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Follow-up to the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference and preparation of the mid-term review of the Conference's main outcomes

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17 October 2023

Informal inter-agency coordination group on environmental assessments for Ukraine

Background note by the secretariat¹

Summary

This informal paper provides information to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Committee on Environmental Policy about activities of the ECE secretariat, working with partners, to support the assessment of the environmental damage caused by the war in Ukraine. Such assessment is needed to inform possible environmental remediation measures and to support a green recover and reconstruction in Ukraine.

The Committee might wish to take note of this information.

Introduction

1. The war in Ukraine has also caused widespread and severe damage to the environment and inflicted both immediate and longer-term consequences including on human health, ecosystems and the economy of Ukraine and other countries. The authorities in Ukraine are active in tracking environmental damage, with the State Environmental Inspectorate taking a leading role, guided by the “Operational Headquarters” of Ukraine. Many other actors are contributing to the monitoring of environmental damage.
2. The Ministers at the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Nicosia, 5–7 October 2022) adopted a declaration recognizing the need to assess the environmental consequences of the war for Ukraine and the surrounding region and to provide support to Ukraine in its reconstruction. International organizations were invited to assess the most urgent environmental needs in Ukraine and to make recommendations to promote the sustainable reconstruction of the country.
3. This document is provided to inform the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Committee on Environmental Policy about the actions taken to follow-up the ministerial declaration adopted in Nicosia.

I. Context

4. The Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Nicosia, 5–7 October 2022) saw the adoption of a declaration in which:

[Ministers] recognize[d] the need to assess the environmental consequences of the military aggression against Ukraine for both the country and the surrounding region, and affirm our support to Ukraine in its reconstruction, including for providing subsequent assistance for restoration. [They] invite[d] the ECE secretariat, in cooperation with UNEP, OECD and others, to prioritize assessing the most urgent environmental needs in Ukraine based upon the methodology of the ECE Environmental Performance Review (EPR) Programme and on the results of ongoing and planned impacts assessments, and to make recommendations to advance

¹ This document was not formally edited.

a sustainable recovery of the country, in line with the Lugano Declaration and its seven principles adopted at the Ukraine Recovery Conference of 4–5 July 2022.²

5. In addition, the Economic Commission for Europe, at its seventieth session (Geneva, 18–19 April 2023), adopted a decision A (70)³ that, among others:

Requests the ECE secretariat and relevant subsidiary bodies to continue and intensify efforts towards the implementation of its projects on the reconstruction of Ukraine;

Requests the ECE secretariat to continue to assist Ukraine and neighbouring member States in recovering and rebuilding from the economic, environmental, infrastructure, energy, and social effects of Russia’s aggression to the extent possible within available resources and within the context of existing mandates.

II. Purpose and objectives

6. Numerous actors, at the international and local levels, are undertaking – or have undertaken – different kinds of damage assessment in Ukraine to gather information on the environmental effects of the war.

7. Following the deliberations at the Ministerial Conference, international partners discussed how best to respond to the request regarding assessments. It was agreed that, before any “EPR-like” process is launched, a review of ongoing and planned assessments is arranged to examine the methodologies applied and their functions. Consequently, an informal inter-agency group on environmental assessments for Ukraine was established by ECE, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and it was joined by others.

8. The informal inter-agency coordination group on environmental assessments for Ukraine aims to support the application of robust environmental assessments, to enhance coherence between the assessments, with a focus on the substantive results and methodological approaches applied in carrying them out, and to advise on how to use them to inform the post-war green reconstruction and recovery of Ukraine.

9. The specific objectives pursued by the group include the following:

- (a) Exchange information on ongoing and planned environmental impact assessments;
- (b) Enhance coherence between assessment processes and methodologies, in support of their robustness and adequacy;
- (c) Explore means and technologies for strengthening environmental assessment;
- (d) Support the identification of priorities for remediation or reconstruction;
- (e) Identify possible methodologies and processes for defining remediation measures;
- (f) Promote principles for a green recovery through advocacy and advisory support.

10. The fulfilment of the objectives will be constrained by the availability of resources. The objectives may also evolve as the situation, and the group’s understanding of the situation, develops over time.

11. The group focuses on environmental damage and loss arising from the conflict, including reconstruction needs, within the internationally recognized borders of Ukraine, in the period beginning on 24 February 2022.

III. Membership

12. Membership of the group is limited to international organizations. At present, the members of the group are: ECE, UNEP, OECD, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Ramsar Convention Secretariat and the United Nations Resident Coordinator’s Office (RCO) in Ukraine. Others are invited as observers of or participants in the group’s meetings and activities.

² ECE/NICOSIA.CONF/2022/L.1, para. 4. Available at https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/ECE_NICOSIA.CONF_2022_L.1_E.pdf.

³ Chapter IV of E/2023/37–E/ECE/1503, decision A (70) Economic and Social Effects of Russia’s Aggression Against Ukraine

13. The group maintains continual contact and coordinates its activities with the relevant authorities in Ukraine, led by the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources and the State Environmental Inspectorate.

