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**Meeting with the Chair of the Committee on Environmental Policy**

**Report by the Chair**

## **Report by the Chair of the Committee on Environmental Policy\***

### **I. Achievements over the past twelve months**

1. In the reporting period, since February 2020, the Environment subprogramme under the general governance of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Committee on Environmental Policy and the other governing and subsidiary bodies under the Environment subprogramme continued to support countries to enhance their environmental governance and transboundary cooperation as well as strengthen implementation of the UNECE regional environmental commitments and advance sustainable development in the region.

#### **Advancing sustainable development and environmental governance in the region**

2. The 26th session of the Committee on Environmental Policy was held in Geneva on 9 and 10 November 2020. Agenda items included sustainable development in the region; new dates and other organizational issues for the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference; work related to environmental monitoring, assessment and reporting; peer review of the environmental performance of Romania; consideration of the Fourth Cycle of Reviews under the UNECE Environmental Performance Programme (EPR); the developments in a number of cross-cutting activities (such as: education for sustainable development; transport, health and environment; environment and security; environment and health; and mainstreaming a gender perspective in environmental activities); annual programme of work of the Environment subprogramme for 2021; presentation and exchange of views on the fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme; and procedural matters of the work of the Committee.

3. The Committee on Environmental Policy expressed its gratitude to the Government of Cyprus for the continued commitment to host the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, including the Third High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries, in Cyprus, and decided to reschedule the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, including the Third High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries (Nicosia, the Republic of Cyprus), for 5-7 October 2022. It encouraged the member States, partner organizations and all interested stakeholders to actively participate in the preparation and conduct of the Conference.

4. In 2020, the Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Programme continued to serve as a platform to advance the monitoring and assessment of environmental conditions and trends, the production, harmonization and sharing of environmental data, statistics, indicators and information for reporting to policymakers, international forums and the public. It also continued to support policy development and its implementation, including the monitoring of relevant SDGs. Under a United Nations Development Account (UNDA) project on “Improved environmental monitoring and assessment in support of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda in South-Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Caucasus”, a training webinar on “Health-relevant air quality data informing policy and the public” was held for the seven target countries of the project. The Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment and the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators both met in 2020 in a hybrid format, focusing on among others the final progress review of the establishment of a Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) and the revision of the Guidelines on the Application of Environmental Indicators. Preparations and work for the 7<sup>th</sup> pan-European environmental assessment (a light indicator-based assessment, as decided by the Committee) were also started in 2020.

5. In 2020, the Committee on Environmental Policy peer reviewed the environmental performance of Romania for the third time and adopted the associated recommendations, which had earlier been examined by the Expert Group on EPRs. The Committee adopted the Fourth Cycle of Reviews under the EPR Programme as prepared by the Expert Group

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\* This document was not formally edited.

(ECE/CEP/2020/6) and submitted it to the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Nicosia, 5–7 October 2022) for ministerial endorsement. The Third EPR of Uzbekistan was published and promoted broadly through mass media and social platforms. The country review mission for the third EPR of Azerbaijan was postponed to 2021 with the dates to be determined based on the COVID-19 international and national situation. The preparatory mission for the second EPR of Morocco took place by virtual means during August-September 2020 and the country review mission was organized using a hybrid approach, consisting of virtual meetings and interviews in second half of November and possible in-person field visits in January-February 2021, if COVID-19 will allow travelling to the country.

6. Activities under the United Nations Development Account (UNDA) project on “Evidence-based environmental governance and sustainable environmental policies in support of the 2030 Agenda in South-East Europe” were on-going and included thus far policy packages on green economy, air quality improvement, climate change, waste management at the national and local level, medical waste management and environmental inspections. As a result of the 2020 global crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic affecting all aspects of life, UNECE and targeted countries agreed to shift travel and workshop funds to more policy papers to support the achievements of EPR-relevant SDGs, mitigate and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and prevent future possible pandemics.

7. The Committee expressed appreciation to countries and organizations supporting financially and in-kind activities carried out under the UNECE Environment subprogramme.

8. The countries under the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme (THE PEP) gathered in an extraordinary meeting on 22 April 2020 to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on transport, health and environment. Participants agreed that THE PEP was key in supporting countries in taking actions to shape, support and promote healthier and more effective transport options. In this framework, member States decided to develop principles for green and healthy sustainable transport, on the basis of experiences from the COVID-19 pandemic, linked to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and to the work to tackle climate change. A task force comprising of member States, academia and other stakeholders worked on them. Member States also continued their work towards the Fifth High-level Meeting on Transport, Health and Environment.

### **UNECE multilateral environmental agreements – highlights**

9. The ECE Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) continued their work focusing on improving the implementation and compliance by Parties. Meetings of the governing bodies under three MEAs were organized in 2020, namely Eleventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents (Geneva, 7-9 December 2020), Eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention) and Fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Espoo Convention serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) (8–11 December 2020), the fortieth session of the Executive Body for the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution (Air Convention) (18 December 2020).

#### *Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution (Air Convention)*

10. In 2020, Parties started their work on the review of the Protocol to Abate Acidification Eutrophication and Ground-level Ozone (the Convention’s flagship Gothenburg Protocol), which was initiated in December 2019 following the entry into force of the Protocol’s amendment. According to article 10 of the Protocol, Parties shall keep under review the obligations under the Protocol, including their adequacy, and the progress made toward the achievement of the Protocol’s objective. At its fortieth session in December 2020, the Executive Body agreed on the scope and content of the review, as well as on the preliminary work schedule for the review. As part of the review process, Parties initiated the evaluation of ammonia control measures and mitigation measures for black carbon emissions.

11. The adoption of the Guidance document on integrated sustainable nitrogen management is another major accomplishment of the Air Convention in 2020. The goal of

the document is to mobilize efforts to control air and nitrogen pollution from agricultural sources in the context of the wider nitrogen cycle. Sustainable nitrogen management provides the foundation to strengthen an emerging “nitrogen circular economy”, reducing nitrogen losses and promoting recovery and reuse. The Guidance demonstrates how actions to control air pollution have co-benefits for climate, water, biodiversity, health and the economy. It identifies 24 principles to help Parties understand and tailor solutions, summarises 76 measures and their performance for abatement of different nitrogen forms and illustrates how to develop packages of measures to improve coherence.

12. ECE marked the first International Day of Clean Air for blue skies on 7 September 2020 with a webinar, in which experts shared lessons learnt from the 40 years history of the Convention. With almost 150 participants, experts discussed features of the Convention that has made it successful, remaining challenges, the importance of awareness-raising, individual actions, and ways how to include air quality management in post-pandemic recovery policies.

13. As a result of continued capacity-building activities, Parties in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia improved their emissions reporting in 2020. In June, the secretariat launched the project “Assessment and enhancement of Kazakhstan’s national capacity to ratify the key protocols and development of a national action plan for ratification”. Remotely held meetings of the EECCA Coordinating Group and in-country workshops on emission inventories helped to promote ratification and implementation of the Convention and its key protocols.

*Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention)*

14. In 20120 the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) effectively further expanded its global reach with the accession of Ghana in June 2020, therefore now counting three Parties from beyond the UNECE region (in total 44 Parties). In addition, countries such as Iraq and Togo are at the final stages of decision-making in the accession process and more than 15 are progressing in their accession. The provision of tailored guidance to numerous countries in the process of accession and the organization of several basin and regional events (in-person and virtual) further strengthened the understanding of the Convention, accelerated engagement of countries from Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East in the Convention’s activities as well as progress towards accession. Cooperation for the management of transboundary water resources was highlighted as a necessity for COVID-19 recovery, contributing to ensuring access to sufficient and safe water for all and basins development.

