecd/38/20/41424800.pdf).

8. The EfE reform plan prepared by the Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) and endorsed by the UNECE Commission at its last session (Geneva, 30 March-1 April 2009) establishes that the Pan-European assessment would be among the official substantive documentation for EfE Conferences. It states, furthermore, that preliminary findings of available assessments and statistical reports on environment should be taken into account when the CEP will be deciding, not later than 18 months before the Conference on not more than two themes for the Conference and discuss the outline of the Conference (ECE/CEP/S/152, annex I, para.12).

II. OPTIONS FOR A PAN-EUROPEAN ASSESSMENT

A. The challenge

9. EEA has informed that currently it does not have plans or resources to produce the next Pan-European assessment report. While the EEA continues to cover the 32 EEA member countries from its core budget, the additional funding that the EEA receives from the European Commission (EC) to extend this coverage is no longer available to support the EfE process and a Pan-European environment assessment report covering all the non-EU and non-EEA countries. Instead, there are separate funding components to support the EU European Neighbourhood policy in the East and South, and the Central Asian countries (although funding availability for the latter is still subject to decision).

10. In the planning of the EEA next regular five-year State and Outlook environment report, which will be issued in late 2010 (SOER 2010), the EEA Management Board considered a number of options. Mindful of the close timing link between this report and the Astana assessment, it nevertheless rejected the idea of extending EEA's regular five-year SOER to the Pan-European area; even for one time only. This is due to the risk of losing the needed focus on EU/EEA countries. Nevertheless, the Board asked EEA to make linkages between SOER 2010 and other regional assessment efforts.

11. The SOER 2010 report that is expected to be published by end-November 2010 will cover 32 EEA member countries and 7 western Balkan countries. The report will contain a strategic integrated assessment of cross-cutting issues, a thematic indicator-based assessment of main environmental trends and outlooks focusing on EU priorities, and a country-level comparative analysis. The focus in SOER 2010 will be on the review of the achievement of objectives set in the Sixth Community Environment Action Programme and other EU policy commitments and targets, as well as on forecasts along with the EEA priority environmental areas.

12. It appears that there are timing, institutional and financial constraints that prevent the EEA to embark on the preparation of a Pan-European assessment similar to those that it submitted to the previous EfE Conferences. The Extended CEP Bureau may address these constraints with a view to recommending possible solutions. It may also consider alternative options should no solution be found to resolve the above constraints.

B. Further EEA involvement

13. It appears that the EEA cannot expand its mandated 5-year regular reporting (SOER) into a Pan-European reporting. In the past, there was a reasonable time lag in-between the publication of the SOER and the preparation of a Pan-European assessment. Needless to say, the “western” part of the latter drew, to a large extent, on the former one. For the Astana EfE Conference, the time lag between the SOER publication (late 2010) and the EfE Conference (provisionally planned for autumn 2011) is very short. Moreover, many delegations expressed their interest during the EfE reform process to make the Pan-European assessment available well in advance of the Astana EfE Conference.

14. It seems that a solution the EEA might be able to offer for the Astana EfE Conference is to supplement the SOER 2010 by an EECCA assessment as an additional part. At the UNECE/WGEMA meeting in September 2008, the EEA proposed that this EECCA assessment part could address issues such as transboundary waters, pollution in urban areas, biodiversity and subregional problems with tailored solutions. With this approach, the SOER 2010 and an EECCA assessment part would collectively constitute a pan-European assessment¹⁰.

15. The UNECE/WGEMA underscored that broader inter-country comparisons between all countries of the Pan-European region over the same themes were the strength of the previous Pan-European assessments. The preparation of a separate EECCA assessment that would focus on themes that are different from those in SOER and would present comparisons between the EECCA countries only would substantially diminish the value of such a report for the Astana EfE Conference.

(i) EECCA supplement to SOER 2010

16. Should the Extended CEP Bureau meeting support the idea of having an EECCA assessment as a supplement to SOER 2010 for the Astana EfE Conference, it might want to consider the benefits of preparing such supplement along the same themes, format, methodology and indicators that would be used in SOER, to the extent possible. The meeting might discuss and propose a limited number of themes that would be of priority for the EECCA assessment, for example:

<i>Environmental theme</i>	<i>Cross-cutting theme</i>
Air Quality	Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation
Freshwater	Sustainable Consumption and Production
Biodiversity and Ecosystems	including:
Land Cover and Soil	Food and Agriculture
	Transport
	Energy
	Waste

¹⁰ See the meeting report issued under the document symbol ECE/CEP/AC.10/2008/2 (www.unece.org/env/europe/monitoring/9thMeeting/Official%20documents/ece.cep.ac.10.2008.2e%20report.pdf).

