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COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment

Eighth session
Geneva, 12–13 June 2007

REPORT OF THE MEETING

1. The eighth session of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment was held in Geneva on 12 and 13 June 2007.
2. The meeting was attended by delegations from Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, Georgia, Hungary, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Poland, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Switzerland, Tajikistan, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.
3. Representatives of the European Commission's TACIS (Technical Aid to the Commonwealth of Independent States) monitoring programme and the European Environment Agency (EEA) attended the meeting.
4. Representatives of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP-Montenegro), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) attended, as did a civil society organization representative from the Volgograd-Ecopress Information Centre (Russian Federation) and a business and industry representative from the Nikochem Corporation/JSC "Caustic" (Russian Federation).
5. Mr. Yuri Tsaturov (Russian Federation) chaired the meeting.

I. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

6. The Working Group adopted the agenda as contained in document ECE/CEP/AC.10/2007/1 with an interchange of items 5 and 6.

II. ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE SEVENTH SESSION

7. The Working Group adopted the report for its seventh session as contained in document ECE/CEP/AC.10/2006/12.

III. FOURTH PAN-EUROPEAN REPORT ON THE ENVIRONMENT

A. Communication and dissemination of the Belgrade Assessment

8. A representative of EEA made a presentation on the Belgrade report preparation process, key messages of the report, the approach applied to handle comments received on draft report chapters and on areas of cooperation to support future pan-European assessments. She reported on a meeting with national focal points and country communication officers to be held in Copenhagen in September 2007 to discuss the dissemination of the Belgrade Assessment, the launch of the report in Belgrade on 10 October 2007 after the first plenary session of the Sixth Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe", and on plans to make both English and Russian versions of the report available online thereafter.

9. During the ensuing discussion, several delegations expressed concern that they were not able to check how specific comments from their Ministries had been reflected in final versions of individual report chapters. One delegation which had been provided during the meeting with an access to the revised draft chapters, invited EEA to correct a box on the Bystroe Channel in chapter on marine and coastal environment to reflect its earlier comments on the matter. Some delegations invited EEA to ensure a continuous access to the report to members of the Working Group.

10. Some delegations held the view that the discussion of the report conclusions at the Belgrade Ministerial Conference should lead to practical action to resolve specific problems such as water management, land degradation and chemicals management. The need was also stressed for work after the Belgrade Conference on further strengthening and harmonizing environmental data collection, producing pan-European environmental indicators, and promoting comparability of environmental statistics. Examples were presented of plans in some countries to communicate the report findings to the public.

11. The Working Group thanked EEA for the information provided and invited delegations to brief their ministers on the report preparation and to designate participants for the report dissemination workshop to be organized by EEA this autumn.

B. Specific activities supporting the preparation of the Belgrade report

12. The TACIS project coordinator from EEA made a presentation on the implementation of various activities under the three components of the project – water, air and climate change – and

improvements in environmental information and reporting. He presented the objectives of each component, activities implemented and a feedback form Eastern European, Caucasian and Central Asian (EECCA) participants.

13. The head of the European Topic Centre (ETC) on Inland Waters of EEA presented a needs assessment report for investment by bilateral and multilateral donors in surface water-quality monitoring in EECCA countries. The report had resulted from visits within the water component of the EEA/TACIS project to all EECCA countries except Turkmenistan and a training workshop for EECCA water experts.

14. Delegations that participated in the discussion thanked the ETC for the results presented. While acknowledging the limited scope of the needs assessment made, they called upon the European Commission (EC) to launch, without delay, a capital investment phase as a follow up. This should be accompanied in EECCA countries by expert training, intercalibration exercises and the extrapolation of good laboratory practices from future national reference laboratories to other analytical laboratories in EECCA countries.

15. The Secretary to the Working Group informed the meeting about the decisions that the Committee on Environmental Policy had taken at its meeting of 29 May 2007 regarding the Working Group's documents prepared within the indicator component of the EEA/TACIS project and associated documents. The Committee agreed on the recommendations to Governments of EECCA countries for the application of environmental indicators and the preparation of indicator-based environmental assessment reports as well as on the guidelines for strengthening environmental monitoring and reporting by enterprises in EECCA, and decided to transmit these two documents to the Belgrade Ministerial Conference under category I for possible action. In addition, the Committee adopted the guidelines for the application of environmental indicators in EECCA and for the preparation of indicator-based environmental assessment reports in EECCA. A publication containing the latter two guidelines will be transmitted to the Belgrade Conference under category II.