15. The Water Convention developed new ways of organizing activities and maintaining its services to its Parties and other countries to adapt to the restrictions associated to the COVID-19 pandemic. Five global virtual or hybrid intergovernmental meetings were organized and acknowledged as valuable platforms to exchange knowledge and good practices: including the meetings of the Working Group on integrated water resources management (October); of the Task Force on Water and Climate Change (October); and of the Task Force on the Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystems Nexus (October);. In addition, several webinars were organized on various topics, including one with the Geneva Environment Network on transboundary water cooperation, the Water Convention and COVID-19.

16. New activities under the Convention attracted high interest from countries and partners:

- on facilitating financing of transboundary water cooperation and basin development: a comprehensive study was developed and a global workshop organized (December), in cooperation with major international financial institutions such as the World Bank, and multilateral development banks from Europe, Africa, Latin America and Asia;
- on supporting equitable and sustainable water allocation in a transboundary context: a handbook on transboundary water allocation was developed, through a dedicated Expert Group (with virtual meetings in March and October) and the organization of a regional workshop for Europe on the topic (October);

- On developing legal frameworks for transboundary water cooperation: a workshop on designing such frameworks (July) supported the development of an annotated outline of a draft checklist on the topic.

17. The new publication *Frequently Asked Questions on the 1992 Water Convention with the Road map to facilitate accession processes* was finalized and launched in November through a webinar with the Geneva environment network.

18. The second reporting exercise on SDG indicator 6.5.2 on transboundary water cooperation was launched in February 2020 by UNECE and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as co-custodian agencies, which is combined with reporting under the Water Convention for Parties. With 132 countries reporting, representing 86% of all countries sharing transboundary waters<sup>1</sup> (compared to 108 responses and 70% response rate for the first reporting exercise in 2017), this represents a major achievement in terms of political attention to the importance of transboundary water cooperation for sustainable development. Support was provided to countries in preparing the national reports through five dedicated webinars in May-June 2020 and two regional workshops for Arab countries (in March) and Asia (in September).

19. Finally, the Convention contributed to global processes such as the development and launch of the SDG 6 global acceleration framework on 9 July 2020 with the Secretary-General, but also the Adaptation Committee under the UNFCCC and the 2020 IUCN World Conservation Congress where a motion on promoting transboundary water cooperation was adopted.

20. The high interest in the Convention in various regions and acceleration of reporting on SDG indicator 6.5.2 demonstrates the growing momentum at the global level to strengthen the sustainable management of transboundary water resources and provides opportunities to prevent conflicts and promote regional stability and development.

#### *Protocol on Water and Health to the Water Convention*

21. In 2020, the Protocol on Water and Health, jointly serviced by UNECE and the World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe, has been further positioned as a key mechanism to address the water, sanitation and health challenges in the UNECE region, also in support of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, in particular Goals 6 on clean water and sanitation and 3 on health and well-being. Challenges requiring urgent attention and action in the UNECE region included providing equitable access to water, sanitation and hygiene for all in all settings, gaps in ensuring safely managed and climate-resilient water and sanitation services, promoting wastewater reuse in support of circular economy and addressing emerging health concerns related to the management of water and sanitation systems, such as legionella prevention and antimicrobial resistance. The Protocol provides methodologies and tools that can be used by UNECE Member States to address the above challenges.

22. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic, greatly affecting human health and well-being and threatening development prospects around the world, made clear that access to water, sanitation and hygiene services is a key public health priority for preventing contamination with the SARS-CoV-2 virus as well as other infectious diseases. The provision of safe, reliable and resilient water, sanitation and hygiene for all and in all settings is therefore a precondition for societies that are resilient to the spread of disease, and it is a crucial pillar for water-related disease prevention in the long-term.

23. The Protocol provides concrete tools to support countries in recovering from COVID-19, in particular through its mechanism for setting, implementing and monitoring national objectives in the areas of water, sanitation, hygiene and health, strengthening capacity for surveillance of drinking-water quality and management of water-related disease outbreaks, and promoting the provision of safe water, sanitation and hygiene services for all in all settings, including in schools, health care facilities and communities. A new series of thematic webinars under the Protocol was launched in 2020 with the aim of covering different

<sup>1</sup> Data as of 7 January 2021

aspects of the pandemic in relation to water, sanitation, hygiene and health through the lens of the thematic Protocol work areas. A high-level briefing on the Protocol for missions was organized on 6 November in Geneva.

24. In 2020, the Protocol also welcomed a new Party – Montenegro. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Spain set their first targets under the Protocol. Belarus, Czechia, Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine were in the process of revising their targets.

25. Finally, the fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol, held in Belgrade on 19-21 November 2019, recognized that the implementation of its current and future programmes of work would require adequate United Nations regular budget resources, due to the Protocol extended mandate, increasing membership and growing number of requests for support from Parties and other States. Parties, therefore, requested the United Nations Secretary-General to increase the support by UNECE, in order to ensure the effective management and full implementation of the expanded programme of work of the Protocol for 2020–2022 and to support the accession to and implementation of the Protocol by the acceding countries. At the 112<sup>th</sup> meeting of the UNECE Executive Committee, the Committee took note of the request.

*Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents (Industrial Accidents Convention)*

26. In 2020, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, major activities under the Convention continued, albeit in an amended form. The eleventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP-11) was organized successfully in 2020 (7-9 December), in a hybrid form, during three two-hour sessions, preceded by two online preparatory events: an advance information session (30 October) and a Seminar on mine tailings safety in the UNECE region and beyond (1 December).

27. CoP-11 took numerous important decisions, including decision 2020/1 on strengthening mine tailings safety in the UNECE region and beyond and decision 2020/2 on strengthening the implementation of the Convention. It adopted the implementation report for the period 2016-2018, which showed further progress in implementation, as well as existing implementation gaps, in particular with respect to transboundary cooperation.

28. Two new projects under the Assistance and Cooperation Programme were launched in 2020, notably the project on supporting countries of Central Asia in strengthening the safety of mine tailings, and the project on National Policy Dialogues for Industrial Safety in Central Asia (Phase I: Launch).

29. Furthermore, progress towards implementation of the Convention was inspired through the conduct of the following activities, under the auspices of its Assistance and Cooperation Programme:

- (a) An online teaser event (21 October 2020), in preparation of the postponed sub-regional workshop on land-use planning and industrial safety for South-Eastern Europe (Belgrade, October 2021);
- (b) Publishing of an Implementation Guide on the Convention for Central Asian countries in English and French, further to the earlier published Russian version;<sup>2</sup>
- (c) Preparation of video on the safety of the tailings management facilities in English and Russian (December 2020);
- (d) Further support to Ukraine towards its accession to the Convention, in planning for the conduct of the mission, to be held in 2021 in view of the COVID-19 pandemic;
- (e) Preparation of the Terms of Reference of the Steering Group and preparation of the launch of the National Policy Dialogues for Industrial Safety in Serbia;
- (f) Continued implementation of the Project on “Strengthening the Safety of Mining Operations, in particular tailings management facilities, in Tajikistan and

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<sup>2</sup> See: <https://ECE.org/environment-policy/publications/implementation-guide-central-asia-convention-transboundary-effects>.

beyond in Central Asia”, with the finalization of a hazard map and inventory of tailings facilities in Tajikistan, including those with potential transboundary effects, and the preparation of an onsite-training, postponed to 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

30. 2020 also saw the launch of an information repository on land-use planning and industrial safety, consolidating over 40 case studies from 25 countries addressing the areas of disaster risk reduction, land-use planning and siting, (strategic) environmental and industrial risk assessment, public information and participation and transboundary cooperation.

