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REVIEW OF THE PROGRAMME OF WORK FOR 2007-2008

**REPORT OF THE SIXTH MEETING BETWEEN THE BUREAUX OF THE
COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY AND THE GOVERNING
BODIES OF THE UNECE ENVIRONMENTAL CONVENTIONS**

Note by the secretariat

1. The sixth informal meeting took place on 12 February 2007 in Geneva between the Bureau of the Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP), represented by Ms. Ruzanna Davtyan (Armenia), Mr. Zaal Lomtadze (Georgia), Mr. Bert-Axel Szelinski (Germany), Ms. Eldrid Nordbo (Norway), Mr. Czeslaw Wieckowski (Poland), Mr. Jon Kahn (Sweden) and Mr. John Michael Matuszak (United States of America), and the governing bodies of the UNECE environmental conventions, namely the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution (Air Pollution Convention), represented by Mr. Richard Ballaman (Switzerland); the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention), represented by Mr. Ioan Gherghes (Romania); the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) represented by Ms. Heide Jekel (Germany) and Mr. Massimo Cozzone (Italy); the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents (Industrial Accidents Convention), represented by Ms. Giuliana Gasparrini (Italy); and the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention), represented by Ms. Mona Aarhus (Norway) and Ms. Giuliana Gasparrini (Italy).
2. Mr. Zaal Lomtadze (Georgia), Chair of the CEP, chaired the meeting.

3. The meeting followed up on the informal meeting of 27 June 2006 (ECE/CEP/2006/2) to continue sharing experiences and finding synergies and areas for cooperation to assess and promote the implementation of environmental legal instruments in the UNECE region.

4. In line with the recommendations from the previous meeting, the informal discussions focused in particular on the following issues:

(a) Preparations for the sixth Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe” (Belgrade, 10–12 October 2007), with a focus on the preparation of a draft background paper on “Implementation of UNECE Multilateral Environmental Agreements”;

(b) Capacity-building activities carried out in the framework of the UNECE environmental conventions’ programmes of work: approaches and lessons learned;

(c) Topics and issues for discussion at future meetings.

5. In addition, the secretariat informed the meeting about the steps taken under the Water Convention and the Industrial Accidents Convention to support the entry into force of the Protocol on Civil Liability, involving notably a workshop scheduled for 21–22 May 2007 in Budapest to analyse obstacles to the ratification of the Protocol and to propose a way forward.

6. The Aarhus Convention secretariat provided an update on the process of consultation with international forums on the Almaty Guidelines on Promoting the Application of the Principles of the Aarhus Convention in International Forums. The outcome is summarized in a synthesis report for submission to the Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention in May 2007. An international meeting between representatives of international forums to discuss various approaches to access to information and public participation is preliminarily scheduled for 20–21 June 2007.

7. Regarding the possible organization of side events and exhibitions at the Belgrade Conference, the secretariat reminded the representatives of the governing bodies of the conventions that the deadline for submission of completed registration forms to the host country secretariat is 1 May 2007.

I. PREPARATIONS FOR THE “ENVIRONMENT FOR EUROPE” CONFERENCE IN BELGRADE

8. The meeting commented on the draft paper “Implementation of UNECE Multilateral Environmental Agreements” (MEAs) prepared by the secretariat for the Belgrade Conference, as requested by the governing bodies of the conventions and the Committee’s Bureau at their previous meeting in June 2006. The paper, which outlines progress and problems in the effective implementation of the conventions, aims to provide ministers with a basis for identifying policy recommendations that will prompt governments to better deliver on their commitments.

9. The meeting considered that the paper provided a good and comprehensive overview of the issues related to the implementation of the five UNECE MEAs but that it was too lengthy and detailed to serve as a background paper for ministers. The meeting invited the secretariat to substantially shorten the paper and to supplement it with an executive summary. In addition, it recommended that the detailed information in the paper that was specific to the work programmes of the conventions be inserted into a category II document.

10. The meeting requested the secretariat to restructure the main paper by giving more prominence to issues such as national implementation and compliance. In addition, it suggested that these be more closely linked to the recommendations of the “Kiev Guidelines” for strengthening compliance with and implementation of MEAs. To the extent possible, the paper should focus on horizontal issues common to all the conventions, such as the identification of obstacles and capacity-building needs for improving implementation and compliance in countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) and South-Eastern Europe (SEE), and also call for more public participation under all the conventions. The conclusions of the paper should outline possible future actions.

11. The meeting proposed that, in its introduction, the paper should highlight that the conventions are important tools contributing to the implementation of policy frameworks, such as the Environment Strategy for Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA strategy).

12. Delegations were invited to provide further comments in writing no later than 19 February to enable the secretariat to finalize the revised draft document by 1 March, the deadline for submitting official Conference documentation for the CEP to discuss and agree on before its submission to the Working Group of Senior Officials (WGSO) responsible for preparing the Conference.

II. CAPACITY-BUILDING ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE UNECE ENVIRONMENTAL CONVENTIONS’ PROGRAMMES OF WORK: APPROACHES AND LESSONS LEARNED

13. The secretaries of the Conventions provided a brief overview of the capacity-building activities carried out, as follows:

(a) Air Pollution Convention

Capacity-building activities under the Air Pollution Convention have been substantially intensified over the past few years. The application for funding to the United Nations Development Account four years ago brought about the CAPACT (Capacity Building for Air Quality Management and the Application of Clean Coal Combustion Technologies in Central Asia) project, which has promoted many activities, for example, in Kazakhstan, including the establishment of an air monitoring station linked to Asian air monitoring networks. In parallel, the secretariat has set up a Trust Fund supporting participation of EECCA representatives in the Convention’s activities. The Executive Body of the Convention has approved an action plan for EECCA and SEE to guide the allocation of voluntary contributions by countries. The secretariat has also been asked to manage

projects financed through bilateral funding. The lesson learned from these activities has been to start work with the involvement of the countries from the region while seeking funding in parallel.