16. The Working Group welcomed the transmission of the major products of its activities since the Kiev Ministerial Conference to the upcoming Ministerial Conference in Belgrade and the inclusion of important elements on monitoring and assessment into the draft ministerial declaration. It invited its members to work closely with their representatives in the Preparatory Working Group of Senior Officials and the Drafting Group on the Belgrade Ministerial Declaration to raise the profile of monitoring and assessment issues in Belgrade.

17. Representatives of UNEP presented the data compendium revised in the light of online consultation with EECCA experts during summer 2007. The compendium covered a set of 15 indicators from and followed the methodology of, the Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators in EECCA. The delegations that participated in the discussion thanked UNEP for the work done and invited it to harmonize time series and to make data assessments more nuanced, to reflect substantive differences between EECCA countries.

C. Related products for the Belgrade Ministerial Conference

18. A representative of UNDP-Montenegro presented a report on environmental policy in

South-Eastern Europe (SEE). A representative of UNEP reported on the preparation of 12 indicators on SEE from the EEA core set of environmental indicators. The Working Group thanked the authors of the presentations.

19. In the absence of representatives from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation (OECD), a representative of EEA briefly informed participants about the assessment report on the implementation of the EECCA Environment Strategy by the Task Force on the Environmental Action Programme (EAP TF). The Working Group expressed its regret that OECD was not represented at the meeting. It expressed concern over some statements in the EAP TF report regarding EECCA countries.

D. Lessons learned for the future

20. Representatives of EEA made presentations on the results of data collection for the Belgrade Assessment (section by section) and on the need to establish a common environmental information system for the pan-European region. They informed the meeting about the intention of EEA to prepare a comprehensive paper for the Working Group on lessons learned from the data collection exercise. They voiced the need for the creation of an annually updated environmental database on EECCA indicators.

21. In the ensuing discussion, the delegations proposed: (a) to streamline future data collections through the cooperation with the Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States and EECCA national statistical offices on the basis of the Indicator Guidelines; (b) to widely use data collected from EECCA on questionnaires for the Kiev Assessment (especially on water); and (c) to cooperate closely with United Nations agencies using their agreed methodologies in data collection for pan-European assessments.

22. The Secretary to the Working Group informed the Working Group about the secretariat paper "Making Monitoring and Assessment an Effective Tool in Environmental Policy" (ECE/CEP/2007/7), prepared for the Committee on Environmental Policy at the request of the Committee's Bureau, to stimulate the debate on monitoring and assessment at the Belgrade Conference.

23. The Working Group thanked the secretariat for the preparation of the paper. It stressed that the paper demonstrated the avenues for future work on environmental monitoring and assessment in UNECE. The Working Group took note of the explanations of an EEA representative regarding the change in future financing modalities by EC of its support to EECCA and invited EECCA delegations to contact their country representatives to ensure that future EC support approaches take into account the needs of EECCA in strengthening capacities in monitoring and assessment.

IV. LINKING AIR-QUALITY MONITORING WITH DECISION-MAKING

24. A consultant to the UNECE secretariat presented the results of the Workshop on the Interaction between Air-quality Monitoring and Air-protection Strategies in EECCA Countries

held in Geneva on 11 June 2007¹. Experts from 16 countries, several international organizations, civil society organizations and the private sector were in attendance. Presentations and discussions focused on the air quality section of the Belgrade Assessment, current status and developments in air-quality monitoring in EECCA countries: on integrating monitoring with pollution control, the modernization of monitoring networks and the management of air-quality data; and on elements for national strategies to link monitoring with policymaking. A possible follow-up might involve a cost assessment of options for modernizing air-monitoring networks using case studies of interested EECCA countries and updating air-quality standards and developing air-quality targets as policy tools.

25. The delegations that participated in the ensuing discussion highly appreciated the usefulness of the Workshop and elements for developing national strategies for the use of air-quality monitoring as environmental policy tool that were submitted to the Workshop by the consultant to the secretariat. They emphasized the importance of developing clear air-quality targets to serve as a policy tool for both pollution abatement and monitoring. The need was stressed to transform the consultant's paper into a strong policy message for decision-makers in EECCA countries.

