



UNECE Weekly

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

Issue N° 185 – 14-18 August 2006



Environment for Europe

Interview with Monika Linn, Team Leader of the UNECE Environment for Europe and Sustainable Development Team

Q: What is the Environment for Europe process and how did it start?

Ms. Linn: It goes back to the political changes in Eastern Europe in 1989. At that time, no one really knew much about the environmental situation in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. The environment minister of what was then Czechoslovakia took the initiative and invited ministers to a meeting held at Dobris Castle, near Prague, in 1991 to discuss the development of pan-European environmental policies. And that was the start of what was then called the Environment for Europe process.



Dobris Castle, Czech Republic

And from then on, we have had a series of international conferences that take place every 4 or 5 years. The conferences are held in different parts of the UNECE region and so, in addition to an overall look at the development of the environment and policies, there is also a focus on the specific subregion where the conference is held. The last one took place in 2003 in Kiev, so the countries of that subregion had the specific focus. The next conference is in 2007 in Belgrade and in addition to UNECE-wide discussions, the talks will also have a focus on South-eastern Europe.

Overall, the general objectives of the process are to address environmental problems in the region and to help Eastern

and Central European countries to gradually raise their standards so that in the end there is a similar standard throughout the region.

Q: What were the main objectives at the first meeting?

Ms. Linn: The first meeting provided the basis for the development of the Environment for Europe process. It started with an assessment of the environmental situation in the region. The UNECE and the European Commission jointly conducted this assessment, which described the current state of the environment in Europe. So this first conference started to develop the political framework for more coherent environmental policies in the region and the second conference, in Lucerne in 1993, set up different mechanisms, for example a financing facility and environmental action programme for the region. UNECE was involved from the start, but was not the only partner. There are other important partners including the European Environment Agency which conducts the assessments, the World Bank, OECD, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and UNEP.



Q: Today, what is the UNECE's main function with regard to the Environment for Europe process?

Ms. Linn: The UNECE works at many levels of the process. One of our main functions is providing the secretariat services. In other words, we are servicing the working group of senior officials who, beginning two years before the next ministerial conference, hold a series of preparatory meetings to define the agenda for the next



Air pollution in a changing climate

The work under the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution addresses the harmful air pollution impacts on the environment, materials and human health. Climate change may increase mean annual temperatures, its variation within a year and affect the intensity and amount of precipitation. More studies now emphasize the combined effects of pollutants and climate.



Increased ozone ...

Increasing temperatures and solar radiation form more ground-level ozone. This became evident in the extreme heat and drought in summer 2003. Ozone had detrimental effects on human health, especially for children and aged persons. Visible injury was detected on vegetation and trees, though sometimes there were delays before effects were observed. However, a contributing factor of the high temperatures, reduced gas exchange and ozone uptake by leaves due to high temperatures, might have mitigated some of the effects.

... and nitrogen ...

In the medium term, mean annual temperature has a determining role in increasing nitrogen leaching from forest soils, especially at sites already enriched with nitrogen. Such leaching may decrease the water quality and affect biodiversity, as more nitrogen becomes available for nitrogen-favouring species. High temperatures also enhance the corrosion of various materials due to air pollution and may lead to large cleaning and replacement costs.

Long-term impacts of air pollution and climate have been predicted by



The full text of the interview will be issued in UNECE Weekly in September.



cont.

ministerial conference and agree upon its focus. We service this entire process. And of course, we are also contributing on the project-level, contributing ideas in our areas of competence.

Q: What progress have the individual subregions made on reaching goals set out in the process?

Ms. Linn: It differs very much because the UNECE region is very diverse. You have Western Europe, Canada and the US, and then the Central and Eastern European countries, some of which are relatively new EU members. Of course, in the process of their accession to the EU, those countries had to comply with certain legislations set forth by the EU and they certainly have made progress in their environmental policies. But there are lots of challenges. Some of these countries are still in situations where there is not really political stability, and living standards in some of these countries are comparable to developing countries. You can imagine how big the challenges are. If there is not much economic progress, if there is not political stability, there is also not much priority given to environmental policies. ❖

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dynamic acidification models applied to environmental monitoring sites. Changes in climate may significantly affect water acidification and impacts on biology, including their future recovery.

