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COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

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(Item 11 (a) of the provisional agenda)

ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING

Progress report by the Chair of the Working Group

1. The Committee on Environmental Policy established an Ad Hoc Working Group on Environmental Monitoring chaired by the Russian Federation in autumn 2000. The Working Group has held three sessions so far: in September 2001, February-March 2002 and in August 2002¹. In accordance with its terms of reference and work plan², it kept under review and contributed to the preparations of the 3rd pan-European assessment report on the environment («Kiev Assessment»), reviewed the situation with monitoring and information in individual countries in transition, and launched activities in a number of areas.

2. The Government of Denmark provided financial support for participation of experts from countries in transition in the Working Group meetings and for some substantive activities. A grant agreement was concluded in summer 2002 between the European Commission (EC) and the European Environment Agency (EEA) on strengthening environmental information and observation capacity in twelve countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia. Under this agreement, Tacis funds will be made available for the implementation of core activities under the Working Group's work plan.

I. Kiev Assessment Report

3. Many UNECE countries designated members of the Working Group to serve as national focal points for the Kiev Assessment. The Working Group reviewed the draft list of contents of the Kiev Assessment and made comments and proposals regarding, among other things, topics to be addressed, the time periods to be covered, the level of detail in the

¹ See meeting reports CEP/AC.10/2001/2, CEP/AC.10/2002/2 and CEP/AC.10/2001/15.

² See <http://www-dev.unece.org/env/europe/wg.htm>.

assessments, use of existing international databases for data collection, the practicalities of making the report user-friendly, and the involvement of NGOs and other major groups in the discussion of the report and dissemination of its findings in UNECE subregions. The discussions led to revisions in the list of contents of the Kiev Assessment.

4. The Working Group reviewed draft guidelines for data collection; questionnaires for country data on soil, waste and water; draft conclusions on EEA members, some early chapters and the preliminary findings of the Kiev Assessment. At a special session, with the participation of EEA focal points, to be held on 28-29 November 2002 in Geneva, the Working Group will consider the draft findings, summary and all available chapters of the Kiev Assessment. The EEA plans to publish the report in March 2003.

II. Strengthening national monitoring and information systems

5. The preparation of the Kiev Assessment allowed the Working Group to discuss ways and means to improve environmental monitoring and reporting in selected areas in countries that are not EEA members, and opportunities to harmonize these countries methodologies, indicators and practices with those that are applied in EEA members. Emphasis was placed on monitoring of inland waters and air pollution, waste inventories and classifications, and on environmental indicators.

6. A task force was established under the leadership of the European Topic Centre on Inland Waters (United Kingdom). It will assess information and monitoring systems for inland waters in twelve countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia and make proposals to fill in existing gaps in monitoring and information, establish integrated national data banks for inland waters, and improve cooperation and data exchange between countries covered by EUROWATERNET and the twelve countries concerned.

7. Having considered the situation with air pollution monitoring in countries that are not EEA members, the Working Group considered it important that the Executive Body for the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution be invited to prepare proposals for a programme, to be implemented jointly with the Working Group, on capacity building for air pollution monitoring in the countries concerned. Pending the development of such capacity-building programme, preparations are underway to help Kazakhstan, at its request, to develop a section on monitoring for its air pollution abatement strategy. This activity would advise also other new Parties to the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and the Republic of Moldova) on practical ways and means to develop air pollution inventories, to apply measurement techniques and emission modelling for major pollutants, and to establish transboundary monitoring stations.

8. The Working Group reviewed indicators developed by EEA to help individual countries to monitor progress in waste prevention, waste management and material flows, and to provide comparable information at the pan-European level. It recommended Governments of countries

that were not covered by EEA networks to consider using these sets of indicators in their national practices. Arrangements are being made to help Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia to introduce routine data collection and reporting on wastes and the use of indicators on waste and material flows that are compatible with those applied in EEA countries.