26. The Working Group thanked the Workshop participants for the work done and agreed to decide at its next meeting (should the Working Group's mandate be renewed) on a specific follow-up which might include the preparation of a paper for decision-makers covering target setting on air quality, timing considerations, and the cost assessment of monitoring needs and technical measures to control emissions in industry and transport. Practicalities would be also considered at the instance of analyzing in a similar manner monitoring needs in other areas like water, land and soil.

V. REPORTING TO THE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

27. The secretariat introduced a draft report to the Committee on Environmental Policy on the implementation of the Working Group's mandate (ECE/CEP/AC.10/2007/3). The Chair presented his compilation of country inputs to the questionnaire on the usefulness of Working Group's activities that had been circulated by the secretariat among EECCA countries (ECE/CEP/AC.10/2007/3/Add.1).

28. Delegations emphasized the importance of renewing and strengthening the Working Group after the Belgrade Ministerial Conference. They presented specific examples of the application of Working Group's recommendations, guidelines and analytical documents in their countries. Proposals for future activities included improved collection, quality and comparability of environmental data, further work on environmental indicators and indicator-based assessments, making monitoring an environmental policy tool, sharing relevant experiences between SEE and EECCA, creating regional and subregional environmental information systems, and evaluating the implementation of adopted recommendations on monitoring and assessment in individual countries.

¹ Documentation from the Workshop, including informal papers and presentations, is available on the Working Group's website at: <http://www.unece.org/env/europe/monitoring/workshops/wksp-7.06.07.e.htm>.

29. The Working Group agreed to transmit its report to the Committee (as contained in (ECE/CEP/AC.10/2007/3 and Add.1) with a recommendation to convert the ad hoc Working Group into a Working Party on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment using the current terms of reference as a basis for the mandate of the Working Party that might be updated in the light of an outcome of the Belgrade Conference. It welcomed the EEA intention to get in touch with the EC to reflect monitoring and assessment considerations in an upcoming EC communication on modalities for future financing support to individual and groups of EECCA and SEE countries.

VI. ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING AND REPORTING BY ENTERPRISES

30. A representative from the Nikochem Corporation/JSC “Caustic” made a presentation on the Enterprise Consultative Board which interested companies participating in the Working Group from Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation had established on their initiative to support the Working Group’s work programme. She informed the meeting in particular about the interest and readiness of the Board to support possible development by the Working Group of guidelines on environmental monitoring programmes in the chemical industry and of environmental monitoring guidelines for the exploration, extraction and transportation of oil and gas in the Caspian Sea area.

31. Consultants to the secretariat introduced a feasibility study, prepared with the financial support from the Nikochem Corporation, on the development of guidelines on environmental monitoring programmes in the chemical industry for enterprise management and relevant public authorities in EECCA. This presented version was prepared in the light of the consultation held in Geneva on 11 May 2007 with the participation of representatives of interested environment ministries from EECCA countries, chemical and petrochemical companies and a civil society organization.

32. The delegations that took part in the ensuing discussion welcomed the initiatives of business and industry to support the Working Group’s activities. They stressed the importance of developing environmental monitoring guidelines for specific industries that would greatly support overall monitoring activities in EECCA. They noted, at the same time, that while in the European Union there was a set of various rules and methodologies on environmental monitoring for the chemical industry, there were no explicit self-standing guidelines that might serve as the basis for the development of similar guidelines for EECCA countries. Some delegations stressed that the proposed guidelines for EECCA would require active involvement of national authorities responsible for setting technical regulations for industries such as ministries of industry. They preferred first to start with the preparation of case studies for interested enterprises. Other delegations expressed the support of their environment ministries for the development of sectoral environmental monitoring guidelines, which could serve as examples to other industries.

33. The Working Group thanked the Nikochem Corporation for its initiative and the financial support provided and the consultants for the feasibility study prepared. It agreed to revert to the issue at the earliest should the Committee decide on a renewed mandate for the Working Group.

34. The meeting documentation, including informal papers and presentations, is available on the Working Group’s website <http://www.unece.org/env/europe/monitoring>.