31. Furthermore, the secretariat contributed significantly to the several events organized by partners, such as:

- (a) Webinar on preparing for and responding to chemical risks: re-starting industry, organized by UNEP/OCHA Joint Environment Unit (14 October 2020)
- (b) Inter-agency coordination meeting on industrial accidents, hosted by the ILO (22 September 2020)
- (c) Annual technical meeting of the Coordination Group on Uranium Legacy Sites (online, 23-27 November 2020);
- (d) XVIII meeting of the CIS Inter-State Council on Industrial Safety (Minsk and online, 16 September 2020);
- (e) Fifty-third and fifty-fourth meetings of the Inter-Organization Coordinating Committee of the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC): 53rd Meeting (Online, 21 April and 8 October 2020).

*The Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention) and Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assistance (Protocol on SEA)*

32. In 2020, despite COVID-19, over 20, predominantly remote, official and informal meetings were organized under the Espoo Convention and its Protocol culminating in the joint online sessions of the Meetings of the Parties (8–11 December). At the sessions, Parties agreed on the workplan and financial arrangements for 2021–2023; reviews of implementation and on multiple compliance issues. The sessions’ highlights included:

- (a) A high-level 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary event of the Espoo Convention, with tributes paid by the UN Secretary-General, the European Union Commissioner for the Environment, Ministers and deputy ministers, civil society and academia to the treaty’s significant achievements in shaping international law, promoting sustainable development and environmental governance;
- (b) After several years of difficult intergovernmental negotiations led by Germany and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the adoption of guidance on the applicability of the Espoo Convention to the lifetime-extension of nuclear power plants was considered as a “breakthrough” or an “environmental victory” by Governments and civil society alike. Guidance was much-awaited as around 100 nuclear reactors in the UNECE region are due to reach the end of their original lifespan in the coming 10 years;
- (c) A first long-term strategy was adopted to provide a strategic vision and to set operational priorities for the two treaties for the coming decade;
- (d) Parties adopted a Declaration affirming their commitment to employ environmental assessments to help achieve a healthy and green post-COVID-19 economic recovery.

33. In addition, a wealth of technical assistance and capacity building activities were implemented, as follows:

- (a) Activities funded through the EU4Environment programme (2019–2022), including:

- Assistance for finalizing legal reforms to implement the Convention and/or the Protocol by Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus and the Republic of Moldova;
- A subregional workshop for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine (online, 26–27 October 2020);
- Update of national guidelines on strategic environmental assessment and environmental impact assessment for Georgia; and preparation of issue- or sector-specific guidelines on transboundary environmental impact assessment for Armenia and Georgia;
- A video to raise awareness on the Espoo Convention.

(b) Activities to strengthen the national and regional capacities on strategic environmental assessment of the five Central Asian countries, including as a response to climate change, through a joint project with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) funded by Germany Switzerland and UNECE; and to facilitate development of new national legislation on environmental assessment by Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

*Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) and its Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (Protocol on PRTRs)*

34. Due to their cross-cutting nature and wide substantive scopes, the Convention and its Protocol supported Parties' efforts for furthering a number of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG 16 and also SDGs 3, 6, 9, 11, 12, 15 and 17. At the twenty-fourth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to Convention (1-3 July 2020, virtual; 28-29 October 2020, hybrid), Parties, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other stakeholders addressed a wide range of issues of upholding the Aarhus Convention's principles in changing circumstances, also linked to COVID-19 pandemic. Subjects included the task of safeguarding environmental defenders and achieving meaningful public participation and transparency in international trade negotiations and in International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). They also addressed systemic challenges, shared positive trends and outlined actions to improve access to justice focusing on the role of public interest litigation and achievements and barriers regarding the following key issues: (a) standing; (b) scope of review; (c) assistance mechanisms and costs; (d) timeliness; (e) remedies; and (f) protection against harassment and other forms of retaliation.

35. The 2020 Aarhus Centres Annual Meeting (10 - 11 November 2020), focused on their role in ensuring environmental democracy in times of disaster and post-disaster recovery; gender mainstreaming, and contributing to sustainable development. Aarhus Centres are unique neutral entities that can assist authorities to promote public participation in times of crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic and during the post-pandemic recovery.

36. The Task Force on Access to Information at its seventh meeting (16 - 17 November 2020) focused its agenda on the promotion of transparency and digital transformation to support a green and circular economy, biosafety and community resilience.

37. At its eighth meeting (16 and 18 December 2020) the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs) considered the role of the Protocol in coordination and cooperation in environmental reporting supporting a green and circular economy. The discussion focused on countries' achievements and challenges, and on the development of the Protocol, aimed at aligning its implementation with ongoing trends and technological possibilities related to PRTRs.

38. In the wake of environmental democracy in times of COVID-19 the Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee adopted a statement on the application of the Aarhus Convention both during the COVID-19 pandemic, and in the subsequent phase of economic recovery making clear that the COVID-19 pandemic cannot justify any restriction of the public's rights to information, participation and justice in environmental matters and provided advice to Kazakhstan on the holding of public hearings during the COVID-19 pandemic.



39. The Aarhus Convention and its Protocol Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers welcomed new Parties: Albania joined the Aarhus Convention's amendment on genetically modified organisms; Kazakhstan accessed to the Protocol and Italy ratified the Protocol.

## II. Major activities planned for 2021 and beyond

40. The Environment subprogramme will continue its work to support countries to enhance their environmental governance and transboundary cooperation as well as strengthen implementation of the UNECE regional environmental commitments and advance sustainable development in the region. An overview of planned activities is contained in the programme of work of the Environment subprogramme for 2021 (ECE/CEP/2020/5<sup>3</sup>). The 27<sup>th</sup> session of the Committee will be organized in Geneva from 3 to 5 (a.m.) November 2021.

41. In 2021, the Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Programme will continue to support member States in advancing the environmental knowledge-base for effective reporting to policymakers, international forums and the public and continue to support policy development and its implementation, including the implementation of SDGs related to environmental monitoring and assessment. Within the framework of the programme, a light indicator-based pan-European environmental assessment will be developed, subject to the funding available, and a final review of the Shared Environmental Information System will be conducted. Within the framework of an UNDA project on environmental monitoring and assessment, regional training webinars to provide guidance on how to streamline the production of regionally and internationally agreed environmental data flows and indicators are planned in 2020 with the target countries of Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, North Macedonia and Tajikistan. The twenty-third session of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment will be held on 3-4 May 2021 and the eighteenth session of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators on 18-19 October 2021.

42. In 2021, the second EPR of Morocco will continue with the country review mission (January-February), the expert review by the Expert Group on EPRs and the peer review by the Committee on Environmental Policy. The third EPR of Romania will be published and launched. The review country mission for the third EPR of Azerbaijan will be organized in line with the international and national COVID-19 situation. Requests for EPRs received from Armenia and Ukraine will be followed up on. The UNDA project on EPRs will enter its final implementation year; project main results will be shared at a concluding sub-regional workshop. With the support of funds from the Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation, roadmaps for implementing their Environmental Performance Reviews' Recommendations developed by the North Macedonia and Uzbekistan will be finalised to support countries' planning implementation activities and monitoring progress.

