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Draft concept for next pan-European environmental assessment

Note by the secretariat and UNEP, as presented to the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment at its twentieth session (Geneva, 3 and 4 September 2018)

I. Introduction

1. Pan-European environmental assessments have been a consistent feature of the Environment for Europe process from 1995 to 2016 (see table 1). The 2009 reform of the Environment for Europe process identified the pan-European assessment as one of the three substantive documents to be prepared for each ministerial conference, together with up to two theme-specific reports. After the Seventh Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Astana, 2011), responsibility for the drafting of the assessment shifted from the European Environment Agency (EEA) to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE).

2. After the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Batumi, Georgia, June 2016), the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy adopted the revised mandate and terms of reference of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment for 2017–2021. The terms of reference foresee the Working Group leading a process of consultation on the regular pan-European environmental assessment and helping in its preparation. The themes for the next ministerial conference in 2021 have yet to be identified.

3. This paper explores options for the modalities, scope and form of a next pan-European assessment to support discussions by the Working Group. It looks first at the background, covering relevant decisions, and at related international processes.

II. Background

4. This chapter sets out the background to the pan-European assessment, in terms of decisions taken by intergovernmental bodies and meetings since the 2009 reform of the Environment for Europe process. Additional resources are provided in annex.

Table 1
A history of pan-European assessments

<i>Year</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Observations</i>
1995	<i>Europe's Environment – The Dobris Assessment</i> (produced and published by EEA) ¹	Western and Central Europe
1998	<i>Europe's Environment: The Second Assessment</i> (produced and published by EEA) ²	Western and Central Europe
2003	Kyiv Assessment – <i>Europe's Environment: The Third Assessment</i> (produced and published by EEA) ³	Overview of progress in the Environmental Programme for Europe (covering the Eastern part of the ECE region for the first time) Intention was to develop it as a fully-fledged indicator-based assessment.
2007	Belgrade Assessment – <i>Europe's Environment: The Fourth Assessment</i> (produced and published by EEA) ⁴	Presents a list of guideline indicators for the European and Central Asian countries, demonstrating the relevance of each indicator to other international indicator sets
2011	Astana Assessment – <i>Europe's Environment: An Assessment of Assessments</i> (produced and published by EEA) ⁵	Focuses on the two themes of the Astana Conference: water and related ecosystems, and green economy
2016	Batumi Assessment – <i>Sixth Global Environment Outlook (GEO-6) for the Pan-European Region</i> (produced and published by UNEP/UNECE) ⁶	Built on existing national, subregional and thematic assessments, including <i>The European environment — state and outlook 2015</i> report produced by EEA in 2015 Assessment of the current state of the environment, highlighting trends and enhancing the science-policy dialogue underpinning the policymaking and decision-making processes in the region.

A. Reform of the Environment for Europe process, 2009

5. At its special session in January 2009, the Committee on Environmental Policy approved a reform plan for the Environment for Europe Process (ECE/CEP/S/152, para.7). The reform plan was subsequently endorsed by the ECE Executive Committee.

6. The reform plan (ECE/CEP/S/152, annex I), requires that “Not later than 18 months before the Conference the [Committee on Environmental Policy] at its regular session will decide on not more than two themes and discuss the outline of the agenda of the Conference.

¹ <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/92-826-5409-5>

² <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/92-828-3351-8>

³ https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/environmental_assessment_report_2003_10

⁴ https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/state_of_environment_report_2007_1

⁵ <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/europes-environment-aoa>

⁶

http://web.unep.org/geo/sites/unep.org/geo/files/documents/unep_geo_regional_assessments_europe_16-07513_hires.pdf

When deciding on the themes preliminary findings of available assessments and statistical reports on the environment should be taken into consideration.” (ibid, annex I, para. 12(a)). **“The official substantive documentation would ... comprise the pan-European assessment and [up to two] theme-specific reports”** (ibid, annex I, para. 12(d)).⁷

B. Seventh “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference, 2011

7. In the declaration made by ministers at the Seventh Ministerial Conference (Astana, 2011), “Save water, grow green!” (ECE/ASTANA.CONF/2011/2/Add.1), para. 14, states:

“...To keep the pan-European environment under review, **we decide to establish a regular process of environmental assessment** and to develop the [Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS)] across the region. These will serve multiple policy processes, including [multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs)], and include capacity-building of countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia and South-Eastern Europe to monitor and assess their environment. We invite EEA and its partners to develop an outline for how these actions could be performed and to present it to the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy.”

