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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. Introduction**

1. In the reporting period, the Environment subprogramme under the general governance of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) 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 ECE regional environmental commitments and advance sustainable development in the region.

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

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

2. The special session of the Committee on Environmental Policy was held in Geneva on 9–12 May 2022. Agenda items included sustainable development in the region; a number of issues related to the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Nicosia, 5–7 October 2022): substantive thematic documents, Pan-European environmental assessment, progress report on the implementation of the Batumi Initiative on Green Economy, final report on the implementation of the Batumi Action for Cleaner Air, draft ministerial declaration, organizational issues and resource requirements; work related to environmental performance reviews; 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, including election of officers.

3. The Committee on Environmental Policy expressed appreciation to Cyprus, as the host of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, including the Third High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries, considered a number of official documents for the Conference, and took other decisions to advance the preparatory process for the Conference. It encouraged the member States, partner organizations and all interested stakeholders to actively participate in the preparation and conduct of the Conference.

4. Another special session of the Committee on Environmental Policy was held in Nicosia on 3–4 October 2022 back-to-back with the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference. Agenda items included outcomes of the Nicosia Conference, peer reviews of the environmental performance of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan, issues related to environmental monitoring, assessment and reporting, annual programme of work of the Environment subprogramme for 2023 and outline of key components of the programme of work of the Environment subprogramme for 2024.

5. The Committee on Environmental Policy amended the draft Ministerial Declaration and decided to transmit it to the Nicosia Conference for adoption; adopted the recommendations contained in the Second Environmental Performance Review (EPR) of Armenia and in the Third EPR of Azerbaijan; postponed the adoption of recommendations of the Third EPR of Kyrgyzstan to its next session, while taking note of the commitment of Kyrgyzstan to provide to the UNECE secretariat comments to the draft EPR recommendations; adopted the mandate and terms of reference of the Expert Group on EPRs for 2023–2026 and requested the ECE secretariat to submit it to the ECE Executive Committee for approval; extended mandates and terms of reference of the Working Group

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\* This document was not formally edited.

on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment and the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators until end-2023 and requested the secretariat to submit these decisions on extension to the ECE Executive Committee for approval; adopted the draft programme of work of the Environment subprogramme for 2023 and recommended that it be approved by the Executive Committee; and took note of the “Outline of key components of the programme of work of the Environment subprogramme for 2024”.

6. The Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference brought together some 900 participants from 62 countries, including government delegations from 53 UN Member States (42 UNECE member States), as well as representatives of European and international organizations, researchers and non-governmental organizations. The conference was hosted by the Government of Cyprus with secretariat support from the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), in cooperation with the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and other partners.

7. The ministers confirmed the value of the “Environment for Europe” process as a unique pan-European platform for addressing environmental challenges, improving environmental governance, promoting environmental and cross-sectoral cooperation and information-sharing among countries, and as a pillar of sustainable development in the region; took note of the key findings of the seventh pan-European assessment, produced by ECE and the United Nations Environment Programme, and confirmed their commitment to keeping the pan-European region under regular review; commended the ECE Environmental Performance Review Programme as an effective and practical policy tool and endorsed the fourth cycle of environmental performance reviews; commended the general establishment of the Shared Environmental Information System across the region and invited countries to continue their efforts to implement all pillars of the System.

8. The Third High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries, organized in the framework of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, adopted the Framework for the implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development from 2021 to 2030 (ECE/NICOSIA.CONF/2022/10) and the Draft Nicosia Ministerial Statement on Education for Sustainable Development (ECE/NICOSIA.CONF/2022/L.2) providing a way forward for the implementation of the Strategy in the region up to the year 2030 and focusing on the special role that education has to play in addressing the unprecedented challenges faced currently by our planet and our societies.

9. In 2022, the Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Programme continued to serve as the knowledge sharing platform in the ECE region 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 an EU-funded project named “EU4 Environment – Water Resources and Environmental Data”, preparations have started for various capacity development activities to be held in 2023, including a regional training on the revised ECE air indicators. The Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment and the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators both met in a hybrid format in 2022. The Working Group focused among others on the key messages and recommendations related to the establishment of a Shared Environmental Information System and the finalization of the seventh pan-European environmental assessment including its summary and policy recommendations. Both outputs were successfully launched at the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Nicosia, 5–7 October 2022) during two plenary sessions prepared under the programme. The assessment also reviewed the status of sustainable infrastructure and economic circularity in sustainable tourism and provided policy recommendations to ECE member States, among others on these topics. During the Ministerial Conference also, a side-event on “Sustainable monitoring infrastructure and continuous innovation in implementing a Shared

Environmental Information System was organized in cooperation with UNEP, Environment Agency Austria and the European Environment Agency. The Joint Task Force continued in 2022 the revision of the Guidelines on the Application of Environmental Indicators, including in view of data and information gaps identified in the pan-European assessment. Both bodies have discussed new mandates and terms of reference beyond 2023 and, in the case of the Joint Task Force, the conversion into a standing body considering the growing number and complexity of the topics the Task Force needs to address. In 2022, the programme has also provided support to the development of a national state-of-the-environment report for Uzbekistan, which is planned to be finalized in 2023.

10. In 2022, the culminating event for the UNECE EPR Programme was the launch of the Fourth Cycle of EPRs at the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, at a dedicated EPR session with high-level participation of reviewed and donor countries and organizations. A side-event on co-financing actions for applying EPR recommendations was organized successfully on the margins of the Conference. Also, in 2022, the UNECE EPR Programme continued its work on the Third EPR of Azerbaijan, undertook country review missions for the Second EPR of Armenia (March) and the Third EPR of Kyrgyzstan (May), and expert reviewed recommendations of these three EPRs. The Second EPR of Morocco was finalised and published. Preparatory mission (August) and country review mission (December) have been carried out for the EPR of Mauritania. These EPRs contain substance pertinent to circular economy and the sustainable use of natural resources, including chapters on greening the economy and financing environmental protection; water management; waste management; biodiversity and protected areas; soil protection; agriculture and the environment; energy and the environment; and industry and the environment, helping reviewed countries to advance in these areas. In addition, the preparatory mission for the Fourth EPR of Tajikistan took place in November.

11. The twentieth session of the Steering Committee of the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme (THE PEP), organized in hybrid form from 17 to 19 October 2022. The Committee was updated on the meetings of the open-ended, ad hoc working group to work on a draft THE PEP strategy. The Steering Committee decided to modify the timeline for developing the strategy to adapt it to the evolving geopolitical situation and agreed to include the need to be prepared to face emergency situations, for example, a pandemic, or an energy supply shortage.

12. The Steering Committee included a session in the form of seminar on “Transport, Health and Environment: Including a Gender Perspective”. The Steering Committee mandated THE PEP to work further on gender mainstreaming in transport, health and environment and decided to: (i) reflect the issue of gender and transport in the strategy under THE PEP, and (ii) insert questions related to gender and transport in the questionnaire that member States were to complete every two years.