(b) Espoo Convention

Recent activities to develop capacity in EECCA to implement the Espoo Convention and its Protocol on Strategic Environmental Impact Assessment (SEA) include the preparation of guidance on the practical application of the Convention for the specific needs of the subregion. Switzerland is financing workshops in Armenia and Ukraine to finalize the guidance. It also supported the organization of a training workshop on transboundary EIA methodology in Tajikistan (February 2007). Two similar workshops are expected to be held in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in the course of 2007. Other ongoing activities include a transboundary EIA pilot project involving Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, which is supported by the Government of Norway and managed by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and UNECE. The secretariat is seeking funding for a similar project between Belarus and Ukraine. A manual on the implementation of the Protocol on SEA is under preparation, and a draft has been posted on the Convention website.

(c) Water Convention

The Convention's workplan includes structured long-term training on integrated management of transboundary waters, focusing on EECCA. The project Capacity for Water Cooperation (CWC) aims at strengthening water management in EECCA by creating a framework for cross-fertilization and exchange of experience between river basins and countries on regulatory, institutional, methodological and other aspects of integrated management of transboundary waters, and, at the same time, bringing in valuable experience from other parts of the UNECE region. The project provides multidisciplinary training through a series of workshops. It is developed and implemented by the UNECE secretariat in cooperation with a number of international partners (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the World Bank, OSCE and the EECCA Regional Environmental Centres (RECs)) as well as national ones. By the end of the project, an overview of the state of cooperation in the region, common problems and solutions, good practices and lessons learned will be available. The project also strives for concrete proposals and recommendations for follow-up activities, in the framework of the Convention workplan, which are carried out by other actors in the region. The project's rationale and approach have been replicated in SEE by the International Waters Learning Exchange and Resource Network.

(d) Industrial Accidents Convention

Under the Industrial Accidents Convention, an Assistance Programme was developed in order to enhance the efforts of countries of EECCA and SEE to implement and accede to the Convention. The Programme differentiates between basic and more complex tasks for the implementation of the Convention and foresees provision of assistance for the more

complex implementation tasks. This assistance will be made available to countries once they have committed themselves to implementing the Convention and have accomplished the basic implementation tasks. After the High-level Commitment meeting and the adoption of a declaration by the interested EECCA and SEE countries in December 2005, expert teams conducted fact-finding missions to 11 countries in 2006. The remaining missions will be completed in 2007. The experts verify the level of implementation of basic tasks and identify the specific capacity-building needs in the countries. The Conference of the Parties at its last meeting (November 2006) approved the participation of the first seven countries in the needs-driven capacity-building activities on complex tasks. The first activities addressing the priority needs will be organized in 2007.

(e) Aarhus Convention

Under the Aarhus Convention, a broad capacity-building coordination framework has been set up to streamline and rationalize international capacity-building activities and promote synergies. Organizations involved in the activities of the framework include the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), UNDP, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), OSCE and the RECs, among others. The framework is serviced by the Convention's secretariat and involves one annual meeting with exchanges of information to identify potential gaps and overlaps in the activities. The International Coordinating Group on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs) serves a similar function, meeting approximately once a year and bringing together organizations according to an informal division of labour. To make optimal use of the limited resources available, the secretariat concentrates its efforts on its coordination role while staying directly involved in some capacity-building activities, especially those at the subregional level.

14. The meeting acknowledged that effective implementation of the conventions requires both adequate administrative skills and technical capacities in the countries. Capacity-building and assistance programmes were seen as necessary and complementary means for strengthening the implementation of and compliance with the legal instruments.

15. Capacity-building activities should be carefully targeted owing to the limited resources available both in the countries and at the international level. To be successful, these activities should be demand driven. The approach taken by the Industrial Accidents Convention, involving prior high-level commitment and fact-finding missions, was seen as a good way to involve the relevant authorities and stakeholders in a country in determining the priority capacity-building needs and in carrying out the activities, and as a potential model for the other conventions. Involvement of the private sector in project development and implementation was seen as useful.

16. The meeting considered that the rapid turnover of staff in the national administrations of many countries limits the impact of capacity-building efforts. Training of trainers was suggested as one approach to addressing this problem. The meeting acknowledged the need for governments to ensure that the environmental administrations had adequate staffing to enable them to deliver on their environmental commitments. In many countries, cuts in environmental budgets and human resources have undermined the ability of the relevant institutions to function properly.

17. Finally, the meeting stressed the importance of ensuring that capacity-building activities are self-sustained and are followed up in the country once a given international project (e.g. a workshop) has been completed. Linking multilateral projects with bilateral assistance was considered very useful in this respect.

III. TOPICS AND ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION AT THE NEXT MEETING

18. The meeting considered holding its next meeting back to back with the meeting of the CEP that is preliminarily scheduled for April 2008.

19. It agreed that opening of the conventions to the non-UNECE countries was one of the topics to be discussed at a future meeting. It decided, moreover, that further topics should be decided on the basis of the discussions and outcome of the Belgrade Conference.