C. Committee on Environmental Policy, 2012–2016

8. In the period between the Seventh and Eighth Ministerial Conferences, the Committee on Environmental Policy considered the regular pan-European environmental assessment and related matters.

9. At its nineteenth session, in 2013, the Committee considered two documents prepared by EEA:

(a) Outline on the establishment of a regular assessment and reporting process underpinned by the gradual development of a Shared Environment Information System (ECE/CEP/2013/15);

(b) A review of Shared Environment Information System-related developments with an impact on environmental assessment and reporting since the Seventh “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference (ECE/CEP/2013/18).

The Committee asked, “How should the regular assessment process be organized and shaped, taking into consideration the benefits of SEIS?” (ECE/CEP/2013/2, para. 39(b)).

10. At its twentieth session, in 2015, the Committee considered a report by the Group of Friends of SEIS, Outcomes of the work of the Group of Friends of the Shared Environmental Information System for the period March–July 2014, which “suggested to work on organizing and shaping the regular environmental assessment process after the twentieth session of [the Committee on Environmental Policy], taking into account the outcomes related to the SEIS targets and performance indicators” (ECE/CEP/2014/7, para. 27).

11. At its twenty-first session, in 2015, the Committee considered a note by the Group of Friends of SEIS, Regular environmental assessment process based on the Shared Environmental Information System (ECE/CEP/2015/10). The note states that:

(a) SEIS “will provide extensive data and information for the generation of assessments, whether for the environment as a whole or for thematic areas” (para. 16). “The

⁷ Bold is added to the quoted text here and throughout this document.

pan-European SEIS will also contain, to the degree possible, certain data, mainly quantitative, necessary for reporting to MEAs” (para. 16);

(b) “Preparation of assessments at the country level will be conducted in accordance with the national legislation in that regard” (para. 18). “Preparation of assessments at the pan-European level will be conducted as necessary to support regional and global discussions. Such assessments will help identify common environmental concerns in the region and decide on responses at the regional level, as well as inform global-level decision-making and policymaking” (para. 20);

(c) **“The pan-European [Global Environment Outlook (GEO)] regional assessment process building on the EEA [state-of-the-environment report (SOER)] could contribute to, or become, a single pan-European assessment process delivering one regular assessment product on the review of the pan-European environment serving multiple purposes”** (para. 28);

(d) “The knowledge base created through SEIS will use, where available, existing technical infrastructure and platforms. UNEP Live should serve as the main platform at the pan-European level, linking with national and subregional platforms and providing centralized access to the knowledge base, including assessments, the data and information regularly published by countries” (para. 31(c));⁸

(e) “The political oversight of the regular review of the pan-European environment and the commissioning of assessments at the pan-European level will be provided by [the Committee on Environmental Policy], which will also coordinate its decisions with those taken at the global level related to environmental assessments, in particular those taken by [the United Nations Environment Assembly] regarding the GEO process and products” (para. 32(a));

(f) “For the pan-European regular environmental assessments, the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment will be serviced and supported by ECE in cooperation with UNEP and EEA” (para. 32(c));

(g) **“The assessment will result in the following product: (a) The GEO pan-European Regional Assessment will become a single pan-European assessment product for the review of the pan-European environment as a whole, serving multiple purposes; (b) The pan-European assessment will build on the EEA SOER and other regional thematic assessments, as well as national assessments”** (para. 33);

(h) “Generation of the pan-European assessments will not require any synchronization with assessment cycles, other than the GEO cycle” (para. 34(c)).