13. The Steering Committee was informed about the meetings under THE PEP Partnerships. In particular, it heard updates on the creation of a pan-European master plans on walking and on child- and youth-friendly mobility. The Committee appreciated the initiative of the Partnership on Active Mobility to organize a cycling promotion tour from Vienna to Ljubljana, on the occasion of the Velo-City 2022 (Ljubljana, 14–17 June 2022). Throughout the tour, the riders had stopped in cities and regions to promote cooperation and raise awareness of THE PEP and the Pan-European Master Plan for Cycling Promotion, thus advancing the implementation of the cycling master plan.

#### **ECE multilateral environmental agreements – highlights**

14. 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 2022, namely the third extraordinary

session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention, (Geneva, 23–24 June 2022), the twelfth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents (Geneva and online, 29 November–1 December 2022) and forty-second session of the Executive Body for the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution (Air Convention) (Geneva, 12–16 December 2022).

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

15. At the forty-second session of the Executive Body, Parties concluded the review of the Protocol to Abate Acidification Eutrophication and Ground-level Ozone, as amended in 2012 (the Convention's flagship Gothenburg Protocol). 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. It was concluded that, despite the emission reductions achieved, adverse effects on human health, ecosystems and materials continued to occur. Current legislation, including commitments in the Protocol, would not be sufficient to achieve its long-term objectives. To increase the effectiveness of the amended Protocol and to achieve its long-term objectives, more Parties would have to ratify and implement emission reduction commitments, new and updated technical measures will have to be introduced, and also non-technical and structural measures, synergies of climate and energy policies, as well as additional efforts outside the ECE region would be needed. Parties will continue considering in 2023 options for the best way forward taking into account the conclusions and recommendations made as a result of the review.

16. At the same session of the Executive Body, Parties adopted the updated Guidelines for Reporting Emissions and Projections Data under the Convention, the Technical Guidance for Emission Inventory Adjustments under the Amended Gothenburg Protocol and the strategy for scientific bodies under the Convention for the period 2022–2030 and beyond. In addition to that, Parties endorsed the report on the cost of inaction, which aims to encourage ratification and implementation of the protocols to the Convention, in particular the Gothenburg Protocol, as amended in 2012, demonstrating to policymakers the comparison of the costs of inaction on air pollution – defined as the damage to health, ecosystems and economy – with the costs of taking action, defined as the costs of abatement measures.

17. As a result of continued capacity-building activities, Parties in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia improved their emissions reporting in 2022. In June, the secretariat launched an e-learning course on the Convention and its key protocols<sup>1</sup>, which is expected to give decision makers and new staff in countries an introduction and orientation to the Convention framework overall, key principles, legal requirements and obligations. The secretariat also launched a follow-up project to develop an e-learning course on emission inventory development under the Convention. Remotely held meetings of the EECCA Coordinating Group were organized at and preceding the sixtieth session of the Working Group on Strategies and Review to encourage participation of these countries in the work under the Convention. A workshop on estimating transport emissions helped to promote ratification and implementation of the Convention and its key protocols. A national clean air dialogue in Georgia was held in October to follow up on Georgia's national action plan to accede to the key protocols. The secretariat also launched a new project to assist the Republic

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<sup>1</sup> Protocol to Abate Acidification, Eutrophication and Ground-level Ozone (Gothenburg Protocol), Protocol on Heavy Metals and Protocol on Persistent Organic Pollutants, all three as amended.

of Moldova to develop emission reduction commitments and projections as this is one of the preconditions to accede to the Gothenburg Protocol.

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

18. 2022 confirmed the growing recognition worldwide of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention). The Convention further expanded its global reach with the accession of Cameroon in November 2022, therefore now counting six Parties from beyond the ECE region (in total 47 Parties). Iraq and Côte d'Ivoire are at final stages in the accession process. 2022 saw a growing interest towards the Convention in Latin American countries, in particular the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Panama and Paraguay. In 2023, the provision of tailored guidance to the numerous countries in the process of accession, as well as support to regional and basins dialogues, will be continued, with the support of relevant partners.

19. On 30 June 2022, a special event was held in Tallinn, Estonia, to celebrate the 30th anniversary of entry into force of the Convention. The new publication "The Water Convention: 30 Years of Impact and Achievements on the Ground" (ECE/MP.WAT/69) was launched. The event allowed to look back at three decades of experiences in implementing the Water Convention and discuss the future of the Convention. Specific proposals how the Convention should evolve to address the new challenges were put forward, in particular in the areas of: communication and awareness-raising efforts; building more inclusive partnerships; moving towards more sustainable financing mechanisms; and strengthening the institutional framework of the Convention.

20. In 2022, the Convention organized more than 30 events (virtual and in-person) at national, basin, regional and global levels. Global intergovernmental meetings provided platform to exchange knowledge and good practices, including during the Global Workshop on Water, Agriculture and Climate Change (October 2022) and Global Workshop on Source-to-sea Management (December 2022); and meetings of the Implementation Committee (February 2022), Working Groups on Integrated Water Resources Management and on Monitoring and Assessment (June 2022), the Task Force on Water and Climate Change (October 2022) and the Task Force on the Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystems Nexus (December 2022). Support to on-the-ground projects continued. For example, the secretariat provided support to continued regional dialogue on the Senegalo-Mauritanian Aquifer Basin (SMAB) shared by the Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania and Senegal.

21. The Convention secretariat has contributed to the preparatory process of the United Nations Conference on the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Decade for Action, "Water for Sustainable Development", 2018–2028, or the "United Nations 2023 Water Conference". The Pan-European Regional Preparatory Meeting for the United Nations 2023 Water Conference (April 2023) was organized to identify regional priorities for the Conference. The Convention contributed to other preparatory events, including the Second High-Level International Conference on International Decade for Action "Water for Sustainable Development" (June 2022), the Preparatory meeting organized by the President of the General Assembly (October 2022) and the UN-Water Summit on Groundwater (December 2022).

22. Finally, the Convention contributed to other global processes and events, such as the World Water Forum 2022, World Water Week 2022 and the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP27).

*Protocol on Water and Health to the Water Convention*

23. In 2022, the Protocol on Water and Health, jointly serviced by ECE and the World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe (WHO/Europe), has continued to provide a platform for steering the regional agenda on water, sanitation, hygiene and health by promoting action and exchange of experience between countries and across sectors, including on how to respond to and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and prepare for future emergencies by focusing on the provision of essential water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services for all, and by facilitating cooperation and assistance. As 31 October 2022, 27 countries<sup>2</sup> have ratified the Protocol on Water and Health.

24. In 2022, Parties to the Protocol worked on finalizing the implementation of the programme of work for 2020–2022.<sup>3</sup> The Protocol's well-established governance framework and technical assistance mechanisms continued to support countries in setting targets and implementing measures addressing priority WASH issues. The Protocol was increasingly recognized as an operational "engine" for translating key global and regional WASH commitments into concrete national actions, specifically Sustainable Development Goals 6 and 3, but also other Goals such as 1, 2, 4, 11 and 13.

25. The sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol (Geneva, 16–18 November 2022) was a key milestone for the implementation of the Protocol and an opportunity to discuss strategic directions of the pan-European water, sanitation and health agenda and in showcasing the progress achieved by countries in the last decade in the provision of good quality drinking-water and safely managed sanitation services for all in all settings, with support of the Protocol. The meeting brought together more than 200 participants representing 40 countries and partner organizations. On 16 November 2022, a high-level session on strengthening the resilience of WASH and health services in times of climate change and pandemics was organized.