43. The Steering Committee of THE PEP agreed with the proposal of the Austrian hosts to postpone the Fifth High-level Meeting from November 2020 - to May 2021. This was in consideration of the travel and meeting restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Postponing the event to 2021 would also allow member States to reflect on changes in travel and mobility and incorporate them into THE PEP work. Decisions taken at the High-level Meeting will provide the basis for the work of THE PEP for the following four years and their implementation would start immediately after the event.

44. The implementation of the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) will continue in accordance with the "Batumi Framework for the future implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD" (adopted at the High-Level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries in Batumi, Georgia, 08 June 2016). The fourth mandatory reporting of national implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD has been completed in 2019; the summary evaluation report was finalised in 2020 and will be issued in 2021. The draft concept note for the post-2019 implementation framework to be submitted for approval by the 16<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Steering Committee (7-8 May 2021) is under

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/documents/2020/ECE/CEP/ece.cep.2020.5.e.pdf>

preparation by the Ad hoc group for Strategic Planning, established by the Steering Committee in 2018; the Group held its second meeting in September in Nicosia, Cyprus, whereas the third meeting scheduled for March 2020 was cancelled due to COVID-19 related developments and imposed restrictions on travel and the in 2020 the Group continues its work by means of online meetings. Three meetings of the Ad hoc group on Indicators (established by the Steering Committee in 2019), tasked with updating and/or revising the existing format for reporting for the next implementation phase from 2020 to 2030, took place in October (Utrecht, the Netherlands) and December 2019 (Podgorica, Montenegro), as well as in February 2020 (Brussels, Belgium). The first meeting of the Ad hoc Group on youth (established by the Steering Committee in 2019) took place in February 2020 (in Vienna, Austria) involving youth representatives from the member States in the activities implemented in the framework of the UNECE Strategy for ESD. All the meetings of the three ad hoc working groups mentioned above were made possible thanks to the kind cooperation and support of the relevant government agencies of the host member States. The capacity building workshop in Baku, Azerbaijan scheduled for April 2020 had to be postponed due to COVID-19 and will be held as soon as the pandemic related restrictions will be lifted (hopefully in spring 2021).

45. The UNECE MEAs will continue their work focusing on improving the implementation and compliance by Parties. Meeting of the governing bodies under MEAs take place in 2021, namely the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties of the Water Convention (Tallinn, 29 September – 1 October), the seventh session of the Meetings of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention and the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (Geneva, October 2021), the forty-first session of the Executive Body to the Air Convention (Geneva, provisionally scheduled for 6-10 December 2021).

46. In 2021, the work of the Water Convention will continue strengthening transboundary water cooperation at the global level. The organization of the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties (Tallinn, 29 September – 1 October) will represent a key milestone, adopting major decisions and the new work programme. It will celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the entry into force of the Water Convention, include a high-level segment and a back-to-back event. Several publications supporting the implementation of the Convention will be finalized in the course of 2021, focusing on: developing legal frameworks for transboundary water cooperation (a checklist); financing transboundary water cooperation and basin development; handbook on water allocation in a transboundary context; nexus solutions and investments in transboundary basins; progress in transboundary water cooperation under the Convention, and; progress in transboundary water cooperation worldwide according to SDG indicator 6.5.2. In addition, the Convention and its implementation will be further promoted, for example through national and basin activities planned in countries interested in accession and recent Parties, mostly in the framework of the EU-funded project “Promoting accession to the Water Convention”. The Water Convention will also continue its contribution to global events such as the preparations of the ninth World Water Forum (Senegal, 21-26 March 2021, where UNECE leads the thematic priority on transboundary water cooperation) etc.

47. In 2021, work under the Protocol on Water and Health will continue towards improving the situation with water, sanitation and hygiene in the UNECE region, including in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, setting of COVID-19 sensitive national targets on water, sanitation and health will be promoted, also in support of implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Ostrava Declaration. Activities under the Protocol will also further support progressive realization of the human rights to water and sanitation in order to ensure that no one is left behind, including in emergency situation such as COVID-19. Finally, the Protocol work will focus on increasing resilience of water and sanitation infrastructure to climate change, including by deepening synergies with the global climate change programme of the Water Convention. To this end, a global workshop on building resilient water management and sanitation through integrating climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction will be organized on 29-31 March 2021 (in hybrid format) under the Water Convention and its Protocol on Water and Health.

48. In 2021, the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents (Industrial Accidents Convention) will continue to support progress towards the

implementation of the Convention's vision, as set out in its long-term strategy: to significantly increase industrial safety and reduce the risk of technological disasters by ensuring its full implementation, its wide recognition as a legal instrument for risk reduction under the Sendai Framework and its contribution to achievement of the SDGs. Activities will support implementation of the Convention by all Parties, in particular in the areas of risk assessment methodologies, through the development of a study, and the development of activities on natural-hazard triggered technological accidents (Natech), in cooperation with the OECD, United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction and the European Investment Bank. It will also foster implementation by all Parties, in follow-up to the dreadful chemical accident in Beirut (4 August 2020). Dedicated support to beneficiaries of the Assistance and Cooperation Programme will also be provided, through missions, project activities and workshops.

49. In 2021, the review of the Gothenburg Protocol will continue: the subsidiary bodies of the Convention will collect scientific and technical input to the review and assess policy implications of the received information. They will start preparing the report of the review, the final version of which will be presented to the Executive Body at its session in December 2022. In 2021, Parties are also expected to adopt a guidance document on reduction of emissions from agricultural residue burning.

50. The secretariat will continue its capacity-building activities in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia through the organization of policy-oriented and technical sub-regional and national workshops to promote the ratification and implementation of the Convention and its key protocols in the sub-region.

51. In 2021, work for promoting ratification and implementation of the Espoo Convention and the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment will be carried out accordance with workplan for 2021–2023 and the long-term strategy adopted by Meetings of the Parties in December 2020. The Implementation Committee will continue to tackle multiple compliance matters, including regarding the lifetime-extension of nuclear power plants, making use of the guidance on that topic also adopted in December 2020. Numerous capacity building activities focusing on strategic environmental assessment will be deployed for the benefit of six countries of Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, involving pilot projects, training workshops and guidelines funded through the EU4Environment programme; as well as for the five Central Asian countries, in cooperation with OSCE and with funding from Germany and Switzerland. including preparation of detailed national action plans and the organization of a sub-regional event. With funding from Italy, a feasibility study will be launched to map out synergies and benefits for possible future cooperation activities to improve the coherence and the links between the Espoo Convention, its Protocol and the Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against Pollution (Barcelona Convention) and other regional seas conventions.

52. In 2021, the work under the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol will continue assisting countries in achieving environmental dimension of SDG 16 and other Goals. A number of multilateral activities are planned in this regard.

53. The Task Force on Access to Justice will have its thirteenth meeting on 15–16 February 2021 and will provide a platform for governments, members of the judiciary, international organizations, international financial institutions, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders to discuss practical measures to enable effective access to justice in air-related cases and to remove existing barriers in that regard. In addition, they identified different tools to promote effective access to justice, discussed recent developments and challenges related to standing, the scope of review, effective remedies, costs and collective redress, in order to further advance the implementation of the third pillar of the Aarhus Convention.