12. The Committee **“approved the proposed organization and shape of the regular environmental assessment process based on SEIS (ECE/CEP/2015/10)”** (ECE/CEP/2015/2, para. 42(a)) and **“agreed to launch [the GEO-6 regional assessment] as the regional environmental assessment at the Batumi Conference”** (ibid, para. 42(b)).

D. Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, 2016

13. In the declaration made at the Eighth Ministerial Conference (Batumi, Georgia, June 2016), “Greener, cleaner, smarter!”, Ministers, “While welcoming progress in developing the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) to support a regular process of environmental assessment, we invite countries to continue their efforts and to further develop

⁸ UNEP Live has subsequently been renamed Environment Live, available at <https://environmentlive.unep.org>.

their national information systems to have SEIS in place in the countries of Europe and Central Asia by 2021. In this regard, we note the value of UNEP Live and the Group on Earth Observations as global knowledge-sharing platforms. **We welcome the launch of the European regional assessment of the Global Environment Outlook, as the regular pan-European environmental assessment.** The GEO-6 Assessment for the pan-European region is built on existing national, sub-regional and thematic assessments, including *The European environment – state and outlook 2015* report produced by the European Environment Agency in 2015” (ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/2/Add.1, para. 10).

E. Committee on Environmental Policy, 2017 onwards

14. In the period since the Eighth Ministerial Conference, the Committee on Environmental Policy considered further the regular pan-European environmental assessment and related matters.

15. At its twenty-second session, in January 2017, the Committee adopted the revised mandate and terms of reference of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment for 2017–2021, as set out in annex II to ECE/CEP/2017/2, which includes:

(a) “The aim of the Working Group, under the oversight of the Committee, is to: ... (b) **Lead a process of consultation on the regular pan-European environmental assessment** and the streamlining of regular state-of-the-environment reporting by 2020” (para. 2);

(b) The Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment shall “Lead a process of consultation on the regular pan-European environmental assessment and the streamlining of regular state-of-the-environment reporting by 2020, and in particular: (i) Bring together experts involved in the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Global Environment Outlook process and the European Environment Agency’s European Environment Information and Observation Network (EIONET), including interested parties, to discuss and oversee the regular pan-European environmental assessment; (ii) Discuss and detail regional priorities concerning the streamlining of regular state-of-the-environment reporting, involving also other thematic networks, including those under the multilateral environmental agreements, in the discussion; (iii) Oversee the implementation of proposed recommendations and guidance provided through the consultation process on the regular pan-European environmental assessment and the streamlining of regular state-of-the-environment reporting” (para. 3(b));

(c) “The following outputs will be achieved leading up to 2021: ... (e) **Assistance will be provided in the preparation of the regular pan-European environmental assessment** and other relevant state-of-the-environment reports” (para. 4).

16. At its twenty-third session, in November 2017, the Committee took no decisions on the next pan-European environmental assessment.

III. Related processes

17. Two important international processes relate to the regular pan-European environmental assessment: the EEA state and outlook reports; and the GEO process led by UNEP.

A. European Environment Agency state and outlook reports

18. The EEA state and outlook report is published every five years and, among other things, feeds into the evaluation of progress achieved by the European Union countries in relation to the European Union Environmental Action Programmes and other common commitments. The latest edition, *The European environment — state and outlook 2015* (SOER 2015), was published in March 2015 (ECE/CEP/2015/10, para. 27(a)).

19. The EEA SOER 2020 will be launched in 2019 and 2020: *The Integrated Assessment* will be issued in 2019, followed by a Synthesis stakeholder interaction; and the *Synthesis* report is based upon the key findings of 2019 the *Integrated Assessment* and the outcomes of the stakeholder interaction in 2020.