26. The meeting adopted an ambitious programme of work for 2023–2025 discussed achievements and lessons learned over the past three years of implementing the Protocol, and reviewed the situation with water, sanitation, hygiene and health in the pan-European region, based on the fifth reporting cycle in accordance with article 7 (5) of the Protocol that was carried out in the period of 2021–2022.

27. The regional workshop on equitable access to water and sanitation (Geneva (hybrid), 13–14 June 2022) laid the foundations for the revision of the Equitable Access Score-Card. In addition, the Expert Group, with support from the lead Parties and co-secretariat, developed the publication *Making water and sanitation affordable for all: Policy options and good practices to ensure the affordability of safe drinking water and sanitation services in the pan-European region*<sup>4</sup>, which unpacks the concept of affordability, identifies and analyses policy options to address affordability concerns, and features good practices.

28. The thirteenth meeting of the Working Group on Water and Health (19–20 May 2022) reviewed progress achieved, in implementing the programme of work for 2020–2022 and discussed the draft programme of work for 2023–2025. The Compliance Committee at its twenty-third meeting (7 June 2022) analysed the summary reports submitted by Parties and other States within the fifth reporting cycle.

29. Collaboration with the European Union has increased through the recast of the European Union Drinking Water Directive<sup>5</sup> that promotes use of guidance documents developed under the Protocol, requiring inter alia, the improvement and maintenance of

<sup>2</sup> See [www.unece.org/env/water/pwh\\_status/legal.html](http://www.unece.org/env/water/pwh_status/legal.html).

<sup>3</sup> See ECE/MP.WH/19/Add.1–EUPCR/1814149/1.2/2019/MOP-5/06/Add.1.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations publication, ECE/MP.WH/20.

<sup>5</sup> See <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32020L2184&from=EN>.

access to water to all. This has further reinforced the synergies in the implementation of the provisions of the Protocol and the requirements of the European Union directives on water and sanitation.

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

30. In 2022, the twelfth meeting of the Conference of the Parties was held. On the occasion of the Convention's 30th anniversary, the Conference renewed its commitments to continue working towards full implementation of the Convention, including to address challenges, emerging risks and developments, such as the increasing impacts of climate change and natural hazards triggering technological disasters (Natech events), urbanization and industrialization, and growing demand for minerals and metals to enable the green economy transition and strive for energy security. The Conference also welcomed Ukraine to the Convention, which expanded the number of Parties to 42 upon the country's accession on 4 October 2022.

31. Following the "UNECE/OECD Seminar on effective management of technological risks of accidents triggered by natural hazards", Parties adopted decision 2022/1 on strengthening Natech risk management in the ECE region and beyond (based on draft decision ECE/CP.TEIA/2022/4), committing to taking measures to address these risks. They also agreed on actions to take to strengthen and scale up mine tailing's safety, by endorsing the *Road map for action to strengthen mine tailings safety within and beyond the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe region* (ECE/CP.TEIA/2022/7).

32. Parties exchanged information and knowledge on implementing the Convention through the Working Group on Implementation's first ever "Special Session: Seminar on Good Practices and Lessons Learned in Implementing the Industrial Accidents Convention" (Geneva (hybrid), 1–2 February 2022)" (for its conclusions and recommendations, see ECE/CP.TEIA/2022/5, Annex). The Working Group on Implementation also provided support for countries in transition to use the Strategic Approach of the Assistance and Cooperation Programme, including the reflection of risks in relation to mine tailings and Natech into the national policies of Central Asian countries.

33. In addition, two reports on risk assessment for industrial accident prevention were finalized: one providing an introduction to risk assessment methodologies for industrial accident prevention; and the other presenting eighteen case studies on risk assessment methodologies applied at selected industrial facilities in the ECE region, including with five of those industrial facilities having potential to cause transboundary effects if an accident were to occur.

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

34. In 2022, the Espoo Convention and its Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment continued to contribute to preventing and reducing environmental and health hazards from across the economic sectors and to promoting environmental governance. The year was marked for example by the following:

(a) In early March, the Chair of the Bureau wrote to all the (45) Parties to express concerns at the devastating effects of the military invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation, in terms of loss of human life and environmental damage, including threats to the Ukrainian nuclear power plants, with potentially far-reaching impacts.

(b) The secretariat continued to assist Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine in the treaties' effective implementation, with funding from the



EU4Environment programme, including by planning and initiating pilot applications of SEA to selected Government draft plans.

(i) On 18 November, Ukraine and Romania signed a bilateral agreement on the implementation of the Convention, putting into action recommendations from the Meeting of the Parties in 2008–2022 (concerning compliance by Ukraine with its treaty obligations in respect of the Bystroe Canal Project). The secretariat supported the drafting.

(ii) On 29 June, the secretariat organized a second sub-regional workshop to take stock of the progress, to address topical issues identified by the beneficiary countries, such as: assessing health in SEA, effective public participation and financial aspects of environmental assessments, and to present related good practice.

(c) The treaties' Implementation Committee considered 43 compliance issues during and in-between its three annual sessions, including regarding the lifetime-extension of many nuclear power plants within the region, building on guidance on that topic adopted in December 2020. The Committee held several formal hearings and informal consultations with the Parties concerned, and prepared findings and recommendations to assist them in the treaties' effective implementation. The Committee and the secretariat were confronted with questions on the legal implications of armed conflicts.

(d) The secretariat prepared draft reviews of Parties' implementation of the two treaties in the period 2019–2021 based on the Parties' national reporting. For the first time, the periodic reporting also served for collecting and disseminating examples of good practice, with a view to sharing solutions and innovative approaches for the treaties' effective application, in particular in the transboundary context. The draft review reports will be due for adoption in 2023.

(e) To prevent and address the negative impacts to regional seas and coastal ecosystems from growing pressures caused by climate change, the increasing pollution loads, tourism, fishing, mining and energy production (such as offshore wind power plants), the secretariat facilitated consultations on synergies and future cooperation activities with six regional sea conventions and commissions. Joint meetings were held on 16 and 17 June to discuss a draft assessment report and to share good practice.

(f) At their meetings, the Bureau and the Working Group on EIA and SEA initiated the preparations for the next year's sessions of the Meetings of the Parties based on the documentation prepared by the secretariat.

(g) In December, at the request of the Bureau, the Executive Secretary wrote to all the Parties to request for additional funding to address the acute shortage of staff resources for the Convention's and the Protocol's core secretariat functions, which had not been increased since 2001 – and which, during large parts of 2022, had further fallen from two to only 1 or 1,5 professional staff member.

*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)*

35. Due to their cross-cutting nature and wide substantive scopes, the Convention and its Protocol continued supporting 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.