54. The twenty-fifth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to Convention is planned for Spring 2021 in a hybrid format. The Working Group will consider numerous decisions in preparations for the seventh session of the Meetings of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention (MOP7), including on a new rapid response mechanism to protect environmental defenders. In addition, thematic sessions on promoting effective public participation in decision-making regarding biosafety and geoengineering among other issues, will be held.

55. MOP7 and the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (MOP4) are planned to be held back-to-back in October 2021 in Geneva. The MOPs will address achievements, lessons learned and challenges in relation to implementing the Convention and its Protocol and adopt a number of decisions, including on new work programmes and financial arrangements and on future directions for substantive activities. There will also be a joint high-level segment dedicated to the role of the Convention and its Protocol for promoting sustainable infrastructure and spatial planning.

### **III. Any proposed change to the subsidiary structure of the Committee**

56. The Committee did not propose any changes to its subsidiary structure. The Committee decided to extend the current mandate and terms of reference of the Working Group until 30 June 2023, to allow the Working Group to prepare a new draft mandate and terms of reference after the next Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference.

57. The Committee also adopted the programme of work of the Environment subprogramme for 2021, as contained in document ECE/CEP/2020/5.

### **IV. Intersectoral activities: new activities and/or progress in existing intersectoral activities**

58. The Environment subprogramme is supporting the cross-sectoral work under the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development, the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme (THE PEP), the Protocol on Water and Health, the Programme on EPRs and the Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Programme. Under the Water Convention the work is on-going on the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus. Joint work under the Water Convention and the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment has been carried out to support sustainable water management planning through Strategic Environmental Assessment. Under the Environment for Europe (EfE) process together with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), OECD and other partners, the Environment subprogramme is supporting the implementation of the Pan-European Strategic Framework for Greening the Economy. Furthermore, the subprogramme is also actively participating in the activities under the European Environment and Health Process.

59. In the reporting period, the work under the UNECE Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) focused on the promotion of SDG 4 and its target 4.7 in the region, via the implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD. 15<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Steering Committee held on 19-20 (a.m.) October 2020 in the hybrid mode, considered the outline of the directions of its work for the next period of the implementation, taking into consideration the preliminary results of the ongoing work on post-2019 implementation framework, being elaborated by the members of the Ad hoc group for Strategic Planning. UNECE continues its cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to align its work to the global framework of actions on ESD. At its 24<sup>th</sup> session, the Committee encouraged its members from the countries participating in the Strategy to establish and maintain working contacts with the Steering Committee members and focal points from their national administrations and non-governmental organizations;

60. THE PEP is intrinsically an intersectoral activity. The secretariat is a collaboration between UNECE (Environment and Sustainable Transport Divisions) and the World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe. Apart from academia and research institutions participating in the preparation of the principles for green and healthy sustainable transport, THE PEP is cooperating with the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment of the Netherlands on a brochure on facts and figures related to transport, health and environment, as background information for the High-level Meeting.

61. In 2020, experts normally engaged in THE PEP were involved in a project managed by the UNECE Housing and Land Management Unit on “Post COVID-19 Recovery in Informal Settlements in the ECE Region”. Furthermore, THE PEP continued its cooperation with non-governmental organizations in preparing the “Draft pan-European master plan for cycling promotion” to be adopted at the Fifth High-level Meeting on Transport, Health and Environment.

62. Under the Water Convention, work is continuing on the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus. The assessment of the nexus in North Africa was finalized in September, with the launch of a report and policy brief on *Improving sustainable development in the North Western Sahara Aquifer System through a transboundary nexus approach*. Nexus work is continuing in the Western Balkans to promote dialogue between water management, energy production, rural development, and environmental protection. The innovative publication *Towards sustainable renewable energy investment and deployment: Trade-offs and opportunities with water resources and the environment*, developed in cooperation with the UNECE Group of Experts on Renewable Energy, was launched in March. It aims to help policy makers plan for sustainable renewable energy deployment, taking into account water and environment-related trade-offs and synergies, as well as transboundary considerations.

63. The UNECE secretariat of the Water Convention co-coordinates the UN-Water Expert Group on Transboundary Waters and the UN-Water Expert Group on Water and Climate. In this framework, UNECE co-coordinated the development of the UN-Water Policy Brief on “The United Nations Global Water Conventions: Fostering sustainable development and peace” as a joint view of the UN system on the topic. UNECE has also co-ordinated the preparations of the 2020 World Water Day focused on “Climate change and water” together with UNESCO and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) in the framework of UN-Water.

64. The European Union Water Initiative National Policy Dialogues (NPDs) on Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM), carried out by UNECE in cooperation with OECD, and in particular the European Union Water Initiative plus programme (EUWI+), continued in 2020 in the countries of Eastern Europe and the Caucasus in the areas of legislative and institutional reforms, River Basin Management Planning, monitoring and public participation and awareness raising in the Eastern Partnership countries. It served as an important platform to promote the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the integration of sectoral policies.

65. The work under the Protocol on Water and Health serviced jointly by UNECE and the WHO Regional Office for Europe requires the health, environment and water communities to strengthen intersectoral cooperation to improve human health and environmental outcomes. The work under the Protocol to promote equitable access to water and sanitation also supports intersectoral analysis of the equity gaps, bringing together not only the water and health sectors but also finance, education, municipal authorities and water supply and sanitation suppliers. In 2020, the Protocol was involved in an intersectoral work under the Sustainable Cities UNECE Nexus Cluster by jointly implementing the project *Post COVID-19 in Recovery in Informal settlements in the ECE Region*, with a contribution on water and sanitation in the policy brief and action plan on informal settlements. The Protocol also contributed to the UNECE Nexus work under the cluster “Measuring and monitoring SDGs” by providing a case study on how to monitor SDG indicators through the Protocol on Water and Health to a dedicated publication.

66. Following the development of a shared information repository on land-use planning and industrial safety, in close cooperation with the Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management and, as relevant, also with the Espoo Convention and its Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessments and the Aarhus Convention, the Industrial Accidents Convention will continue relevant cooperation in the organization of sub-regional workshops on land-use planning and industrial safety for South-Eastern Europe (Belgrade, October 2021) and for Central Asia (2022). It will continue its close cooperation with the Water Convention, through their Joint Expert Group on Water and Industrial Accidents, in strengthening cooperation with river basin organizations and in advocating a multi-hazard approach to disaster risk reduction. It will particularly cooperate with the Water Convention’s National Policy Dialogues for Integrated Water Resources Management in relation to mine tailings safety in Central Asia. The Convention’s activities in the area of mine tailings safety,

and beyond, will naturally contribute to the broader policy debate on sustainable infrastructure development, in the framework of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (5-7 October 2022) and on mineral resource governance, in the lead-up to the fifth United Nations Environment Assembly meeting in spring 2021 and 2022. In this respect, cooperation will continue to be pursued with UNECE's Sustainable Energy Division, as secretariat to the United Nations Framework Classification for Resources (UNFRMS), among others, through the joint organization of a side event at the 2021 session of the Commission. In addition, the Convention's activities will continue to support implementation of the respective implementation of the recommendations contained in the Environmental Performance Review (EPRs).

