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COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

Twelfth session,
(Geneva, 10-12 October 2005)
(Item 3(e) of the provisional agenda)

**MINUTES OF THE FOURTH INFORMAL MEETING BETWEEN THE BUREAUX OF
THE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY AND OF THE GOVERNING
BODIES OF THE UNECE ENVIRONMENTAL CONVENTIONS**
(Geneva, 6 June 2005)

Introduction

1. A fourth informal meeting was held on 6 June 2005 between the representatives of the Bureaux of the Committee on Environmental Policy and of the governing bodies of the UNECE environmental conventions, namely the Conventions on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution (CLRTAP), on Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) in a Transboundary Context, on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention), on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents (Industrial Accidents Convention), and on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention).
2. It followed up on the informal meeting of 7 June 2004 (CEP/2004/10) to continue sharing experiences and finding synergies and areas of cooperation to assess and promote the implementation of the environmental legal instruments in the region.
3. In line with the recommendations from the previous meeting, the informal discussions focused in particular on: (a) financial and human resources allocated for environmental activities within the UNECE; (b) synergies between the UNECE environmental conventions at both international and national levels, and (c) possible items to be negotiated or prepared for discussion or adoption at the 2007 Belgrade Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe".

4. Mr. Zaal Lomtadze (Georgia), Chairman of the Committee on Environmental Policy chaired the meeting.
5. The list of participants is contained in annex I below.

I. RATIFICATION STATUS OF THE FIVE UNECE MULTILATERAL ENVIRONMENTAL AGREEMENTS

6. The participants received information on the status of ratification of the conventions and their protocols.

II. SHARING EXPERIENCES TO FIND SYNERGIES AND AREAS OF COOPERATION

A. Financial and human resources allocated for environmental activities within the UNECE

7. The representatives of the governing bodies of the five conventions gave an account of the availability and use of resources for the implementation of the activities under the conventions. Detailed information on contributions and expenditures under the Conventions had been made available to the meeting participants in advance of the meeting.
8. As a general rule, most of the activities under the conventions are being carried out by means of extra budgetary funds, while the UNECE regular budget covers staff costs for most of the convention secretariats and for conference services, including translation and reproduction of documents and interpretation costs.
9. The meeting was informed about the voluntary scheme for financing the work programmes under the Aarhus Convention. The scheme is based on a system of "shares" that allows the Parties to grant any number of shares or portions of shares. A similar system has been established under the Espoo Convention. The Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention had assessed the system in May 2005 and agreed to continue with broadly a similar scheme for the time being. Some parties had however wished to see the system improved further to ensure fairer sharing of the burden and better predictability of future income. The next meeting will be discussing further the possibility of making the scheme mandatory in the future and of applying the UN scale for the contributions.
10. Owing to the fairly limited resources both within the UNECE secretariat and within the Member Countries for servicing and implementing the Conventions, it was deemed essential that, when initiating new activities, resources be ensured either by a Lead Country or by pledges of extra budgetary funds. Parties that propose activities should be invited to give an indication on how much money they are willing to contribute to their implementation. At the same time, the meeting agreed that some consideration should be given in this respect to the unequal capabilities of the countries (in transition) as regards the financial contributions.

11. The meeting acknowledged the need to harmonize, as much as possible, the reporting by the various conventions on the use of extra budgetary funds, with a clear indication of expenses, balance of funds, funds received and how they are spent. An indication of the percentage of the time that the regular budget staff spent on various activities was also seen as useful. It was also agreed that financial statements provided by the UNECE administration on the contributions and expenditures related to the trust funds would be made available. This could also provide an overview of the financial contributions of countries to the five Conventions. The meeting emphasized, however, that due consideration should be given to the in kind contributions for various activities the full costs of which was often difficult to estimate.

12. In conclusion, the meeting identified the need to:

(a) Collect information on donor's contributions for each of the conventions. This information would allow comparison and would single out those countries that may not be contributing to any of the conventions. On the basis of the information obtained, the joint Bureau meeting could look into ways of encouraging further commitment from the countries and stimulating financing of the activities.

(b) Explore the possibilities for the EECCA countries to provide in kind contributions. It was deemed important to further convince policy makers in EECCA of the usefulness and value added for their countries of investing in the relevant activities under the conventions.