36. The Convention's third extraordinary session of the Meeting of the Parties and the Working Group of the Parties were held back-to-back in Geneva on 22–24 June 2022. Parties reaffirmed their commitment to protect the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment and took a number of commitments in this regard. The Meeting of the Parties

focused its attention on the protection of environmental defenders, culminating in the landmark election of Mr. Michel Forst as the world's first Special Rapporteur on environmental defenders. The Special Rapporteur will work to protect any person experiencing or at imminent threat of penalization, persecution, or harassment for seeking to exercise their rights under the Aarhus Convention. To help inform the work of the Special Rapporteur, the event featured a round table where environmental defenders, Parties, human rights institutions and international organizations discussed the related main trends, challenges and good practices in the region and beyond. The Working Group of the Parties focused its deliberations on: (a) access to environment-related information on products, which is critical for informed environmental choices and supporting sustainable consumption and production; and (b) promoting transparency and public participation in international decision-making with regard to plastics and business and human rights.

37. The Task Force on Access to Justice held its fourteenth meeting and its Judicial Colloquium (Geneva, 26–28 April 2022) to promote effective access to justice for members of the public with regard to environmental cases. The Task Force focused its discussion on spatial planning- and energy- related cases. At the Judicial Colloquium, representatives of judiciary, judicial training institutions and other review bodies directed their attention on trends and recent developments in adjudication of cases related to climate change and air quality.

38. At its tenth meeting, the Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-making (Geneva, 10–11 October 2022) focused its deliberations on major achievements and challenges with regard to effective public participation in decision-making: (a) in the context of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic; (b) on health-related issues linked to air pollution; and (c) on urban development. It is expected that the shared experiences will help to strengthen public's involvement in these challenging areas.

39. At its ninth meeting, the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs (Geneva, 24–25 November 2022), considered a number of subjects, including coordination and synergy among major international organisations dealing with chemicals management; optimization and modernization of PRTRs; the use of PRTRs for reporting on international agreements and processes dealing with chemicals management; possible inclusion of PRTRs in relevant future treaties, such as a legally binding instrument on plastic pollution; and needs for capacity building with regard to PRTRs.

40. Compliance Committees under the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs held several meetings aimed to assist Parties in improving their compliance with these treaties through e.g., identifying major issues of concern, developing recommendations and providing advisory support.

### **III. Major activities planned for 2023 and beyond**

41. 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 ECE 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 2023 (ECE/CEP/S/2022/10<sup>6</sup>). The twenty eighth session of the Committee will be held in Geneva from 1 to 3 November 2023.

42. In 2023, the Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Programme will continue to support member States in advancing the environmental knowledge-base for effective

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<sup>6</sup> <https://unece.org/environment/documents/2022/07/draft-programme-work-environment-subprogramme-2023>.

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 EU funded project “EU4Environment Water Resources Environmental Data” support to environmental monitoring, reporting and assessment in the countries of the EU Eastern Neighbourhood region will be provided. Furthermore, support will be provided to the development of the national State of the Environment Report in Uzbekistan. The twenty-fifth session of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment will be held on 2–3 May 2023 and the twentieth session of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators in October 2022.

43. In 2023, The EPR Programme will work on finalising the Second EPR of Armenia and the Third EPR of Azerbaijan for publication and national launches. The Second EPR of Morocco will be launched at national level. The EPR of Mauritania will be prepared for expert and peer review and the Third EPR of Kyrgyzstan for additional expert review, as necessary, and peer review. The EPR country review mission for the Fourth EPR of Tajikistan will be carried out. In late 2023, preparations will commence for the Fourth EPRs of Montenegro and of the Republic of Moldova. Moreover, the EPR Programme will support the work of the UNECE Expert Group on EPRs in fulfilling the mandate given by CEP to prepare additional guidance on the conduct of Fourth Cycle EPRs for the consideration by CEP at its twenty-eighth session in November 2023. Subject to availability of resources regional or sub-regional workshops might be organized to support reviewed countries efforts to exchange experience in implementing EPR recommendations.

44. The Bureau of THE PEP will meet at the beginning of 2023 to operationalize decisions of the Steering Committee. Further, the fifth meeting of the ad hoc working group to develop a THE PEP strategy will meet early in 2023 to start the drafting of the strategy. The Partnerships will continue their work in view of preparing, among others, a master plan on active mobility.

45. Up to 5 October 2022, the implementation of the ECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) was continuing in accordance with the “Batumi Framework for the future implementation of the ECE Strategy for ESD” (adopted at the High-Level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries in Batumi, Georgia, 08 June 2016). At its 17<sup>th</sup> meeting, the Committee was updated on the last preparations for the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Third High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries which was held on 5 October 2022 in Nicosia, hosted by the Government of Cyprus. The meeting also was updated about the outcomes of the capacity building international conference on the whole school approach, organized and funded by the Government of the Netherlands as an in-kind contribution to funding the activities organized by the Steering Committee. On 4 October 2022, the Committee held its special session in Nicosia, which considered the draft annotated provisional agenda of the Third High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries, including its official documents and outcome, and also the agenda of the High-level Meeting of the Ministers for Education on Education for Sustainable Development, held on 6 October 2022 in Nicosia, as it was decided at the 17<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Steering Committee. Since 5 October 2022, the implementation of the ECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) continues in accordance with the “Framework for the implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development from 2021 to 2030” (adopted at the Third High-Level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries).

46. The ECE MEAs will continue their work focusing on improving the implementation and compliance by Parties. Meeting of the governing bodies under MEAs take place in 2023, namely, the forty-third session of the Executive Body to the Air Convention (Geneva, 11–14 December 2023, tentatively).

47. In 2023, the Water Convention will continue activities aimed at supporting accession processes in interested countries. A new twinning programme will be initiated to enable the transfer of practical experience and lessons learned between Parties to the Convention. Two global workshops will be organised: on conjunctive management of surface water and groundwater and on financing of transboundary water cooperation. The third reporting exercise on the Sustainable Development Goals indicator 6.5.2 and under the Water Convention will take place. The Convention secretariat will continue to provide input to the preparatory process for the UN 2023 Water Conference (New York, 22–24 March 2023). An event on the Convention will be organised at the Conference.

48. In 2023, work under the Protocol on Water and Health will focus on implementing the newly adopted programme of work for 2023–2025, including activities on climate change adaptation/ resilience, equitable access to water and sanitation as well contribution to the 2023 United Nations Water Conference (New York, 22–24 March 2023), and the Seventh Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health (Budapest, July 2023). While the Protocol on Water and Health is an intersectoral instrument by nature, bringing together the environment and health communities, the year of 2023 foresees the implementation of the United Nations Development Account projects “*Food-water-energy nexus support to post-COVID-19 recovery in Eastern Europe, Western Balkans, Central Asia, the Middle East and Africa*” and “*Equitable access to water and sanitation services for all and in all setting and strengthened climate-resilience in water and sanitation sector*” with Kazakhstan, Montenegro, Moldova, Turkmenistan acting as beneficiary countries.

49. In 2023, the secretariat to the Industrial Accidents Convention will continue jointly developing a OECD/UN/European Union Joint Research Center guidance on Natech risk management. The template for national implementation reports for the tenth reporting round will be finalized and circulated in 2023, and Parties will submit their reports. The Working Group on Implementation will then analyze the national implementation reports to draw up the tenth report on implementation of the Convention in 2024.