B. Global Environment Outlook process

20. The latest global assessment, GEO-6, is to be based on the findings of regional assessments of each of the six UNEP regions. The regional assessments are in turn based on the established political and institutional processes and mechanisms in each region and engage with regional partners and stakeholders to make maximum use of these processes and mechanisms in the assessment process. The full GEO-6 assessment was expected to be launched at the third meeting of the United Nations Environment Assembly in 2018 (ECE/CEP/2015/10, para. 27(b)). It will now be launched at the fourth meeting of the United Nations Environment Assembly, being held from 11–15 March 2019.

21. Regarding a possible seventh Global Environment Outlook:

(a) The High-level Group, which helps guide the GEO process, has recommended an evaluation be conducted before any decision on a seventh GEO is made;

(b) UNEP has commissioned a medium-term evaluation of the GEO process by its independent evaluation office, which identified funding as a major challenge for the GEO process;

(c) Given that GEO-6 faced funding challenges, UNEP has recommended in several briefings that future Global Environment Outlooks be put on a more stable financial and structural footing.

22. Therefore, it is not possible to determine at this time the schedule for the seventh edition of the Global Environment Outlook; this may prevent synchronization of the pan-European environmental assessment with the GEO cycle. Nor is it possible to determine whether sufficient budget would be available to conduct another set of regional assessments.

IV. Concept for the next pan-European environmental assessment

23. To develop a concept for the next pan-European environmental assessment, the Working Group may wish to:

(a) Consider a number of elements as set out in the first section of this chapter;

(b) Determine a process and timeline for preparation of the assessment;

(c) Consider options for the scope and form of the assessment.

A. Elements for consideration

24. The following elements might be considered in the development of a concept for the next pan-European environmental assessment based on the issues raised in Chapters II and III:

(a) The mandate is for a regular process of environmental assessment in the pan-European region based on SEIS (to start with it was “and”, not “based on”, i.e. the mandate was for a pan-European assessment and for SEIS, not linked);

(b) An integrated assessment would: combine and assess data, indicators, information and knowledge; and facilitate an understanding of the state of the environment while measuring progress towards agreed policy targets;

(c) SEIS is the knowledge base for the assessment including the networks behind;

(d) UNEP Live is a/the platform. It harvests what is available regionally, including EEA information;

(e) The member States must be given the opportunity to participate in the preparation of the assessment;

(f) There needs to be clear authorship, clear ownership and a clear role for the Working Group;

(g) The Committee on Environmental Policy must have the final say on draft messages for Ministers;

(h) The assessment should, at the same time, demonstrate that SEIS has been established;

(i) The assessment must be linked to the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development;

(j) The assessment should also address green economy in the pan-European region;

(k) In an effort to streamline reporting at the regional level, the EEA SOER 2020 findings and assessment need to be largely used and complemented eventually by additional elements covering the remaining countries of the region.

B. Process and timeline

25. The Working Group might begin by agreeing on a general approach (section C below) and a process to propose to the Committee on Environmental Policy in January 2019. The period between the twenty-third and twenty-fourth sessions of the Committee (January and November 2019) could be used to refine the approach for agreement by the Committee at its twenty-fifth session.

26. Countries, based on their national or subregional state-of-the-environment reports, might identify priority themes of concern after the twenty-fourth session of the Committee on Environmental Policy (January 2019), for the twenty-fifth session (November 2019). This information could contribute to discussions at the twenty-fifth session of the Committee on the themes for the next ministerial conference.

27. This would leave, essentially, 2020 to prepare the assessment. The Working Group might propose, and the Committee decide, to establish a drafting group to prepare the assessment. The drafting group might be co-chaired by three chairs or vice-chairs of the Committee, Working Group and the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and

Indicators. It might meet in person three times, say, if invited by a member State, otherwise working by virtual means. The drafting group could be supported by the ECE secretariat and UNEP and, in an advisory role based on the findings of the SOER 2020, EEA, and by a science writer in a supporting role, a graphic designer and a coordinator, subject to the availability of extrabudgetary resources. Resources would also be needed for:

- (a) Hosting drafting group meetings;
- (b) Assuring broad participation in meetings of the Working Group and Joint Task Force to ensure acceptance and policy relevance;
- (c) Publishing the assessment.