67. The project on access to environmental information, implemented by EEA in close cooperation with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and the Aarhus secretariat, resulted in the assessment of the status of e-government and open data readiness in environmental domain and the country roadmaps to advance digitalization of environmental information systems.

68. Furthermore, it continued servicing a region-wide inter-agency capacity-building coordination mechanism for the implementation of the Aarhus Convention and a global international coordinating Group for the Protocol.

69. The UNECE Environment Division (Environmental Monitoring and Assessment programme) and UNECE Statistical Division co-service the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators. The Joint Task Force continues to assist countries with economies in transition to understand indicator methodologies and supports them in applying the methodologies to produce and share specific environmental indicators.

70. The implementation of the Espoo Convention and its Protocol on SEA necessitates intersectoral cooperation and consultation by Parties in the assessment and addressing of environment, including health, impacts of projects, plans and programmes originating from across the economic sectors. The EU4Environment programme that funds the treaties' capacity building activities in six countries of Eastern Europe and the Caucasus brings together representatives of ministries of environment and economy of the beneficiary countries. In December 2020, the Meetings of the Parties adopted guidance on the applicability of the Convention to the lifetime-extension of nuclear power plants that was prepared during over three years with active participation of the nuclear energy sector. The secretariat also actively cooperates with IAEA and the Nuclear Energy Agency of OECD, including through supporting IAEA's capacity building work on strategic environmental assessment of nuclear power programmes. Under the Protocol on SEA, close collaboration with WHO will continue to improve the assessment of health and the participation of health sector in strategic environmental assessment, with the aim to finalize a guidance document on that topic.

## V. Technical cooperation activities

71. Technical cooperation activities in the Environment subprogramme include activities carried out by the UNECE Regional Adviser on Environment as well as a number of other activities undertaken under MEAs and policy programmes.

72. The Regional Adviser supports the implementation of the technical cooperation activities, contributes to fund raising efforts and provides policy advisory services to the countries in close collaboration with the secretariats of the UNECE MEAs. The work aims at supporting ratification and implementation of the MEAs and strengthening cooperation on common environmental problems in the countries of Central Asia, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe and the Caucasus.

73. The work undertaken by the Regional Adviser in the reporting period resulted in the implementation of the transboundary water cooperation projects in Drin basin (South-Eastern Europe) and in the Dniester basin (Republic of Moldova and Ukraine), and initial negotiations of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Global

Environment Facility (GEF) project to be implemented in the Bug-Neman basin (Belarus and Ukraine).

74. Due to the COVID-19 and resulted travel restrictions, the work of the Regional Adviser supporting technical cooperation has been adapted to the new circumstances and workplan activities have been re-purposed. Three sub-regional capacity building workshops, co-funded by the Regular Programme for Technical Cooperation (RPTC), have been postponed. In lieu of the postponed activities, new activities requested by the Governments have been implemented in 2020 with RPTC fund. These include:

- Development of a compendium of measures to green the post-pandemic recovery
- Support to the development of a roadmap for the implementation of recommendations of 3<sup>rd</sup> EPR of Uzbekistan
- Support to the development of a roadmap for the implementation of recommendations of 3<sup>rd</sup> EPR of North Macedonia
- Support to Tajikistan in ratification of the GMO Amendment to the Aarhus Convention through reviewing national legislation in the light of the requirements of the GMO Amendment to the Aarhus Convention
- Support in strengthening the capacity in integrating gender aspects into environmental policies and strategies in Serbia
- Development of training material on water-food-energy nexus for university teachers and graduate students in Central Asia
- Development of awareness raising material and educational video on strengthening mine tailings safety under the Industrial Accidents Convention

75. To strengthen the engagement of UNECE at the country level and to introduce overall UNECE work at the country level, a new task has been incorporated into the work of the Regional Adviser. Within the scope of this responsibility, the Regional Adviser has been informing RC and UNCT in Uzbekistan of relevant UNECE guidelines and products and participating in UNCT discussions on post-pandemic recovery.

76. Technical cooperation projects were implemented in more than 15 countries in the Caucasus, Central Asia and Eastern and South-Eastern Europe.

77. Under the Espoo Convention and in particular its Protocol on SEA an extensive amount of technical cooperation activities is implemented in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. In Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine the European Union (EU) funded “EU for Environment” programme allows the treaty secretariat to continue supporting the ratification and/or the effective implementation of the Protocol on SEA in the period 2019–2022 (with a budget of some 2,7 Mio USD) building on the outcomes of its previous EU funded support (2013–2018). In Central Asia, the secretariat continued to assist Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in the alignment of their national legislation with the Convention and the Protocol. To support the development of national strategic environmental assessment systems in all the five Central Asian countries, detailed action plans based on needs assessment studies are being developed in cooperation with OSCE, with the funding from Germany, and co-funding from Switzerland and UNECE.

78. Under the Water Convention, technical cooperation activities are implemented in numerous basins inside and outside the UNECE region such as the Chu Talas, Cubango-Okavango (CORB), Drin, Drina, Dniester and Neman-Bug basins as well as the North Western Sahara (NWSAS) and Senegalo-Mauritanian Aquifer Systems. The Convention finalized assessments of the benefits of transboundary water cooperation in the CORB and NWSAS basins, and also supports transboundary water negotiations, for example between the riparian countries of the Ogooué, Ntem, Komo, Nyanga, Woleu and Mouni River Basins. In the Senegalo-Mauritanian aquifer system, UNECE facilitated together with the Geneva Water Hub the creation of a new working group for the management of the shared aquifer between the four riparian countries.

79. Under the Protocol on Water and Health, Belarus and the Republic of Moldova were supported in revising their national targets under the Protocol within the framework of the project implemented by the UNECE with funding from the European Union under the EU

Water Initiative Plus Programme. Support was also provided to Belarus to finalize a self-assessment on equitable access to water and sanitation.

80. The Industrial Accidents Convention will continue to foster progress by non-Parties towards accession under its Assistance and Cooperation Programme and seek to support beneficiary countries of the Assistance and Cooperation Programme in enhancing inter-institutional cooperation, through the establishment of National Policy Dialogues on Industrial Safety. A major focus of the technical cooperation activities will be on Central Asia, through the implementation of three projects, focused on strengthened policy-making and governance and mine tailings safety. These Projects seek to align the national legislation of Central Asian countries with the Convention's requirements, to map tailings management facilities (TMFs) in Uzbekistan, to establish inter-institutional working groups on TMF safety and the prevention of accidental water pollution in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, and to conduct an on-site training in Tajikistan, with respective preparatory and follow-up online events.

## VI. Cooperation with other organizations

81 The Environment subprogramme is working with a number of organizations in and outside the United Nations system with the aim of combining efforts, ensuring mutual benefits and avoiding overlap and duplication. Cooperation takes place through information and communication technology tools, internal coordination meetings and the organization of joint events, as well as involving relevant partner organizations in various activities. Among the many organizations involved in the work of the Committee and of other governing bodies under the Environment subprogramme, the following activities mark highlights of cooperation during the reporting period:

### *United Nations Regional Collaborative Platform*

82. A Regional Collaborative Platform has been established for Europe and Central Asia as part of the reform of the UN Development System. The Platform brings together more than 20 UN organizations in the region. Issue-based coalitions coordinate the UN response to cross-cutting challenges in the region. UNECE, UNEP and UNESCO jointly lead the Issue-based Coalition on Environment and Climate Change, which brings together 18 UN agencies, funds and programmes. Following its establishment in early 2020 and three subregional consultations with Resident Coordinators (RCs) and UN Country Teams, the Coalition responded to queries posed by RC Offices on the impact of COVID-19 on the environment, made its members' COVID- and environment-related materials available on the UNECE website and issued summary recommendations on the COVID-19 recovery.<sup>4</sup> A compendium of measures to green the post-pandemic recovery was launched at a webinar for RC Offices on 19 January 2021. These actions have resulted in increased awareness of the importance of integrating environmental and climate change issues into post-COVID recovery strategies and supporting a "rebuilding- better" approach. The documents equip RCs and Country Teams for providing their advice and support and offering concrete measures to governments in "greening" recovery plans.