17. The focus in the EECCA assessment would be on the review of the achievement of objectives set in global and regional multilateral environmental agreements and commitments made in global and Pan-European forums and programmes such as the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, the EfE process and the Pan-European processes on environment, transport and health; environment and health; Biodiversity Strategy, and; forestry and environment. The EECCA assessment might include a final section with inter-country comparisons between all countries of the Pan-European region on the same themes. Alternatively, a self-standing document could be prepared for the Astana EfE Conference on the basis of SOER 2010 and the EECCA assessment with the said inter-country comparisons.

(ii) EECCA countries' role

18. At its September 2008 meeting, the UNECE/WGEMA voiced the need for the active involvement in the preparation of a Pan-European assessment of the UNECE/WGEMA and its members from the EECCA countries, and for ensuring the assessment publication in Russian¹¹. These concerns should be addressed at the 19 May meeting as they touch upon the issues of EECCA countries' ownership of the assessment, data availability and reliability, and the report dissemination and impact in EECCA countries.

(iii) Funding for EECCA assessment

19. Should the Extended CEP Bureau meeting support the idea of preparing an EECCA supplement to the SOER 2010, it would also need to consider possibilities for raising funds for the EECCA assessment. The amount of funds may depend on whether the assessment would be prepared by EEA or any other competent and interested body. Given its role and expertise in the EfE process to date, the EEA would obviously be the best candidate for this task. However, its Management Board would have to reconsider its previous decision and invite the EEA to prepare the EECCA assessment for the Astana EfE Conference. The upcoming EEA Management Board meeting in late June 2009 would be the earliest opportunity for such a decision.

20. To support the preparation of the report, there are basically two solutions. Either the work would be financed by the EC, as in the past, or interested countries would be invited to provide the funds. A mixture of both approaches might be also considered. In any case, the issue should be brought to the attention of the high-level decision-makers in both the EC and prospective donor Governments as quickly as possible.

C. Other options

(i) EECCA or subregional assessment by other actors

21. Should the EEA not be in a position to prepare an EECCA assessment of the type proposed in section II.B(i) above, the Extended CEP Bureau might consider to invite possible other actors to do so. This approach would imply close cooperation between the actors engaged and the EEA to ensure the sharing of the SOER 2010 format, methodology and data to ensure consistency between the two assessments.

¹¹ See the meeting report issued under the document symbol ECE/CEP/AC.10/2008/2 (www.unece.org/env/europe/monitoring/9thMeeting/Official%20documents/ece.cep.ac.10.2008.2e%20report.pdf).

22. The UNECE/WGEMA might assume the overall leadership for this exercise. UNEP/GRID-Arendal and the Regional Environmental Centres (RECs) in EECCA countries might be invited to serve as implementing institutions. The UNECE/WGEMA members from the EECCA countries would support the implementing institutions in data gathering. The UNECE/WGEMA would oversee the report preparation and discuss its draft. In case the preparation of an assessment covering all EECCA countries occurs not to be feasible, a smaller geographical scope might be chosen with a focus, for instance, on the Central Asian countries only.

23. At its September 2008 meeting the UNECE/WGEMA agreed that, depending on final decisions made by EEA for country coverage in its contribution to the next EfE Conference, it might consider preparing its own assessment contribution (e.g. on Central Asia or selected ecosystems) for the Astana EfE Conference¹². The RECs' capacities and networks in EECCA countries would be instrumental in the exercise. UNEP/GRID-Arendal's experience in environmental assessment work in EECCA countries would make it a strong candidate to be involved in the assessment work for the Astana EfE Conference¹³.

24. Under this option, consideration would have to be given to whether the preparation of inter-country comparisons between all countries of the Pan-European region on the same themes would be feasible, and, if so, who would be responsible for this part of the work.

25. Needless to say, the funding issue as described in section II.B(iii) would have to be addressed.

(ii) Another type of Pan-European assessment

26. The Extended CEP Bureau might also consider the alternative of preparing a Pan-European assessment that would be different from previous ones. The report would cover all countries concerned but would be prepared using a different methodology. It might be either the only Pan-European report or a supplement to SOER 2010 and EECCA (or Central Asian) assessment.

27. The Global Footprint Network, a non-governmental organization, expressed its readiness to prepare such report following the template of the "Living Planet Report", highlighting the ecological footprint and biocapacity of countries of the Pan-European region¹⁴. It offers a timely delivery and a global comparability of the assessment to be based on data available in the Global Footprint Network's database. Between USD 400,000 and USD 500,000 would have to be raised by interested donors for the purpose, according to the Network.

(iii) A set of thematic assessment reports

¹² See the meeting report issued under the document symbol ECE/CEP/AC.10/2008/2 (www.unece.org/env/europe/monitoring/9thMeeting/Official%20documents/ece.cep.ac.10.2008.2e%20report.pdf).