50. The secretariat will further support countries in strengthening mine tailings safety under the Convention through their implementation of the *Road map for action to strengthen mine tailings safety within and beyond the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe region* (ECE/CP.TEIA/2022/7). In this regard, a particular focus will be placed on supporting Central Asian countries to strengthen policy and governance at the national level, and in a transboundary context.

51. Projects under the Convention’s Assistance and Cooperation programme will continue, with a focus on strengthening governance and policy. ECE will continue supporting Serbia in the implementation of the National Policy Dialogue on industrial safety and the development of a national programme, and Central Asian countries in strengthening inter-institutional coordination and mine tailings safety. The secretariat will also, in close cooperation with the Working Group on Implementation continue to support beneficiary countries in implementing the Convention’s Strategic Approach, in lead up to the Assistance and Cooperation Programme’s 20th anniversary in 2024.

52. In 2023, Parties to the Air Convention, following the review of the Gothenburg Protocol, as amended in 2012, will continue considering options for the best way forward taking into account the conclusions and recommendations made as a result of the review. Parties are also expected to adopt a guidance document on non-technical and structural measures, a guidance document on co-mitigation of methane and ammonia and other nitrogen compounds from agricultural sources, a guidance document on methane mitigation technologies and a guidance document on shipping.

53. 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.

54. For the Espoo Convention and its Protocol, the year 2023 will culminate in the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention and the fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol to be held in Geneva from 12 to 15 December. The treaties' Bureau will meet in February and the Working Group on EIA and SEA in June to finalize the draft documentation and the other preparatory work with support from the secretary. During and in between its three sessions (February, May and September), the Implementation Committee will prepare a large array of decisions on Parties' compliance with their treaty obligations, including regarding the lifetime-extension of several nuclear power plants in the ECE region. The Meetings of the Parties are likely to hold discussions on the role of the Convention and the Protocol in promoting energy transition and circular economy. They are also expected to adopt several key decisions and documents that will shape the treaties' implementation in the next period 2024–2026 and beyond and help provide more sustainable and equitable extrabudgetary funding to address the current acute resource constraints. The finalization and adoption of Guidance on the assessment of health in strategic environmental assessment is also an expected and important item on the agenda. Aside from the core activities, the Meetings is likely to mandate work to prepare for the opening of the Convention for any future accession of countries beyond the ECE region, and also cover subregional cooperation in six marine regions, with a focus on the Mediterranean Sea

55. In 2023 the EU4Environment funding for capacity-building activities under the Espoo Convention and its Protocol will come to an end, and will mark a decade of the secretariat's extensive delivery of technical assistance and capacity-building activities to support the countries in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus in the implementation of and/or accession to these two treaties. As a result of it, the beneficiary countries have developed and aligned their legislative frameworks with the treaties, and enhanced their capacity to implement them, through multiple national and subregional capacity-building activities, including pilot application of strategic environmental assessment to Government plans

56. In 2023, 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.

57. The Task Force on Access to Justice will hold its fifteenth meeting back-to-back with the Judicial Colloquium on 3–5 April 2023 to 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 and advance the implementation of the third pillar of the Aarhus Convention.

58. The twenty-seventh meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to Convention is planned for June 2023. The Working Group will follow up on the implementation of decisions adopted at the seventh session of the Meetings of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention (MOP7). In addition, thematic sessions on promoting effective public participation in decision-making and on promoting the Convention's principles in other international forums will be held.

59. The Task Force on Access to Information will hold its eighth meeting in November 2023, which will provide a platform for governments, international organizations, international financial institutions, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders to exchange of experience in advancing effective access to information, in particular with regard to product information.

60. The tenth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers will be organized in November 2023 to consider among other

issues the promotion of the Protocol and strengthening capacities of Parties and other interested member States to implement and apply its provisions, as well as improving PRTR systems to respond to different needs.

61. Global Round Table on Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) will be organized in December 2023. The meeting will aim at taking stock of successes and challenges in promoting effective access to information and public participation in decision-making with regard to GMOs in different countries.

62. Compliance Committees under the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs will hold several meetings aimed to assist Parties in improving their compliance with these treaties.

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

63. The Committee on Environmental Policy held its special session on 3 and 4 October 2022. The report of the session is contained in document ECE/CEP/S/2022/6. As part of its deliberations, the Committee adopted the programme of work of the Environment subprogramme for 2023, as contained in document ECE/CEP/S/2022/10. Further, the Committee decided to extend the mandate and terms of reference of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment, as contained in document ECE/EX/2017/L.2, until 31 December 2023; and to extend the mandate and terms of reference of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators, as contained in the annex to document ECE/CEP-CES/GE.1/2021/3, until 31 December 2023. Further, the Committee decided to adopt a revised mandate and terms of reference of the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews for 2023–2026, as contained in document ECE/CEP/S/2022/9, annex. The Executive Committee is invited to approve these decisions.

#### **V. Follow-up to the 2021 session of the Economic Commission for Europe**

64. The ministers at the Nicosia Conference appreciated the commitment expressed by the member States of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe at its sixty-ninth session (Geneva, 20–21 April 2021) to step up their efforts to promote circular economy approaches and the sustainable use of natural resources, in particular through the voluntary commitments made as a part of the “Environment for Europe” process. The ministers committed to foster a circular economy, favour a life cycle approach and support resource efficiency and waste prevention in production and consumption. They committed to supporting and promoting these decisions by fully exploiting the potential of the “Environment for Europe” process and, in particular, further promoting the Pan-European Strategic Framework for Greening the Economy through the BIG-E for mobilizing voluntary commitments and sharing positive experiences. Continuous strong interest in BIG-E was confirmed as 67 new commitments were submitted prior to the Conference. The new commitments include actions focused on the application of principles of circular economy to different sectors, including tourism and infrastructure development, as well as enhancing education for sustainable development agenda towards promotion of the required knowledge, values, attitudes, qualifications and skills related to green and circular economy, and green technologies, necessary for facilitating green transformations and sustainable development.

65. Pursuant to decision VII/1 on promoting effective access to information (ECE/MP.PP/2021/2/Add.1), the Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention (June 2022) held a thematic session on advancing public access to environment-related information on products, including in relation to digitalization; measures against

greenwashing; and means to encourage operators to inform the public (eco-labelling, eco-auditing, environmental, social and governance solutions). The Convention's Task Force on Access to Information (November 2023) will explore means to improve access to information relevant for circular economy, namely to product information, including through such digital solutions as "product passports" and will monitor the implementation of the Recommendations on the more effective use of electronic information tools (ECE/MP.PP/2021/2/Add.2). Pursuant to decision IV/2 on development of the Protocol on PRTRs (ECE/MP.PRTR/2021/6/Add.1), the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol (November 2022) considered possibilities to strengthen PRTRs in order to e.g., promote circular economy.

66. The Task Force on Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystems Nexus under the Water Convention brings together the concerned sectors representing the Parties and non-Parties to guide and oversees the activities implemented under the Convention in the nexus area and on water allocation in a transboundary context. Assistance is provided in the development and operationalization of cross-sectoral regional strategies with a transboundary character as frameworks for action on nexus solutions and investments. Capacity-building workshops are conducted on a needs basis to discuss options to address and reconcile sectoral water demands through an integrated approach to transboundary water allocation.