83. In parallel, the Coalition began preparing guidelines on mainstreaming the environment and climate change in UN Common Country Analyses and Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks. The guidelines should be issued in the first quarter of 2021. Such guidance will assist RC Offices and Country Teams in strengthening the environmental dimension of Common Country Analyses, integrating environmental concerns across all outcomes in the Cooperation Frameworks and enhancing the capacity of RC Offices and Country Teams in linking regional, subregional and transboundary issues and priorities with national priorities. The Coalition also organized two webinars on water themes: on the 2020 World Water Development Report on Water and Climate Change in May and on transboundary water cooperation in July. The webinars provided RCs and Country Teams with data, tools and recommendations on how to assist member States that

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<sup>4</sup> Information on the Coalition's work is available at <https://unece.org/issue-based-coalition-environment-and-climate-change>.



need to manage water resources subject to climate change and to strengthen coordination between agencies and RCs to support transboundary water cooperation. UNECE took a leading role in all the above activities, which respond to requests from RCs and Country Teams to provide support at the country level. Task teams have also been established to respond to the thematic demands of country teams. UNECE is co-leading the task teams on socio-economic assessments and post-pandemic recovery; air pollution and water management.

*United Nations Regional Commissions*

84. The Water Convention is cooperating with the other regional commissions in the framework of the Convention's global opening. In particular, cooperation with the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) resulted in:

- (a) the joint organization in March of two regional workshops on (1) Enhancing transboundary water cooperation in the Middle East and North Africa region and (2) Supporting the monitoring and implementation of the SDGs, in particular transboundary water cooperation SDG 6 Indicator 6.5.2 March 2020;
- (b) the translation of various publications of the Water Convention into Arabic;
- (c) the development of a joint brochure on tools for the water-energy nexus.

85. The Water Convention has also agreed on concrete cooperation with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) to support accession to the Water Convention in African countries, including through national and regional events, and to develop a regional report on SDG indicator 6.5.2 for Africa.

86. The Aarhus secretariat is providing continuous advisory support to United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) with regard to the implementation of the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (Escazu Agreement) and cooperates on the establishment of PRTRs.

87. The first e-learning introductory course on SDG 16 and Access Rights, the Aarhus Convention, and the Escazu Agreement was jointly prepared by UNEP, UNECE and ECLAC with the support of the European Union through the InforMEA project.

*United Nations Environment Programme*

88. The Environment subprogramme has long-standing cooperation with United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) through many joint activities and partnerships.

89. The work of UNECE and UNEP is complementary: UNECE provides the regional political platform, expert and intergovernmental bodies and policy expertise; UNEP brings its global policy leadership, specific technical expertise and country and regional policy and programmatic engagement. Such a symbiosis enables the two organizations to address in an effective way the existing and emerging environmental concerns across the UNECE region.

90. UNECE co-led the UNEP sub-regional consultations on sustainable infrastructure and mineral resource governance held in fall 2020.

91. At its 26<sup>th</sup> session, the Committee welcomed the information provided by UNEP on the ongoing preparations for the fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme and invited UNEP to continue to inform the Committee of relevant developments under the Assembly. The Committee also congratulated UNEP on the success of the virtual side event "Transforming Tourism for a resilient and sustainable post COVID world", which took place on the first day of its 26<sup>th</sup> session (9 November 2020).

92. UNEP is actively involved in the activities of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment and the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators, including, but not limited, to the monitoring of SEIS establishment in Europe and Central Asia and the final review on SEIS establishment and the 7<sup>th</sup> pan-European environmental assessment, to be conducted in 2021. In addition, UNEP is engaged, as part of a common approach between UNECE, the European Environment Agency (EEA) and

UNEP, in supporting national, regional and global reporting on the state of the environment. Representatives of the three organizations meet regularly at senior and operational levels. UNEP is also involved in relevant activities of the UNECE-led UNDA project on environmental monitoring and assessment.

93. UNEP provided expertise for the third EPR of Romania, expert reviewing the chapter related to environmental monitoring and information.

94. The United Nations Environment Programme is also actively contributing to the implementation of many UNECE MEAs.

95. Since 2013, the secretariat of the Espoo Convention and its Protocol on SEA has promoted the implementation of these instruments and, in general, greening the economies of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine in partnership with United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), OECD and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), with funding from European Union. In 2019-2022, it continues to assist the same countries in cooperation with the UNEP, UNIDO, OECD and the World Bank under the EU4Environment programme.

96. In 2020, the secretariat contributed and provided inputs to the UNEP Air Quality Regional and Global Reports for UNEA 5, to UNEP's Framework Manual on Green and Sustainable Chemistry, to the UNEP Global Assessment of air quality legislation in response to UNEA resolutions and participated in Regional consultation for Europe and Central Asia.

97. The secretariat of the Air Convention together with WHO co-leads the Task Team on Air Pollution in the framework of the United Nations Inter-Agency Issue-Based Coalition on Environment and Climate Change for Europe and Central Asia.

98. The Industrial Accidents Convention will seek to further build on its partnership with UNEP, by contributing to the broader policy debate on sustainable resource governance, in the follow-up to its significant contributions to sub-regional consultations in preparation of the fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly.

*World Health Organization (WHO)*

99. UNECE and WHO/Europe continue to jointly provide secretariat services for the Protocol on Water and Health and THE PEP. The UNECE and WHO/Europe secretariats are in constant communication to coordinate the activities. UNECE is also represented in the Bureau of the European Environment and Health Task Force, serviced by WHO under the European Environment and Health Process.

100. The UNECE Environment subprogramme is also actively working with WHO/Europe in the European Environment and Health Process and the EPR Programme, where WHO provides an expert to draft a chapter in some country reviews.

101. The Espoo Convention and its Protocol on SEA secretariat cooperates closely with WHO for the implementation in particular of the Protocol that requires consultation of health authorities in SEA. In 2020, draft guidance for the assessment of health impacts and for the involvement of health authorities in strategic environmental assessment was prepared with funding from the European Investment Bank, but its finalization was postponed to the intersessional period 2021-2023.

102. WHO also provided expertise during the 17<sup>th</sup> session of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators and contributed to a webinar on "Health-relevant air quality data informing policy and the public."

*United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)*

103. The UNECE Strategy for ESD is implemented in close cooperation with UNESCO, the lead agency for the Global Action Programme, as a key partner in the Partnership Network for its implementation, including the joint activities carried out in the framework of the first priority action area on advancing policy. For the reporting period UNESCO also continued to participate in the work of the UNECE Steering Committee on ESD and its Bureau.

104. UNECE and UNESCO are the custodian agencies for SDG indicator 6.5.2 and cooperate for the 2020 second reporting exercise. This work is carried out in the framework of the UN-Water Integrated Monitoring Initiative for SDG 6.