9. The Working Group organized round-table discussions on problems and prospects of environmental monitoring in nine countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia. The debates focused on a draft strategy for updating and developing the State system of pollution monitoring in Georgia, the development of the national environmental monitoring system in Belarus, a review of environmental monitoring activities in Central Asia, and on approaches to improving environmental monitoring in the Russian Federation and Ukraine. The Working Group developed a series of recommendations to Governments of countries concerned.

III. Information systems and reporting

10. The Working Group established a task force, with the Russian Federation as lead country, to develop practical tools and instruments, using modern information technologies, to improve the use and exchange of environmental information in twelve countries that were not covered by EEA, and to harmonize these countries' approaches with those applied within EEA networks.

11. The Workshop on Information Technologies for Environmental Monitoring and Assessment was held in February 2002 in the Russian Federation to discuss practicalities of establishing Internet-based inter-connected environmental information systems in countries that were not covered by EEA using tools and guidelines applied within the EEA. The Workshop also voiced the need of developing recommendations to Governments (in the form of guidelines) on improving national state-of-the-environment reporting, including the use of core indicator sets and modern information technologies, and on better use of these reports for environmental policy- and decision-making.

12. Pursuant to this proposal, the Working Group reviewed the current situation with state of the environment reporting in the twelve countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia, and decided to convene a workshop in Moscow on 31 October-1 November 2002 to prepare draft guidelines, on the basis of this review and similar studies by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and EEA. In addition, it is envisaged to promote the use in Armenia, Republic of Moldova and Tajikistan of a core set of environmental indicators, and to help these countries producing state of the environment reports on a regular basis.

IV. Remote sensing

13. The Working Group discussed possibilities for using remote sensing to complement existing ground-based monitoring systems taking into account, in particular, the recent Global Monitoring for Environment and Security (GMES) initiative. It established a task force led by the EC Joint Research Centre to identify and map, as a first step, a key set of indicators, derived from remote sensing for environmental assessments in selected Eurasian regions (Eastern Europe, Siberia and Central Asia) and marine basins (Baltic Sea, Black

Sea and Caspian Sea). The elaboration of proposals for a demonstration exercise, an awareness campaign for potential end-users and training activities will be the next step.

V. Coordination of international initiatives

14. The Working Group works in close coordination and cooperation with intergovernmental organizations and institutions and non-governmental organizations that are active in the UNECE region on environmental monitoring and information. It prepared an inventory of twenty-six international environmental databases that are based on data collection from a substantive number of UNECE Governments. The review identified gaps in country coverage, weaknesses in data reporting and some problems in data accessibility. These findings might help individual countries and relevant intergovernmental bodies responsible for data collection to improve the current situation.

VI. Contributions to the Kiev Conference

15. In the light of its above-mentioned activities, the Working Group is expected to provide inputs to a possible environmental monitoring session at the Kiev Conference, as follows:

- (a) Findings of the Kiev Assessment, particularly those relating to environmental monitoring and information;
- (b) Lessons learned from data collection for the Kiev Assessment;
- (c) Recommendations to countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia on strengthening national environmental monitoring and information systems;
- (d) Guidelines on improving national state-of-the-environment reporting.

VII. Possible action by the Committee

17. The Committee on Environmental Policy may wish:

- (a) To take note of the progress made in the activities of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and to invite delegations that have not yet designated their representatives in the Working Group, to do so as soon as possible;
- (b) To invite the Executive Body for the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution to prepare, through its EMEP Steering Body and centres, possible proposals for a short-term (two- to three-year long) programme, to be implemented jointly with the Working Group, on capacity building in countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia, taking into account, in particular:
 - (i) Data collection priorities under the Convention and its protocols;
 - (ii) Country needs for air pollution monitoring systems that would provide data and

information to local, national and international decision-makers;

- (iii) Opportunities for establishing an institutional structure, supported by the necessary resources, with the participation of experts from Eastern Europe, Caucasus, Central Asia and interested Western countries as well as representatives of EMEP centers.