¹³ Its recent assessment reports include, for instance: *Environment and Security. Transforming risks into cooperation. The case of the Eastern Caspian Region*. 2008, and *Environment and Security: Transforming risks into cooperation - Central Asia - Ferghana / Osh / Khujand area*. 2007. (www.grida.no)

¹⁴ Examples include *Europe 2007 - Gross Domestic Product and Ecological Footprint*, released by Global Footprint Network and WWF for EU-27 countries (http://assets.panda.org/downloads/europe_2007_gdp_and_ef.pdf), *Africa: Ecological Footprint Factbook 2009* and *The Ecological Footprint Atlas 2008*. (www.footprintnetwork.org)

28. Finally, the Extended CEP Bureau might want to consider whether assessment requirements for the Astana EfE Conference could be met through a set of thematic assessment reports produced for different purposes, but being made available to the Conference.
29. Such reports will include the second transboundary water assessment¹⁵, a report on EPRs' findings with a focus on Central Asian countries, and the EAP TF reports mentioned in section I.C above.
30. The EEA might submit its SOER 2010 to the EfE Conference, and the Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC) might volunteer to make its reports on "environment security" hot spots in EECCA and SEE available for the Astana EfE Conference. The UNEP/GRID/Arendal would be able to contribute to the Conference various maps focusing on selected environmental issues.
31. The Extended CEP Bureau meeting might also consider opportunities of inviting the governing bodies of the UNECE environmental conventions to prepare jointly an assessment report focussing on key issues that would require the attention of Ministers and support the discussions in Astana.
32. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) have been publishing regional state-of-the-environment reports every five years since 1985, coinciding with the Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific (MCED)¹⁶. The next report will be submitted to the 2010 MCED in Astana. It will focus on selected issues such as climate change adaptation and energy efficiency. The Extended CEP Bureau meeting might consider inviting UNESCAP to make this report (or its parts related to the Central Asian and Caucasian countries) available for the next EfE Conference.
33. This option would require no additional funding.

III. RECENT AND UPCOMING ASSESSMENTS TO SUPPORT THE SELECTION OF THEMES FOR THE ASTANA EFE CONFERENCE

A. Conventions' implementation reports

34. In addition to the assessments mentioned in the sections above, the Extended CEP Bureau meeting may take into account the assessment and statistical reports on environment that has been recently prepared or are planned, as follows:
35. In 2008, a questionnaire on air pollution abatement in the UNECE region was carried out under the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution on the basis of replies by the Parties to the protocols. Replies to this questionnaire will be made available although will not be

¹⁵ For the progress in this report preparation see www.unece.org/env/water/meetings/wgiwrm/2008/informal_doc_4_Assesment.pdf.

¹⁶ The last one, *The State of the Environment in Asia and the Pacific 2005* report is available at www.unescap.org/esd/environment/soe/.

compiled into a report. The next review covering both protocol-related and general policy issues will be published in 2011 based on the replies to the 2010 questionnaire¹⁷.

36. The 2008 synthesis report on the status of implementation of the Aarhus Convention was reviewed in 2008 by the Meeting of the Parties¹⁸. It summarizes information from 32 national implementation reports. The next report will be prepared for the fourth meeting of the Parties to be held in 2011.

37. At its meeting in 2010, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents will consider a report on the status of the Convention's implementation over the period 2008 to 2009. A similar report was issued for the period 2006-2007¹⁹. It summarized contributions from 35 Parties and eight other countries.

38. The Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context, at its 2008 meeting, adopted the Second Review of Implementation²⁰. It is based on completed questionnaires submitted by 33 States Parties and two States not party to the Convention. The next report will be prepared for the fifth meeting of the Parties to be held in 2011.

39. Implementation reports has been recently completed or upcoming under the global environmental agreements like those on the climate change, biodiversity and desertification as well as under subregional conventions like those on the protection of the marine environment and the protection of mountain ecosystems.

B. Statistical reports

40. The Questionnaire on Environment Statistics is a part of the biennial data collection process by the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) covering all countries except those covered by the joint OECD/Eurostat questionnaire. The UNSD/UNEP Questionnaires 2006 and 2008 covered data collection on water and waste. The latest data obtained related to 2007. The next Questionnaire will be circulated in 2010²¹.

41. The Extended CEP Bureau may consider to what extent summaries of the above reports could be of help to the CEP when it will be selecting themes for the next EfE Conference

¹⁷ See www.unece.org/env/documents/2007/eb/EB/ece.eb.air.91.add.2.e.pdf.

¹⁸ ECE/MP.PP/2008/4 (www.unece.org/env/documents/2008/pp/mop3/ece_mp_pp_2008_4_e.pdf) and its corrigendum (www.unece.org/env/documents/2008/pp/mop3/ece_mp_pp_2008_4_Corr_1_e.pdf).

¹⁹ ECE/CP.TEIA/2008/3 (www.unece.org/env/documents/2008/TEIA/ECE_CP_TEIA_2008_3E.pdf).

²⁰ ECE/MP.EIA/10 (www.unece.org/env/documents/2008/eia/decision.IV.1.e.pdf). It is being issued as a publication (environment series no. 9, ECE/MP.EIA/11).

²¹ see <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/environment/qindicators.htm>.