IV. Activities and plans

14. The inter-agency coordination group has been meeting regularly since 8 November 2022, gathering online about once a month. During these meetings, the members of the group, representatives of Ukrainian institutions, possible observers and other participants exchange relevant information and updates to coordinate and improve the quality of assessments of environmental damage in Ukraine. This regular coordination effort helps foster coherence and synergies, sharpen assessment methodologies and avoid duplication. It also contributes to the robust evidence-base that will be needed for future recovery and reconstruction endeavours. The meetings of the group also offer a platform for Ukrainian authorities to communicate their environmental needs and discuss with the group possible support and activities to address them. In addition to these regular meetings, members of the group have also gathered to organize seminars and other activities.

15. The seminars aim to increase coherence between the different kinds of environmental assessments in Ukraine, promote collaboration between the actors involved and raise awareness on the ongoing efforts supporting Ukraine in this context.

16. The first *Seminar on Assessments of the Environmental Damage Resulting from the Russian Invasion of Ukraine* was held on 16 February 2023. The seminar provided a platform for different actors to share insights on findings and approaches taken so far by them to track environmental damage. Participants focused on the substantive results of their assessments and the methodological approaches applied in carrying them out. Discussions underscored that strengthening coordination and fostering coherence between assessment approaches will be crucial to obtain a meaningful overall picture of environmental impacts.

17. The group organized its second *Seminar on Assessments of the Environmental Damage Resulting from the Russian Invasion of Ukraine: The Use of Earth Observations and Remote Sensing* on 24 May 2023. The seminar focused on remote sensing using satellite imagery and their analysis, other Earth observations methods as well as the links between remote and ground-based analysis. Experts from various organizations presented the methods already applied in Ukraine and those that could be used, focusing on their potential and limitations. Ongoing initiatives and opportunities for collaboration were also considered.

18. The two seminars were held online and respectively brought together 120 and 98 stakeholders, respectively. Participants included representatives of the Government and Parliament of Ukraine, government officials from other ECE member States, United Nations entities, international organizations including OECD, OSCE and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), multilateral development banks including the World Bank and the Council of Europe Development Bank, and international and Ukrainian non-governmental organizations.

19. Following the breach of the Kakhovka Dam on 6 June 2023, the Ukrainian Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources requested UNEP to perform a rapid environmental assessment, while UNEP was also drafting the chapter on environment of the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) on the effects of the breach. The PDNA is a joint effort of the Ukrainian Government, the United Nations and the Kyiv School of Economics, aimed at assisting the Government of Ukraine in assessing the impact of the collapse of the Kakhovka Dam and defining a recovery strategy, including estimating its cost. It consists of one consolidated report of the damage and loss for each sector, complemented by a recovery framework and strategy covering short-, medium- and long-term needs. The other members of the inter-agency group have been involved in discussions and coordination meetings with UNEP and other agencies engaged in drafting the PDNA and have provided input on the assessment of the environmental damage caused by the breach of the dam. A seminar to present the UNEP-led rapid environmental impact assessment and the chapter on environment of the PDNA is planned for the last quarter of 2023, following the launch of the PDNA on 17 October 2023.

20. The group also foresees a seminar on damage to ecosystems, including the use of Earth observations and remote sensing, in late 2023 or early 2024.

21. In response to requests received from Ukraine and the stakeholders of the inter-agency coordination group on environmental assessments for Ukraine, the group has been engaged in mapping the assessments undertaken since the outbreak of the conflict, their scopes and methods, to identify gaps and weaknesses that need to be addressed to maximize their usefulness. To this end, UNECE prepared a collection of studies

related to the environment in Ukraine and maintains an inventory of assessments of the environmental damage resulting from the Russian invasion of Ukraine.⁴

22. To provide a comprehensive overview of the existing, ongoing and planned assessments on environmental damage in Ukraine and a preliminary identification of critical areas for remediation, UNEP hired a consultant in June 2023, with funding provided by Switzerland. The consultant was engaged in (i) a preliminary mapping of the assessments of environmental damage in Ukraine that have been undertaken or are underway, (ii) a preliminary identification of gaps and overlaps in the assessments and the identification of areas where further assessments may be required, (iii) the identification of planned environmental recovery and remediation processes and plans, with the view to identify possible follow-up support by the inter-agency coordination group, and (iv) the production of a report including the result of the mapping exercise, identification of gaps and overlaps as well as preliminary indication of possible remediation measures. The consultant presented interim results to the inter-agency group and representatives of Ukraine on 18 October 2023, with final results due at the end of 2023.

23. Members of the inter-agency group have provided or facilitated the provision of expert comments and reviews on, for example, the draft air pollution methodology developed by the Scientific and Expert Council of the State Environmental Inspectorate of Ukraine. Experts from UNECE and UNEP participated in meetings of the State Environmental Inspectorate to engage in practical discussions on the draft methodology. The group will support the development of other methodologies, depending on the needs of Ukrainian authorities.

24. The group has begun discussing possible activities for the promotion of principles for a green recovery and reconstruction, including the organization of a seminar on this topic. The group is also exploring whether it might promote or support a possible intergovernmental platform for policy dialogue on green recovery of Ukraine, an initiative aimed at ensuring participatory, scientifically sound, economically feasible and effective planning for green recovery of Ukraine.

V. Funding and resources

26. To date, UNEP and OECD have benefited from financial contributions to support the work, including for the hiring of a consultant and the provision of an online platform with English-Ukrainian interpretation for seminars.

⁴ Inventory available at <https://unece.org/environment/documents/2023/03/working-documents/inventory-assessments-environmental-damage>. However, this version will be updated based on the information gathered by a consultant (as described in para. 22).