

MEETING OF THE EXTENDED BUREAU OF THE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

Geneva, 19 May 2009

REPORT OF THE MEETING

Introduction

1. The Bureau of the Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) held an Extended Bureau meeting on 19 May 2009 to brainstorm possibilities for the preparation of the assessment report(s) required for the Seventh Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe” (EfE), to be held in Astana (Kazakhstan) in 2011. Participants also discussed recent and upcoming assessments that might be used to support the selection of themes for the Astana Ministerial Conference.
2. The meeting was attended by the members of the CEP Bureau¹, as well as by representatives of governing bodies of the UNECE environmental conventions, the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment (WGEMA), the Environmental Performance Reviews (EPR) Expert Group and relevant international organizations.
3. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Zaal Lomtadze (Georgia).
4. The Chairperson opened the meeting. In his introductory remarks, he presented the meeting’s objectives and the proposed organization for the discussions, as well as the expected outcomes. Mr. Marco Keiner, Director of the Environment, Housing and Land Management Division of UNECE, welcomed the participants and expressed his wishes for a constructive brainstorming discussion with concrete proposals.
5. The secretariat had prepared a background document on the pan-European and other assessment reports for the next EfE Conference to help facilitate the discussion at the meeting. Lists of meeting participants and documents are available on the UNECE website (<http://www.unece.org/env/cep/ExtBureau19May09.html>).

I. OPTIONS FOR THE PREPARATION OF PAN-EUROPEAN ENVIRONMENT ASSESSMENT(S) FOR THE NEXT “ENVIRONMENT FOR EUROPE” MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE

6. The Chairperson invited Mr. Mikhail Kokine, Secretary to WGEMA, to make a kick-off presentation on the different options for the pan-European environment assessment for the next EfE Ministerial Conference. His presentation highlighted the important contribution made by these assessment reports to the EfE process and outlined various options for preparing the next assessment. Reference was made to the Ministers’ decision in Belgrade regarding the preparation of assessments for the next EfE Conference, i.e. (a) to call upon the European Environment Agency (EEA) to consider preparing the fifth assessment report; (b) to invite UNECE to report on the results of the second round of its EPRs; and (c) to invite the Meeting of the Parties to the

¹ Except the Bureau member from the USA, who was not available due to other commitments.

Water Convention² to prepare the second assessment of transboundary waters. Besides the above three assessments, a number of other reports on the previously agreed commitments were likely to be prepared for the Conference by different EfE partners. Unlike the pan-European environment assessments and the transboundary water assessments, however, few of these reports would be in the line of a state-of-the-environment assessment. This needed to be taken into account during the brainstorming of feasible options. Details for various options were outlined in the background paper. The EfE Reform Plan adopted by CEP stipulated that the pan-European assessment would be part of the official substantive documentation for EfE Conferences (ECE/CEP/S/152, annex I, para. 12).

7. Following the UNECE presentation, the Chairperson invited Mr. David Stanners of EEA (participating in his individual capacity at this meeting) to brief participants on recent developments at EEA connected with a next pan-European environment assessment. He referred to a number of elements guiding deliberations at EEA. These elements were presented in the letter of 18 May 2009 sent by the EEA Executive Director to the CEP Chairperson. The major challenges that EEA faced concerned the lack of (a) a comprehensive pan-European shared environmental information system (SEIS); and (b) sufficient human and material resources to cover the pan-European region. EEA would need some roughly estimated €0.5 to €2 million (the €2 million would include the national capacity-building component) of additional resources to prepare the pan-European assessment for the Astana Ministerial Conference. EEA was in the process of establishing SEIS, and the participation of all countries across the pan-European region would be crucial for its success.

8. Mr. Stanners also presented the concept behind the next EEA regular five-year state and outlook of the environment report (SOER), to be ready in 2010. The SOER would include three analytical elements, namely: (a) cross-cutting integrated assessments; (b) inter-country (or inter-regional) comparisons and trend analysis vis-à-vis policy targets; and (c) country or subregional analysis to underpin the first two elements. The SOER would cover 32 countries of EEA and 7 Western Balkan countries. It would review the achievements of the objectives set in the Sixth Community Environmental Action Programme and other EU policy commitments and targets, as well as the scenarios in accordance with EEA priority environmental areas. Given the preparation of a comprehensive SOER to be published less than one year ahead of the Astana Ministerial Conference, EEA would need concrete guidance from CEP with respect to expectations regarding the content of a next pan-European environment assessment. The EEA Management Board would consider the issue of a pan-European assessment at its meeting on 17 June 2009. In addition, a meeting would be convened by the EEA on 3 July 2009 to continue discussions on the assessment on the basis of outcomes of both the Extended CEP Bureau meeting and the EEA Management Board meeting.