67. The Water Convention contributes to promoting circular economy and sustainable use of natural resources through projects supporting intersectoral dialogues and assessments through the application of the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus approach, in particular in the Drina and Drin River basins and with a new project "Regional mechanisms for the low-carbon, climate-resilient transformation of the energy-water-land nexus in Central Asia" (IKI project). In addition, new publications *Solutions and investments in the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus: A synthesis of experiences in transboundary basins* (ECE/MP.WAT/66) and the *Handbook on Water Allocation in a Transboundary Context* (ECE/MP.WAT/64) provide tools in support of strengthening intersectoral cooperation in transboundary basins.

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

68. The Environment subprogramme is supporting the cross-sectoral work under the ECE 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. 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.

69. 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 their cooperation to improve human health and environmental outcomes. Recent work under the Protocol has also promoted cooperation and integration of policies with other sector: for instance, work under the Protocol to promote equitable access to water and sanitation 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.

70. In the reporting period, the work under the ECE Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) continued to be focused on the promotion of SDG 4 and its target 4.7 in the region, via the implementation of the ECE Strategy for ESD. 17<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Steering Committee held on 30-31 May 2022 in the hybrid mode, considered the Draft Ministerial Statement of the Third High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries, elaborated by the members of the Steering Committee's drafting group, which strongly supports the continuation and stepping up of efforts for the implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development until 2030 at the regional (ECE) level, in synergy with relevant efforts undertaken at the global and subregional levels (e.g., the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the European Union/European Economic Area, Central and Eastern Europe, Mediterranean, Central Asia) and at the national level..

71. THE PEP is intrinsically an intersectoral activity. The secretariat is a collaboration between ECE (Environment and Sustainable Transport Divisions) and the World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe. Furthermore, THE PEP continued its cooperation with non-governmental organizations in preparing its work in the Partnerships; especially for the Partnerships on: Active Mobility; Sustainable Tourism Mobility; and Child- and Youth-Friendly Mobility.

72. National Policy Dialogues on Integrated Water Resources Management under the European Union Water Initiative programme served as platforms for intersectoral cooperation and water reform in 9 countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. In 2022, a major achievement was the start of the NPD process in Uzbekistan with the first Steering Committee meeting organised in September 2022. In 2023, NPDs will continue to advance the implementation of the water and health agenda and strengthen national water governance, including intersectoral cooperation, and international cooperation. Work under the NPDs will contribute to country-level implementation of the Protocol on Water and Health and COVID-19 pandemic recovery, implementation of the Water Convention and the Industrial Accidents Convention.

73. In close partnership with the Water Convention, through their Joint Expert Group on Water and Industrial Accidents (JEG), the Industrial Accidents Convention organized the JEG Seminar on emerging risks in accidental water pollution: focus on natural hazard-triggered accidents (Budapest and online, 5 October 2022). The Industrial Accidents Convention's activities contributed to the broader policy debate on sustainable infrastructure, in the framework of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference. The Ministerial declaration adopted highlights the tangible results achieved with the implementation of the ECE multilateral environmental agreements enhancing environmental protection and industrial safety, as well as in improving social, economic and health aspects of people's lives across the pan-European region and beyond. Cooperation was also pursued with ECE's Sustainable Energy Division, through the Working Group on Transforming Extractive Industries for Sustainable Development, set up by the Secretary General, the technical secretariat of which is being co-led by ECE, for the Regional Commission, UNEP and UNDP in 2022. 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).

74. The secretariat 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 and providing inputs to the United Nations Sustainable Development Framework.

75. The ECE Environment Division (Environmental Monitoring and Assessment programme) and ECE 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 and statistics. In 2022 further progress was achieved in revising the ECE Environmental Indicators and to align them with the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics to better meet the needs for monitoring and measuring progress of recent and emerging policy developments including a circular economy and to fill gaps identified in the seventh pan-European environmental assessment.

76. The essence of the Espoo Convention and its Protocol is to provide for intersectoral cooperation and consultations in assessing and addressing environmental, including health, impacts of projects, plans and programmes from across the economic sectors. In 2022, the EU4Environment programme (2019–2023) that funds the treaties' legal assistance and capacity building activities in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus continued to bring together representatives of ministries of environment and economy of the six beneficiary countries, and the implementing organizations (UNEP, UNIDO, OECD, the World Bank), and involve cooperation with UNDP at the country-level. In cooperation with WHO, efforts continued for finalizing a guidance document on the assessment of health and the involvement of the health sector in strategic environmental assessment. In 2022, a new intersectoral activity will focus on promoting the Protocol's application into development cooperation, in consultation with the treaty bodies and Parties' authorities responsible for development cooperation.

77. The ECE Programme on EPRs cooperates with other units within ECE and with other organizations (UNEP, WHO, OECD, EIB) in preparing EPR intersectoral chapters, looking at how environmental concerns are mainstreamed into priority sectors, such as energy and the environment, transport and the environment, industry and the environment, agriculture and the environment, and human settlements and the environment, as well as assessing the impact of the environment on human health. In addition, cross-sectoral capacity development activities are carried out upon demand from countries, such as on-line workshops on strengthening national capacities in applying economic sectors' policies and practices, based on EPR recommendations, which are organized jointly with relevant UNECE sub-programmes and organizations.

## VII. Technical cooperation activities

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

79. 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 ECE 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.

80. Due to the COVID-19 and resulted travel limitations, the work of the Regional Adviser supporting technical cooperation has been adapted and workplan activities have been re-adjusted. With savings from the travel fund, new activities requested by the Governments have been introduced in the workplan and implemented in 2022 with RPTC fund. These include:

- Support Kazakhstan in ratification of the GMO amendment to the Aarhus Convention through reviewing national legal and institutional frameworks in light of the requirements of the Amendment;

- Assist member States in integration of green transition in and implementation of the UNSDCF through organization of a training on circular economy and enabling policies to support green transition;
- Strengthen environmental dimension of the RPTC funded project “UN4Kharkiv: Plan for the integrated rehabilitation of settlements in Ukraine with a pilot project in the city of Kharkiv”;
- Strengthen the capacity of the Ministry of Environmental Protection of Serbia to implement the provisions of the Industrial Accidents Convention, notably the capacity for improved prevention, preparedness and response to industrial accidents, disaster resilience through the development of the National Programme on Industrial Safety;
- Support to the development of a National State of the Environment Report, development of a methodology for NSoERs and for strengthening national capacities for its regular production based on international good practices and guidelines.

81. To strengthen the engagement of ECE at the country level and to introduce overall ECE work at the country level, the Regional Adviser continued to work closely with the RCs, their offices and UNCTs in Uzbekistan, Serbia and Tajikistan by informing RCs and UNCTs of relevant ECE guidelines and products, participating in and contributing to UNCT and Results Group (RG) discussions and identifying potential joint activities with UNCT member agencies. The Regional Adviser is now co-chairing the RGs on environment and climate change in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan together with UNESCO and UNDP respectively.