... and critical loads

The critical loads, which define the lowest sensitivity level to pollution exposure, are used as environmental targets to negotiate air pollutant reductions under the Convention. The study on climate-dependent critical loads concluded that they would generally increase due to elevated temperatures, changed precipitation patterns and modified net primary production. However, decreases were predicted in mountainous and arid regions – areas where the more sensitive ecosystems are often found. So while

sulphur and nitrogen depositions may generally exceed critical loads less in future, certain sensitive areas may have greater problems. In addition, in many areas nutrient nitrogen will remain a substantial problem. Critical loads for nutrient nitrogen will be exceeded due to the leaching effects described above.

It is clear that future policies on air pollution and climate change need to be coordinated. Some of the gases causing the problems are the same or they originate from the same sources. However, the inter-related environmental effects also need to be considered. For example, policies on climate change could emphasize the need for further reductions of nitrogen emissions. ❖

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UNECE region forest products markets

The **UNECE/FAO Forest Products Annual Market Review, 2005-2006**, just released, covers forest products market and policy developments in the UNECE region. The UNECE region has a lead responsibility in assuring sustainable production from forests in and outside the region because it is the main consumer, producer and exporter of forest products in the world.



The Review begins with an overview of forest products markets and policies, followed by a chapter focusing on policy issues related to forest products markets. These are followed by analyses of the economic factors affecting the forest and forest industries sector. Statistics-based chapters are included for markets of sawn softwood, paper, wood raw materials, tropical timber, etc. Other chapters highlight the rapid developments in wood energy, forest products certification, as well as value-added wood products, e.g. furniture. ❖

Available at <http://www.unece.org/trade/timber>. Also available from UN Publications Sales and Marketing Section, Palais des Nations, Geneva (unpubli@unog.ch).

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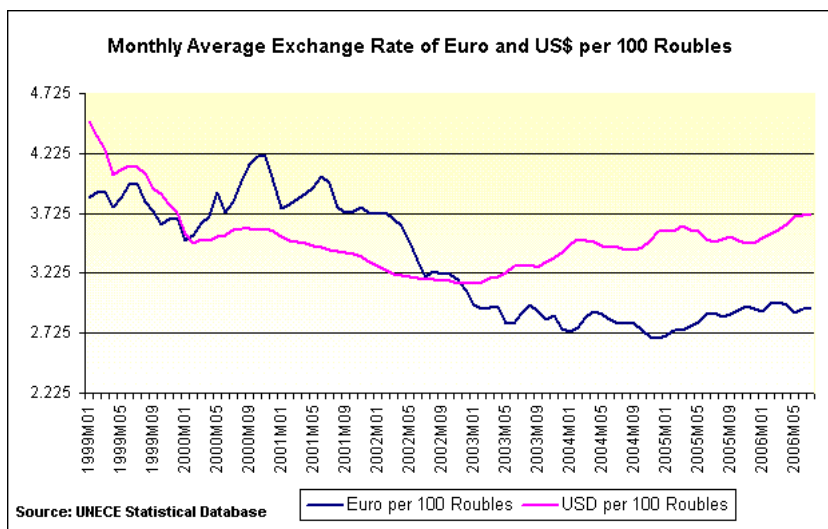
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Facts and figures

The Rouble is now a fully convertible international currency



On 1 July 2006 the Russian Government made a decision to cancel some restrictions in currency control. As a result, the Russian Federation's Rouble is now a fully convertible and freely tradable currency.

The above graph shows monthly movements in the value of the normalised Rouble against the United States Dollar (US\$) and Euro since the beginning of 1999. During the period January 1999–July 2006 the Rouble depreciated 24% against the Euro, with 100 Roubles buying 3.86 Euros in January 1999 and 2.93 Euros in July 2006. During the same period the Rouble depreciated 17% against the US\$, with 100 Roubles buying US\$ 4.49 in January 1999 and US\$ 3.72 in July 2006.