9. Following the two presentations, participants discussed the issue of the pan-European environment assessment considering various options for its preparation. Many reiterated and strongly supported the Ministers' decision in Belgrade to have a full-fledged pan-European environment assessment for the next EfE Conference. Other participants were concerned about the timing, procedural and financial implications for preparing the pan-European assessment. With reference to the Ministers' request in Belgrade that EEA consider preparing the fifth assessment report, the meeting restated that EEA would be the most appropriate body to prepare the assessment. However, some participants suggested that, if for some good reasons the EEA

² The Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes.

Management Board should decide otherwise, WGEMA and CEP should consider alternatives – as pointed out in the secretariat paper – to prepare the assessment.

10. Some participants supported the preparation of a set of thematic assessment reports with an overarching synthesis report for the Astana Ministerial Conference. A few proposed combining the above-mentioned two options, i.e. having a set of assessment reports, including the pan-European assessment, and inviting UNECE to produce a synthesis report of these assessments to support the Ministers' discussions at the Conference. The implementation of the latter proposal might encounter difficulties, however, due to the different nature/content, scope and format of the individual assessments.

11. Some concerns were expressed with regard to the procedure of preparation, as well as the validity and availability of current data for countries of EECCA (Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia) used by EEA, in particular with respect to ensuring that coherent information is presented in the different thematic assessments prepared by other bodies. Mr. Stanners indicated that EEA would be using all information available at the time of preparing the assessment and would be coordinating the preparation of different parts of the assessment with the relevant actors and institutions preparing the thematic assessments. Many participants advised using the potential of WGEMA in preparing the pan-European assessment, given the representation of Governments in this group. This would ensure up-to-date and verified information from EECCA and other countries in the region. In addition, the involvement of relevant international organizations would be crucial for a meaningful and successful document. CAREC³, on behalf of all Regional Environmental Centers (RECs), informed the meeting about the interest and commitment of all the RECs in being actively involved in the preparation of the pan-European assessment. European ECO-Forum also expressed its readiness to participate.

12. Participants welcomed the EEA initiative to establish SEIS; however, a pan-European SEIS might take a long time to be put in place and properly functioning soon (e.g. Ministers from countries not covered by the EEA network could consider committing their countries to SEIS at the Astana Ministerial Conference). Thus short-term solutions would be necessary for delivering the pan-European environmental assessment in time for the Astana Ministerial Conference.

13. Participants acknowledged that the next report might be of a different format than its four preceding assessments. They stressed the need to have a shorter and concise report covering all countries of the region and providing broad inter-country comparisons over the same themes. The themes should include key environmental issues, as well as cross-sectoral and cross-cutting issues in the region. Participants stressed that the scope of the pan-European assessment should not be limited to the two themes to be selected by CEP in due time for the Conference. Indeed, the assessment should give reasonable prominence to the themes selected. WGEMA, at its session in September 2009, should discuss the scope and format of the pan-European environmental assessment.

14. The representative of Kazakhstan proposed that water and ecosystems management should be the two themes for the Conference. With regard to the preparation of the two thematic policy documents for the Conference, following the selection of the two themes the relevant EfE partner(s) would be identified and the documents would be commissioned. Recent assessments

³ Central Asia Regional Environmental Center.

and reports or those under preparation and relevant to the two themes could then be used as a basis to prepare these two documents.

II. ASSESSMENTS AND STATISTICAL REPORTS THAT MIGHT BE MADE AVAILABLE FOR THE SELECTION OF THE THEMES OF THE CONFERENCE

15. The EfE Reform Plan stated that preliminary findings of available assessments and statistical reports on environment should be taken into account when CEP would be deciding, not later than 18 months before the Conference, on not more than two themes for the Conference, and would discuss the outline of the Conference.

16. The Chairperson invited the representatives of the international bodies and institutions to inform the meeting about ongoing or planned preparation of assessments and statistical reports on the environment with a view to discussing if the preliminary findings of such reports could be made available to CEP when it discussed, at its session in October 2009, themes for the next EfE Conference. Overarching questions for this discussion included: (a) Which reports are or may be upcoming? (b) How could these reports be of help to CEP in the theme selection? (c) In what way should "preliminary findings" be presented to CEP? and (d) How should relevant intergovernmental bodies be involved in the discussions on main findings of their reports?