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

83. In 2022, under the Espoo Convention and in particular its Protocol on SEA, an extensive amount of technical cooperation activities continued to be deployed in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. In Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine the European Union (EU) funded “EU for Environment” programme has financed secretariat’s support towards the ratification and/or the effective implementation of the Protocol on SEA and the Convention by the beneficiary countries in the period 2019–2022 (with a budget of some 2.7 Mio USD) building on the outcomes of the previous EU funded support (2013–2018). The programme was extended until 2023.

84. The joint secretariat of the Protocol on Water and Health regularly provides technical assistance to Protocol Parties and other states active in its framework. In particular, the ECE secretariat supports national self-assessments aimed at establishing a baseline measure of the situation with equitable access to water and sanitation; in 2023 such self-assessment will continue to take place in Montenegro and Albania. ECE further provides continuous support to countries in the process of setting, implementing, monitoring and/or reviewing intersectoral targets on water, sanitation, hygiene and health under the Protocol.

85. ECE implemented several projects under the Assistance and Cooperation Programme set up under the Industrial Accidents Convention, seeking to strengthen policy-making and governance for industrial safety and disaster risk reduction, nationally and in a transboundary context. The Convention’s secretariat supported Kazakhstan and Tajikistan in establishing Inter-Institutional Working Groups on tailings safety and the prevention of accidental water pollution. It also facilitated the preparation of national reports with analyses of the five Central Asian countries’ national legislation and recommendations on alignments with the Convention’s requirements and related policy areas, such as disaster risk reduction. Furthermore, ECE, under the auspices of the Water and Industrial Accidents Conventions, supported the four riparian countries of the Syr Darya river basin in mapping their tailings management facilities and other hazardous activities in the Basin, as well as in analysing gaps in national legislation related to joint contingency planning, information exchange and

emergency preparedness and response in case of an accident. Furthermore, ECE supports, through a joint UNECE-UNDRR Project Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in integrating elements of industrial accident risk and transboundary considerations into their national strategic documents prepared under the umbrella of the Sendai Framework.

## VIII. Cooperation with other organizations

86. 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*

87. 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. ECE, UNEP and UNESCO jointly lead the Issue-based Coalition on Environment and Climate Change, which brings together 18 UN agencies, funds and programmes. Through its co-chairing and leading some of the activities and major products developed by the Coalition, ECE collaborated and provided support to Resident Coordinators, Resident Coordinator Offices and relevant UN country team (UNCT) agencies in the region on the environmental dimension of country level work. Following up on its mainstreaming guidance on integrating the environment and climate change in UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework processes, the Coalition developed and launched a training programme.<sup>7</sup> A first training event on mainstreaming entry points was held in December 2021, with three subregional events organized in January 2022 on approaches and tools for mainstreaming. The training increased awareness and understanding of Resident Coordinator Offices and country teams on the importance of strengthening the environmental dimension of UN Common Country Analyses, integrating environmental concerns across all outcomes in the Cooperation Frameworks, enhanced capacity in linking subregional and transboundary issues with national priorities, and facilitated experience sharing.

88. In April 2022, the Coalition organized a peer-learning round table on “Action to protect and restore terrestrial ecosystems” during the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development. The Coalition’s task team on climate and disaster risk reduction held a side-event on “Partnerships to address Climate Change, Extreme Events and Disaster Risk Reduction towards Sustainable Development Goals”. These events increased awareness of ecosystem approaches that work, particularly those building upon transboundary cooperation or addressing the protection of key biodiversity areas, and of the importance of collaboration with partners working in science, innovation and technology, including of public, private and academic sectors, to increase the efficiency of post-COVID recovery strategies.

89. The Coalition designed and implemented a green transition training programme in response to requests by UNCTs. The work was led by UNDP, ECE, UNEP and UNESCO, with contributions from the other Coalition members and external experts. Between

<sup>7</sup> Information on the Coalition’s work is available at <https://uneuropecentralasia.org/en/ibc-environmental-coalition>.

September and November 2022, five webinars were led by different agencies, on themes identified through consultations with the Resident Coordinator Offices and UNCTs, on Sustainable Finance; Energy; Circular Economy; Plastics; and Enabling Policies and Strategic Frameworks for Green Transition at the Country Level. ECE led the webinars on Circular Economy and Enabling Policies. Outcomes, in the form of guidance notes, will be published in 2023. The webinars provided Resident Coordinators and UNCTs with guidance and practical advice on how to assist member States in transitioning to a green economy and facilitated exchange of good practices amongst UNCTs and Results Groups working on green transitioning.

90. The Coalition also addressed several priority thematic issues. In follow up to a webinar in 2021 on “Air pollution from domestic heating in Serbia – impacts, challenges and solutions”, the Coalition’s task team on air pollution issued in October 2022 a briefing note entitled “Together for warm homes and clean air”. Also in autumn 2022, as requested by the Regional Collaborative Platform and Resident Coordinators, the Coalition issued key messages on “The importance of a continued focus on climate action in support of UNCT engagement with Governments in Europe and Central Asia”. The publications provided Resident Coordinators and UNCTs with guidance on joint action on to tackle air pollution from domestic heating and with messages to communicate with governments to continue focussing on climate action through the economic downturn. In response to a request from the Resident Coordinator in Tajikistan for a subregional analysis on water resources in Central Asian countries, notably at the transboundary level, the Coalition is developing, in consultation with the Resident Coordinators in the subregion, a concept for a webinar to be held in January 2023. The webinar will discuss ways to strengthen support from the UN system in implementation of water-related SDGs and their targets, present how international instruments and tools can be used to support access to water and sanitation, integrated water resources management, climate resilience, conflict prevention and resolution in Central Asia and inform about the UN 2023 Water Conference.

#### *United Nations Regional Commissions*

91. 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. It also cooperates with ESCAP on promoting environmental rights in Asia-Pacific region.

92. ECE and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) cooperated in preparing the 2<sup>nd</sup> EPR of Morocco.

#### *United Nations Environment Programme*

93. The Environment subprogramme has long-standing cooperation with United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) through many joint activities and partnerships. The work of ECE and UNEP is complementary: ECE 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 ECE region.

94. At its special session in May 2022, the Committee welcomed the information provided by UNEP on the outcomes of the resumed meeting of the fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly of UNEP and invited UNEP to continue to inform the Committee of relevant developments under the Assembly.

95. United Nations Environment Programme is a key partner in the Environment for Europe process and participated actively in the preparatory process for and in the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference. In particular, UNECE and UNEP worked jointly to develop substantive background documents for the two themes of the Conference and some other official and information documents.

96. 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 7<sup>th</sup> pan-European environmental assessment, which was successfully launched in 2022. In addition, UNEP is engaged, as part of a common approach between ECE, 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 at senior and operational levels as relevant. UNEP and UNECE also cooperate in supporting Uzbekistan in the development of a national State of the Environment report.

97. UNEP provided expertise for the Second EPR of Armenia and the Third EPR of Kyrgyzstan, authoring chapters on environmental monitoring and assessment and public participation, and expert reviewing chapter related to environmental monitoring and information.

98. UNEP is also actively contributing to the implementation of many ECE MEAs.

99. Since 2013, the secretariat of the Espoo Convention and its Protocol on SEA has promoted the treaties' implementation 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.