*United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)*

105. UNDP office in Uzbekistan supported the EPR Programme in substantive and logistics matters. Also, UNDP is supporting organization of activities on the national level, in particular, implementation of the UNECE MEAs and other environmental policy instruments.

106. UNECE and UNDP cooperate on the joint implementation of several GEF-funded projects in transboundary basins under the Water Convention, particularly in the Chu Talas, Dniester, Drin and Neman River basins.

107. UNECE will further seek to exchange information on mutual activities with UNDP in the field of mine tailings safety, following a related exchange of letters, specifically with respect to the implementation of projects in Central Asia and decision 2020/1 on strengthening mine tailings safety in the UNECE region and beyond, taken by the eleventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties of the Industrial Accidents Convention.

*United Nations Statistical Division (UNSD)*

108. Cooperation with the UNSD continues on the monitoring and reporting of SDG indicator 6.5.2 for which UNECE acts as co-custodian agency, together with UNESCO.

109. UNSD participates routinely in the activities and meetings of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators and the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment.

*Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)*

110. The Protocol on SEA secretariat has worked closely with OSCE to assist Kazakhstan Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in reforming their national legislation in accordance with the Convention and the Protocol on SEA. Since late 2019, OSCE and the secretariat also jointly implement a project for the development of national strategic environmental assessment systems in all the five Central Asian countries, with the funding mainly from Germany, and co-funding from Switzerland and UNECE. The project involves preparation of action plans for strengthening national and regional capacities on SEA that are based on needs assessments and discussed at a subregional event (postponed from 2020 to 2021).

111. The Industrial Accidents Convention will continue its cooperation with OSCE and OECD in capacity-development to strengthen industrial and tailings safety in Central Asia.

112. The UNECE secretariat of the Water Convention cooperated with OSCE in providing support to the Dniester transboundary basin to adapt to climate change.

*Other partners*

113. Under the European Union funded EU4Environment project 2019-2022 UNECE (the Espoo Convention and the Protocol on SEA secretariat) cooperates with the European Commission, OECD, UNEP, UNIDO, UNDP and the World Bank.

114. The Industrial Accidents Convention will continue to foster inter-agency cooperation with a range of international organizations, through the Inter-agency coordination group on industrial accidents and its contributions to the meetings under the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC). It will continue its close cooperation with the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR). It has joined forces with OECD and the UNEP/OCHA Joint Unit, as well as the EU Joint Research Centre in the implementation of a joint Natural-hazard triggered technological accidents (Natech)-III project, to develop a brochure and guidance on Natech risk management. To foster synergies in advocacy and the implementation of assistance activities, further partners will continue to be involved, including international organizations, such as UNIDO, and regional actors, such as the Commonwealth for Independent States (CIS) Inter-State Council for Industrial Safety, and the Center for Emergency Situations and Disaster Risk Reduction for Central Asia.

115. The European Environment Agency (EEA) is involved in the activities of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment and the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators, including, but not limited, to the monitoring of SEIS establishment in Europe and Central Asia. EEA is engaged, as part of a common approach between the UNECE, EEA and UNEP, in supporting national, regional and global reporting on the state of the environment. EEA has also provided financial support to the Working Group and Joint Task Force in the past. The cooperation with the EEA also focuses on supporting integration of environmental information systems in e-government and open data domestic frameworks.

116. Other important partners outside the United Nations system are OECD (for the Protocol on PRTRs, the EfE process, and in conjunction with the European Union Water Initiative (EUWI)), OSCE (for the Environment and Security (ENVSEC) Initiative, supporting different activities under the UNECE MEAs), the European Commission and the Regional Environmental Centers (RECs). OECD participates in the activities of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators and the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment on green growth-related work. UNECE is represented in the Bureau of the GREEN Action Programme Task Force, serviced by OECD under the Environment for Europe process. The Espoo Convention and the Protocol on SEA secretariat also cooperates with the Nuclear Energy Agency of OECD.

117. The European ECO Forum and its members are active partners in the work of the Committee, MEAs, ESD, THE PEP and in the EfE process.

118. The Water Convention and its Protocol on Water and Health are cooperating, among others, with UN-Water, WHO and its Regional Office for Europe, the European Investment Bank, Global Environment Facility (GEF), UNDP, the United Nations Environment Programme, UNESCO, international river basins commissions, such as the Rhine, Danube, Okavango (OKACOM), Chu Talas, Niger, Senegal, Volta commissions, the International Network of Basin Organizations, OSCE, OECD, the Global Water Partnership, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), the Alliance for Global Water Adaptation, the African Network of Basin Organizations, the Economic Communities of Central African and West African States, the Southern African Development Community, the Intergovernmental Authority for Development, the African Development Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, the Stockholm International Water Institute, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Organization of American States (OAS), the World Bank, the World Wildlife Fund, Green Cross International, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation and the International Union for Conservation of Nature. In 2020, the Water Convention has also intensified cooperation with Resident Coordinators for example in Bangladesh, Albania and Senegal.

119. The secretariat to the Espoo Convention and its Protocol on SEA exchange information and cooperate regularly with International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) regarding transboundary environmental impact assessment and strategic environmental assessment of nuclear energy-related activities, including through commenting draft guidance documents or attending meetings, workshops or capacity building events.

120. The secretariat to the Espoo Convention and its Protocol on SEA has established cooperation with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), through supporting the negotiations on the new high seas agreement under that Convention (on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction – BBNJ) regarding aspects on environmental impact assessments and strategic environmental assessments

121. The secretariat of the Aarhus Convention continuously pursues a close cooperation with a number of partner organizations, including OSCE, UNEP, UNDP, UN OHCHR, CBD secretariat, United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), Regional Environmental Centres (RECs), EEA and secretariats of other MEAs.

122. UNECE has worked with UNEP, OSCE, OHCHR and other partner organizations in supporting cooperation of judiciary, judicial training institutions and other independent review bodies in the pan-European region (in support of target 16.3 of SDG 16).

123. Furthermore, the secretariat also pursued cooperation with UNEP and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on environmental human rights defenders and cooperated with partners within the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals to assist Governments to implement different international obligations related to chemicals management.

124. The secretariat cooperated with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Human Rights Council secretariat, Special Rapporteurs appointed by the Human Rights Council, including Special Rapporteur the environment; Special Rapporteur the situation of human rights defenders; and Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes; ILO, the World Bank Group, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the European Investment Bank, European Environment Agency, International Union for Conservation of Nature World Commission on Environmental Law, the Global Judicial Institute on the Environment, the European Union Forum of Judges for the Environment and the Association of European Administrative Judges.

125. Secretariat cooperates closely with OECD, UNEP, GEF and UNITAR as to build capacities of Governments in the area of chemicals management.

126. Since 2016 UNECE has been an observer to the Inter-State Council on Industrial Safety under Commonwealth of Independent States, and has regularly attended the meetings of the Council, which recognized achievements under the UNECE Project on Strengthening Industrial Safety in Central Asia and supported future work by its members towards the preparation of national self-assessments and action plans under the Industrial Accident Convention's Assistance Programme.

127. The European Environment Agency (EEA) is involved in the activities of THE PEP.

128. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) participates in the activities of the Water Convention and the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment, when relevant.

129. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) office in Romania supported the EPR Programme in logistics matters related to the third EPR of Romania.