17. The representatives of the UNECE environmental conventions informed the meeting about their recent and upcoming reports on the implementation of the conventions. The Water Convention briefed the meeting on the preparation of the second assessment of the transboundary waters in the UNECE region for the Astana Ministerial Conference. In addition to the comprehensive assessment, a short summary targeted to the decision makers would be prepared. The Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents would have their next implementation report available in June 2010. The Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution was producing and publishing on the website several annual regional reports on various issues, as well as country-based synthesis reports. An overarching synthesis report would be ready in 2011. The next implementation reports of the Espoo⁴ and Aarhus⁵ Conventions would be ready in spring 2011, in time for their respective sessions of their Meeting of the Parties. The implementation report of the UNECE Strategy for ESD would be ready at the beginning of 2011.

18. The representatives of international organizations and institutions briefed the meeting on their assessments and reports, which were ready or under preparation and which might be taken into account within the preparatory process for the Astana Ministerial Conference. Reference was made in particular to:

(a) The United Nations Environment Programme's (UNEP) report on the state-of-the-environment of the Caspian Sea, which would be prepared for the third Conference of the Parties to the Teheran Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea, to be held in 2011. Also, UNEP has begun the preparation of a Dinaric Arc and Balkans Environment Outlook (DABEO) integrated environment assessment report, which would focus on common high-mountain ecosystems and human well-being issues there. Background/scoping studies were now under way and would be completed later in 2009.

⁴ The Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context.

⁵ The Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters.

Furthermore, a graphical package (“Vital graphics”) on the environmental situation in parts of the EECCA subregion was being prepared. In the framework of the Environment and Security Initiative, the assessment on Amu Darya river basin covering three countries of Central Asia and Afghanistan, was being finalized, as was an analysis of the relationship between energy and environmental planning in Belarus, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine;

(b) The EAP Task Force Bureau would consider the preparation of several reports with a focus on progress made in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) related to water and sanitation, on mainstreaming environmental programmes into public budget, and on environmental institutions and building capacity for environmental management;

(c) The United Nations Development Programme’s (UNDP) global human development report devoted to climate change issues covering the period 2007–2008, and the human development report for Central Asia, published in 2005;

(d) CAREC’s upcoming five national reports on water quality in Central Asia, as well as the Central Asian subregional report on water quality standards and norms. REC-Caucasus’ transboundary water management and sustainable mountain management, including water, transport, energy issues in Caucasus;

(e) An Eureka project on ecosystem services to be initiated as a follow up of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment with a foreseen pan-European coverage and final outcomes in 2013.

19. Participants supported the secretariat’s proposal to send a template to the relevant EfE partners involved in preparing assessments and statistical reports with a request to provide an up-to-two-page summary of preliminary findings. These inputs could facilitate discussions by CEP of the selection of the two themes for the Conference. The template is annexed to this report.

20. The meeting stressed that a further CEP or Extended Bureau meeting might be needed in March 2010, should more time be required for the selection of themes for the Astana Ministerial Conference.

Annex

DRAFT⁶ TEMPLATE

for summaries / (preliminary) findings of the most recent (*since 2007*) / planned (*by 2011*) assessment and statistical reports that might be made available for the selection of themes of the Seventh Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe”⁷

(Up to two A4 page, Times New Roman, size 12; deadline for submission to the UNECE secretariat: 31 July 2009)

1.	<u>Title of the assessment/statistical report</u> ; name of author (organization/institution); publication date; link to the website
	<u>Keywords</u> (<i>one or two lines</i>) <i>This part should enumerate the main issues addressed in the report.</i>
2.	<u>Objective and scope</u> (<i>one paragraph</i>) <i>This part should present the issues/problems addressed in the report.</i>
3.	<u>(Preliminary) main findings and/or major concerns</u> (<i>up to one-and-a-half page</i>) <i>This part should present the main (preliminary) findings of the report. It should also include the major concerns/challenges identified, that could be brought to the attention of CEP during the Conference’s preparatory process and to the Conference itself.</i>

⁶ This draft might be revised to reflect possible comments by the CEP Bureau.

⁷ These inputs will support the preparation of a background document to facilitate the discussions on the two themes for the next Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe” in accordance with the EfE Reform Plan: “When deciding on the themes preliminary findings of available assessments and statistical reports on environment should be taken into consideration.” (ECE/CEP/S/152, para. 12.(a)).