



**Economic and Social  
Council**

Distr.  
GENERAL

CEP/AC.10/2000/3  
6 June 2000

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

**Preparatory Meeting on Environmental Monitoring**

(13-14 July 2000)

(Item 4 of the provisional agenda)

**FRAMEWORK FOR A PROGRAMME FOR THE AD HOC WORKING GROUP  
ON ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING**

Note by the Chairman of the Committee on Environmental Policy

**Background and organization**

1. The ad hoc working group on environmental monitoring, to be established under the auspices of the Committee on Environmental Policy of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UN/ECE), is foreseen as an instrument to improve pan-European cooperation on environmental monitoring. In this context environmental monitoring is defined as “gathering, assessing and reporting environmental information obtained through continuous or periodic sampling, observation and analysis of both natural variation or changes and anthropogenic pressures and their effects on humans and the environment.”

2. The creation of this group is the direct result of an initiative taken at the Fourth Pan-European Conference of Environment Ministers, “Environment for Europe”, (Århus, Denmark, June 1998), of a subsequent meeting in Moscow, 8-9 December 1999, and a decision of the Bureau of the Committee on Environmental Policy (Geneva, February 2000).

3. As stated in the draft terms of reference for the ad hoc working group on environmental monitoring prepared at the meeting in Moscow in December 1999, the overall objective should be to strengthen environmental monitoring and reporting in Europe in order to provide good, reliable and relevant information as a basis for improved environmental policy-making. Consequently, the ad hoc working group should strengthen existing networks

GE.00-31763

of environmental monitoring in Europe, promote coordination between them, and build capacity in those countries where support is needed. Particular, though not exclusive, emphasis should be given to the newly independent States (NIS). Consequently, the work could benefit from a phased approach, while aiming at fulfilling a number of separate, practical tasks.

4. A key, practical objective of the ad hoc working group will be to contribute to the development of an indicator-based report on the state of the European environment to be prepared by the European Environment Agency (EEA). The Agency was given this task by the Ministers at the Århus Conference in 1998, who asked it to present the report at the Fifth Pan-European Conference to be held in Kiev in 2002.

### **Needs assessment**

5. Initially, the ad hoc working group should strive to identify the main needs for strengthening/reforming monitoring systems to support both national and international policy-making. With very scarce resources and a fragmented monitoring system, many countries in eastern Europe - in particular NIS – urgently need to reconsider monitoring efforts and target them towards the most pressing policy needs and information demands.

6. The second dimension of the needs assessment is the generation of the main information for indicators. Consensus on this must be reached for the Kiev report. The needs and resources of individual countries will differ; this must be reflected in the prioritization of national information items and indicators.

7. Regarding both national and international needs, the work can draw on the work on a core set of information and indicators by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), work by the United Nations Statistical Commission, other work by the European Environment Agency and work on the harmonization of environmental monitoring carried out by UN/ECE or the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), plus work carried out by the secretariats of a number of international conventions. An important task will be to identify gaps and/or reporting overlaps and discuss ways to eliminate them.

8. For the second dimension, major obstacles to the generation of the relevant information should be identified. Previous analysis of environmental information systems in central and east European countries carried out by OECD and others have pointed at a range of technical, organizational and institutional problems. The ad hoc working group should focus on a few of the most pervasive obstacles and seek to develop recommendations to overcome them.

### **Addressing specific needs**

9. The work should address ways to strengthen the monitoring systems - responding to the main problems identified. This could be split in a number of specific tasks.

### Task 1: Support to the development of the Kiev report

10. Work on the Kiev report is already under way so that it can be finished in time for the Kiev Conference. The ad hoc working group's role in this task is to support the work of EEA. The ad hoc working group's assistance could be tailored to meet its other objectives, such as that of using the report as a basis for studying and improving environmental monitoring. This should include building practical capacity in those countries not previously involved in reporting to "Environment for Europe" ministerial meetings - namely a number of NIS.

11. Ministers in Århus requested EEA to develop an indicator-based report on the state of the environment in order to meet policy needs more closely. In this context, an indicator is used to communicate the outcome of an analysis of developments in different sectors of society and the environment in order to answer policy-relevant questions. EEA is working on developing an outline of the analysis needed. It will be circulated later.

### Task 2: In-depth study of the monitoring situation in one or two areas

12. The in-depth analysis of a few significant areas of environmental monitoring is expected to shed light on good practices and major obstacles. This effort should then form the basis for common recommendations. The priorities of NIS and central and east European countries should guide the choice of topics for these case studies. Particular focus should also be given to the link between monitoring and reporting obligations under relevant intergovernmental processes and agreements.

### Task 3: Tools and guidelines

13. The ad hoc working group should work to identify and focus on areas where there are no common standards and harmonization is needed. It should work to outline common standards and formats in these areas and to improve the inter-operability of data to facilitate data transfer and use. This could lead to the building of a harmonized meta-database on sources of data and data sets, institutes, reports and other products. Other possible products could be a multi-lingual environmental thesaurus, standardized on-line, national state-of-the-environment reports and linking of Web-sites. This work could draw on previous work carried out by the United Nations Division for Sustainable Development, the United Nations Statistical Commission, OECD, UNEP, UN/ ECE, EEA and others.

### Task 4: Remote sensing

14. The role of remote sensing in environmental monitoring featured prominently at the meeting in Moscow. A special analysis of the role and contribution of remotely sensed environmental information to monitoring environmental problems across Europe could be carried out. Consistent information in a pan-European context is difficult to obtain, and some geographical areas are poorly covered by ground-based monitoring. An analysis should be made of the role that satellite information might play in this context.

**Time-frame**

15. The work should start mid-2000. Task 1 must be finalized in time for the Fifth Pan-European Conference of Environment Ministers in Kiev in 2002. Other work may also begin during this period. The ad hoc working group should report to the ministers at the Kiev Conference on progress achieved in other tasks, and based on this information the Ministers should decide on the future of the ad hoc working group.