28. A possible timeline is set out in table 2.

Table 2

Possible timeline for the next pan-European environmental assessment

<i>Date</i>	<i>Event</i>	<i>Actions</i>
September 2018	20 th session of the Working Group	Agree on a general approach and process
October 2018	15 th session of the Joint Task Force	Review the proposed general approach and process
January 2019	24 th session of the Committee on Environmental Policy	Review the proposed general approach and process
May 2019	21 st session of the Working Group	Refine the above and identify possible priority themes
October 2019	16 th session of the Joint Task Force	Further refine the general approach and process and develop possible priority themes
November 2019	25 th session of the Committee	Decide upon the general approach and process and up to two themes for the next conference
Early 2020	1 st meeting of the drafting group	To be determined
Spring 2020	22 nd session of the Working Group	To be determined
Summer 2020	2 nd meeting of the drafting group	To be determined
Autumn 2020	3 rd meeting of the drafting group	To be determined
	17 th session of the Joint Task Force	To be determined
	26 th session of the Committee	To be determined
Early 2021	Special session of the Committee	Consideration of the draft pan-European environmental assessment
	23 rd session of the Working Group	To be determined
2021	9 th Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference	Consideration of the pan-European environmental assessment

C. Options for the seventh pan-European environmental assessment

29. The Working Group might wish to consider the following options or develop an alternative for the scope and format of a next pan-European environmental assessment.

1. Comprehensive integrated environmental assessment for pan-European region

30. This option:

- (a) Is resource intensive, with a high cost and significant staff and experts time;
- (b) Is potentially very useful for policymakers and includes an outlook perspective;
- (c) Is potentially difficult to integrate with the EEA SOER 2020;
- (d) Is difficult to produce in a short timeframe, depending on the themes selected by the Committee on Environmental Policy for the Ninth Environment for Europe Conference;
- (e) In the absence of a further mandate from the United Nations Environment Assembly on the next GEO cycle (GEO-7) and regional assessments, might not be able to build upon a regional GEO assessment;
- (f) Provides the following roles for the Working Group:
 - (i) To be consulted and agree on the objectives, scope and process of the assessment;
 - (ii) To agree the annotated outline for the assessment and table of contents;
 - (iii) To participate actively in the intergovernmental peer review process and assure the policy relevance of the assessment.

2. Thematic assessment based on the themes for the ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference

31. This option:

- (a) Involves the development of a synthesis or review of various policy relevant issues in the form of a short policy-relevant report;
- (b) Means that the report could include specific chapters on assessing progress in implementing certain Batumi Conference outcomes (e.g., on air quality, green economy and the establishment of SEIS) and selected, relevant Sustainable Development Goals according to Voluntary National Reports, as well as the two chosen themes of the conference;
- (c) Provides the following roles for the Working Group:
 - (i) To be consulted and agree on the objectives, scope and process of the assessment;
 - (ii) To agree the annotated outline for the assessment and table of contents;
 - (iii) To participate actively in the intergovernmental peer review process and assure the policy relevance of the assessment.

3. Indicator-based report based on ECE environmental indicators, reflecting the establishment of SEIS in the region

32. This option:

- (a) Means that the type of assessment will depend on the comparability of the indicators across the whole region and the (often limited) availability of the data in each country;
- (b) Offers a possibility to focus on the indicators for the region using the DPSIR framework drawing from regional data sets held by the United Nations and other international and regional organizations;
- (c) Provides the following roles for the Working Group:
 - (i) To be consulted and agree on the objectives, scope and process of the assessment;
 - (ii) To agree the annotated outline for the assessment and table of contents;
 - (iii) To participate actively in the intergovernmental peer review process and assure the policy relevance of the assessment.