100. UNEP participates in coordination mechanisms under the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol and supports the implementation of both treaties in various areas, including through co-organizing 2022 Judicial Colloquium “Adjudication of cases related to climate change and air quality”.

101. In 2022, the secretariat contributed and provided inputs to the UNEP-led annual celebration of the International Day of Clean Air for blue skies.

102. The secretariat of the Air Convention together with WHO co-leads the task team on air pollution in the framework of the Issue-Based Coalition on Environment and Climate Change for Europe and Central Asia.

#### *World Health Organization (WHO)*

103. ECE and WHO/Europe continue to jointly provide secretariat services for the Protocol on Water and Health and THE PEP. The ECE and WHO/Europe secretariats are in constant communication to coordinate the activities. ECE is also represented in the Bureau of the European Environment and Health Task Force (EHTF), serviced by WHO under the European Environment and Health Process. At the 11th meeting of the EHTF in December 2021, the Hungarian Government announced that it would host the Seventh Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health in Budapest in 2023. The EHTF entrusted its Bureau to oversee the preparation of the Conference and the drafting of its political outcome document, the Budapest Declaration.

104. The Protocol on Water and Health continues to support Parties and other States in implementing the WASH-related commitments set by the 2030 Agenda and the Ostrava

Declaration. The Protocol has served as a tool to transfer key global and regional WASH commitments into concrete national actions, e.g., proposed actions set out in annex I to the Declaration of the Sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health (Ostrava, Czechia, 13–15 June 2017) (Ostrava Declaration), which explicitly calls for ratification of or accession to the Protocol and is fully consistent with the Protocol's priorities

105. The ECE 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.

106. 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 2022, joint efforts continued to finalize draft guidance for the assessment of health impacts that was prepared with funding from the European Investment Bank (EIB).

107. WHO contributes to the work of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment and the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators when relevant.

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

108. The ECE Strategy for ESD is implemented in close cooperation with UNESCO, the lead agency for ESD for 2030 education 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 ECE Steering Committee on ESD and its Bureau.

109. ECE and UNESCO are the custodian agencies for SDG indicator 6.5.2.

110. UNESCO also contributed to the work under the Aarhus Convention to promote access to environmental information and cooperation with judiciary and other review bodies on these matters.

*United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)*

111. UNDP offices and Resident Representatives in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan and Mauritania supported the EPR Programme in substantive and logistics matters, including for the country review missions in these countries.

112. ECE also cooperates with UNDP, for promoting the implementation of the Espoo Convention and its Protocol on SEA in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, with funding from the EU4Environment programme.

113. Several activities supported by UNDP in different countries aimed to advance the implementation of the Aarhus Convention and the Protocol on PRTRs.

114. UNDP was an active partner in the Issue-based Coalition on Environment and Climate Change, led by ECE, UNEP and UNESCO.

*United Nations Country Teams (UNCT)*

115. UNCT and Resident Coordinators in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan and Mauritania supported the EPR Programme in substantive and logistics matters, including for the country review missions in these countries.

*United Nations Statistical Division (UNSD)*

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

117. 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)*

118. The Protocol on SEA secretariat has worked closely with OSCE in 2019–2021 to assist Kazakhstan Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in reforming their national legislation in accordance with the Convention and the Protocol on SEA and to develop action plans for the development of strategic environmental assessment systems in all the five Central Asian countries, (with the funding mainly from Germany, and co-funding from Switzerland and ECE). In 2022, OSCE supported the translation of guidance material into the languages of the Central Asian countries.

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

120. The Aarhus Convention secretariat also maintained close cooperation with OSCE that supported the work of the Aarhus Centres and other capacity-building activities under the Convention and the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Register.

*Other partners*

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

122. ECE organized an extra-ordinary meeting of the Inter-agency coordination group on industrial accidents, discussing the industrial threats that Ukraine faces and opportunities for cooperation in prevention and preparedness (online, 9 March 2022). The Convention secretariat will continue fostering inter-agency cooperation with a range of international organizations in this Group and other forums.

123. ECE closely cooperated with OECD in the co-organization of the joint ECE-OECD Seminar on effective management of technological risks of accidents triggered by natural hazards in the framework of the twelfth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (Geneva and online, 29 November 2022), which will be built upon in the forthcoming joint OECD/UN/JRC Guidance on Natech risk management.

124. ECE cooperated closely with the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) through a joint workplan. Among others, ECE contributed at the highest level to the Global Platform for disaster risk reduction (Bali and online, 23–28 May 2022) and the Sendai Framework mid-term review. Under the auspices of the Industrial Accidents and Water Conventions, ECE organized a side event “Governance of climate and technological risks in transboundary water bodies”, which showcased concrete examples of multi-hazard/multi-risk approaches.

125. Furthermore, ECE cooperates closely with the Center for Emergency Situations and Disaster Risk Reduction (CESDRR), including through its contributions to the Regional Forum of the Heads of National Disaster Risk Management Authorities of Central Asia (Dushanbe, 4 October 2022).

126. 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, in the implementation of SEIS in Europe and Central Asia. EEA is engaged, as part of a common approach between the ECE, 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 promoting effective implementation of the access to information pillar of the Aarhus Convention and the Protocol on PRTRs.

127. 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)), the European Commission and the Regional Environmental Centres (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. OECD also contributed to the development of the pan-European environmental assessment. ECE 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.

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

129. The Air Convention cooperates, among others, with WMO, the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP), Minamata Convention on Mercury, the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (HELCOM), and the Instrument for Strengthening the Acid Deposition Monitoring Network in East Asia (EANET).

130. 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.

131. In 2022, the Espoo Convention and its Protocol continued the implementation of an activity funded by Italy to facilitate synergies, coordination and cooperation with six relevant regional seas conventions and bodies to protect marine environment and coastal zones, focusing on the Mediterranean Sea and also covering the Arctic, Baltic, Black and Caspian Seas and the North-East Atlantic marine regions. This activity involves close cooperation with the following bodies, secretariats and treaty Parties: the Arctic Council and its Working Group for the Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment; Helsinki Commission servicing



the Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area (Helsinki Convention); the Black Sea Commission for the Bucharest Convention on the Protection of the Black Sea against Pollution; the OSPAR Commission for the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic (OSPAR Convention); and UNEP for the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean (the Barcelona Convention) and Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea (Tehran Convention).

132. The secretariat of the Aarhus Convention continuously pursues a close cooperation with a number of partner organizations, including OSCE, UNEP, UNESCO, UNDP, OHCHR, including Special Rapporteur on the environment; Special Rapporteur on 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; EEA, CBD secretariat, secretariat of UNEP MAP and Barcelona Convention and secretariats of other MEAs; international financial institutions such as the World Bank Group, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the European Investment Bank, and the European ECO Forum.

133. ECE has worked with UNEP, OSCE, UNDP, 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).

134. Furthermore, the secretariat also pursued cooperation with UNEP, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and Council of Europe 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.

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

136. Since 2016 ECE 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.

137. 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.

138. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) office in Romania supported the EPR Programme in logistics matters related to the 3<sup>rd</sup> EPR of Romania.