B. Synergies between the UNECE environmental conventions at both international and national levels

13. The meeting discussed the cooperation and synergies between the conventions at three levels. The cooperation between the secretariats of the five UNECE conventions was considered to be good. On the whole, the meeting considered that the dialogue and cooperation between the governing bodies of the conventions had improved over the years and was further developing, with some joint activities being more advanced than others.

14. At national level, coordination between the focal points for the different conventions was considered rather weak in some countries, partly because of the lack of adequate structures for cooperation within the environmental administration. Further need to cooperate with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the other line ministries was also identified. In other countries, however, internal cooperation was considered rather good.

15. It was noted that cooperation between the different offices responsible for environmental programmes takes place mostly during preparation of national contributions for meetings, such as the Environment for Europe Conference or other major meetings, rather than on a more permanent basis by means of structures specifically established for that purpose. Mechanisms for internal coordination were seen as important, particularly in transition countries, in order to ensure continuity of the activities at country level, in case of changes in government.

16. It was suggested that the CEP delegates could play a role in improving the coordination of environmental activities and promoting the implementation of the Conventions.

C. Possible items to be negotiated and/or prepared for discussion/adoption at the 2007

Belgrade Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe"

17. The meeting held initial discussions on the possible topics for the Belgrade Conference. In most cases, it was too early for countries to have an official view on the topics that they wished to see on the Belgrade agenda.

18. The meeting was informed about the possibility of organizing an event in Belgrade to mark the 10th anniversary of the EIA Convention in 2007. The representative of the Bureau of the EIA governing body briefed the meeting about the proposal to commission an outside, independent report on the implementation of, and compliance with, the five UNECE Conventions in time for the Belgrade Conference.

19. The meeting was also informed about the review processes that have started under the Convention on LRTAP since the entry into force of the three most recent protocols. It has been proposed to consider the amendments and additions to the protocols as a package rather than separately but it is not yet possible to know exactly what proposals may come forward during the review process. Work on regulating particulate matter under the Convention is underway, but it is still uncertain whether enough progress will have been made by 2007 to allow the adoption of these regulations in Belgrade. As regards the action plans for integrating the EECCA countries into the protocols (through mission inventories, need assessment's and technical exchange of information), a report outlining the achievements and challenges of this work will be prepared for the Belgrade Conference.

20. Information on the implementation of the support programme for the EECCA countries under the Industrial Accident Convention would be available in time for the Belgrade conference.

21. Finally, the Chairman of the Committee considered that the first meeting of the Working Group of Senior Officials (WGSO) in October would be a good opportunity to start discussions on the themes and topics for Belgrade. Delegates were also invited to initiate talks on this issue, at national level, as soon as possible.

D. Means for addressing public participation in international forums relevant to the environment

22. The meeting was informed about the guidelines for addressing public participation in international forums relevant to the environment, which were adopted by the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention in Almaty, in May 2005. They provide guidance to Parties on how to apply the principles of the convention in international bodies and processes dealing with environmental matters.

23. Once the official translations of the guidelines are available, the secretariat will send them to the relevant international forums. Consultations with these international forums will be subsequently carried out with the objective of promoting the use of the guidelines under the auspices of other relevant bodies, including the other UNECE environmental conventions. A task force has been set up to identify the bodies to be consulted as well as the procedure and the time schedule for the consultation itself, subject to the approval of the Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention. The consultations will be completed in time for the Meeting of the

Parties to the Aarhus Convention in 2008, where it will be decided whether amendments to the guidelines are needed. It was emphasized that the international forums were free to decide whether they are going to apply the guidelines and if so how. The other convention bodies stressed the importance of transparent and timely consultations on the further application of the guidelines.

III. TOPICS AND ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION AT THE NEXT MEETING

24. The meeting discussed the optimal interval for the informal consultations and agreed on the usefulness of the yearly meetings for exchanging information and enhancing cooperation between the conventions. It agreed to hold its next meeting on 5 June 2006, in particular to discuss topics related the up-coming Belgrade Ministerial Conference. The invitation together with the agenda would be prepared by the UNECE secretariat in consultation with the Bureaux of the governing bodies and of the Committee.

25. The topics proposed for discussion at the next meeting include:
- (a) Preparations for the Belgrade Conference;
 - (b) Second regional implementation forum on sustainable development: outcome and followup.
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Annex**LIST OF PARTICIPANTS**
ENGLISH ONLY

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