Annex

Relevant links to ECE documents, from 2017 back to 2011

Report of the Committee on Environmental Policy on its twenty-second session, ECE/CEP/2017/2, paras. 29-34 and Annex II
(www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/documents/2017/ece/cep/ece.cep.2017.2.e.pdf)

Batumi Ministerial Declaration, ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/2/Add.1, para 10
(www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/documents/2016/ece/ece.batumi.conf.2016.2.add.1.e.pdf)

Chair's summary of the Conference, ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/2/Add.3, paras. 15-20
(www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/documents/2016/ece/ece.batumi.conf.2016.2.add.3.e.pdf)

Report on progress in establishing the Shared Environmental Information System in support of regular reporting in the pan-European region, ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/8
(www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/documents/2016/ece/ece.batumi.conf.2016.8.e.pdf)

Revised draft report on progress in establishing SEIS in the pan-European region, ECE/CEP/S/2016/L.9
(www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/documents/2016/ece/cep/ece.cep.s.2016.L.9.e.pdf)

Report of the Committee on Environmental Policy on its twenty-first session, ECE/CEP/2015/2, paras. 32-42 and 89-94
(www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/documents/2015/ece/cep/ece.cep.2015.2.e.pdf)

Streamlining the work on environmental monitoring and assessment, ECE/CEP/2015/12
(www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/documents/2015/ece/cep/ece.cep.2015.12.e.pdf ;
www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/cep/CEP-21/ppt/WGEMA_JTFEI_ToR_CEP-21_e.pdf)

Outcomes of the work of the Group of Friends of SEIS, ECE/CEP/2015/9
(www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/documents/2015/ece/cep/ece.cep.2015.9.e.pdf)

Regular environmental assessment process based on SEIS, ECE/CEP/2015/10
(www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/documents/2015/ece/cep/ece.cep.2015.10.e.pdf)

First report on progress in establishing SEIS in the pan-European region, ECE/CEP/2015/11
(www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/documents/2015/ece/cep/ece.cep.2015.11.e.pdf)

Targets and performance indicators for measuring progress in developing SEIS across the pan-European region, ECE/CEP/2014/8
(www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/documents/2014/ece/cep/ece.cep.2014.8.e.pdf)

Outcomes of the work of the Group of Friends of SEIS for the period March–July 2014, ECE/CEP/2014/7
(www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/documents/2014/ece/cep/ece.cep.2014.7.e.pdf)

Terms of reference of the Group of Friends of SEIS, ECE/EX/11, Annex II
(www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/documents/2014/ece/ece.ex.11.e.pdf)

A review of SEIS-related developments with an impact on environmental assessment and reporting since the Astana Ministerial Conference, ECE/CEP/2013/18
(www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/documents/2013/ece/cep/ece.cep.2013.18.e.pdf)

Outline on the establishment of a regular assessment and reporting process underpinned by the gradual development of a SEIS, ECE/CEP/2013/15

(www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/documents/2013/ece/cep/ece.cep.2013.15.e.pdf)

Input by the Environment for Europe partners into the gradual development of a SEIS, ECE/CEP/2013/13

(www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/documents/2013/ece/cep/ece.cep.2013.13.e.pdf)

Proposed coordination mechanism for the development of the SEIS, ECE/CEP/2013/23

(www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/documents/2013/ece/cep/ece.cep.2013.23.e.pdf)

Report of the Committee on Environmental Policy on its nineteenth session, ECE/CEP/2013/2, paras. 37-40, 64-69, 116 (g)(v); (l) and (m)

(www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/documents/2013/ece/cep/ece.cep.2013.2.e.pdf)

Astana Ministerial Declaration, ECE/ASTANA.CONF/2011/2/Add.1, para. 14

(www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/documents/2011/ece/ece.astana.conf.2011.2.add.1.e.pdf)
