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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

Ad Hoc Preparatory Working Group of Senior Officials
“Environment for Europe”

Fourth meeting
Geneva, 30 May – 1 June 2007
Item 2 (g) of the provisional agenda

PROVISIONAL AGENDA OF THE SIXTH MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE
“ENVIRONMENT FOR EUROPE”

COMPILATION OF SUMMARIES: PROPOSED CATEGORY I DOCUMENTS

Note by the secretariat

Addendum

I. EVALUATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Europe's Environment: the Fourth Assessment

By the European Environment Agency

Objective and scope

1. The Declaration by the Environment Ministers of the Ministerial Conference in Kiev 2003 calls on the European Environment Agency to produce a fourth assessment report to inform the Ministerial Conference in Belgrade in 2007. The assessment aims to be policy-relevant and highlights progress towards environmental goals / targets at the pan-European level, using indicators where possible.

Main findings

2. **Europe's Environment: The Fourth Assessment** addresses environmental concerns in the pan-European region (i.e. in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA), South Eastern Europe (SEE), as well as Western and Central Europe (WCE)). Issues addressed range from the pollution of air, soil and water (all of which have improved significantly, but still remain of concern in parts of the pan-European region) to Europe's significant contributions and vulnerability to the consequences of global problems.

3. **Unsustainable patterns of production and consumption**, driven by society's desire for ever higher standards of human well-being together with increasing resource needs which can deplete and contaminate natural resources within and beyond Europe's borders. Since the Kiev conference, the issue of sustainable consumption and production has become more prominent on the policy agenda although few substantive results have emerged. Patterns of consumption are changing rapidly across the region, with increases in the shares for transport, communication, housing, recreation and health. Total waste generation is increasing in the pan-European region. At the same time, the legacy of old waste sites still presents a major problem in some EECCA and SEE countries, although many have developed waste strategies and legislation for specific waste streams. However, waste management plans and effective legislation have yet to be implemented in some countries.

4. **Environment-related health concerns** result from continuing pollution of air, water and soil. Despite considerable reductions in air pollutant emissions in much of the pan-European region, atmospheric pollution (in particular current levels of fine particles and ozone) still poses a significant threat to human health and the environment as a whole - in EECCA countries some air polluting emissions have increased by more than 10% since 2000 as a result of economic recovery, increase in transport, and the persisting poor effectiveness of air pollution protection strategies. Similarly, although water quality appears to have improved in rivers across the region, some large rivers and many smaller watercourses remain severely polluted. More than 100 million people in the pan-European region still do not have access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation; and in EECCA and SEE the quality of water supply and sanitation services has deteriorated continuously over the past 15 years. Soil degradation, in particular contaminated sites, remains to be an issue of concern across the region. Yet, some progress has been made in terms of policy development and the availability of information on soil issues. Also, the production and use of commercial chemicals raises health concerns, as the production of toxic chemicals has increased at almost the same rate as total chemical production..

5. **Climate change**, mainly driven by energy consumption and the resulting emission of greenhouse gases (GHG), exacerbates extreme weather events (such as flooding or droughts) and has an impact on a range of socio-economic activities such as agriculture and tourism. Impacts of climate change on society and natural resources are already occurring both across the pan-European region and worldwide, and are projected to become even more pronounced. A global emission reduction of up to 50% by 2050 is necessary to achieve the target proposed by the EU to limit temperature increase to a maximum of 2 degree Celsius above pre-industrial levels. However, even if global emissions of greenhouse gases are drastically reduced, some unavoidable climate change impacts make adaptation measures urgent.

6. **Biodiversity loss** in the pan-European region (particularly in farmland, mountain regions, forests and coastal zones) is occurring as a result of land use changes, urban sprawl, infrastructure development, acidification, eutrophication, desertification, resource overexploitation, both intensification and abandonment of agriculture, as well as climate change. The global target of halting biodiversity loss by 2010 will not be achieved without considerable additional efforts. More than 700 species are currently under threat in the pan-European region, while the number of invasive alien species in the pan-European region continues to increase. National forest plans that link sustainable forest management with an ecosystem approach are being implemented. Nevertheless, illegal logging and human-induced forest fires are a growing problem, particularly in EECCA and SEE.

7. **Overuse of marine resources** and pressure on coastal environments continue to be high. Eutrophication remains a problem in all enclosed seas and sheltered marine waters across the pan-European region, whilst over-fishing and destructive fishing practices are still widespread in all European seas. Improved fisheries policies and stricter enforcement are needed, especially to stop illegal fishing. There is evidence that some fish stocks can recover where proper measures are implemented. Major accidental oil spills have generally decreased in European seas, although oil discharges from day to day activities, such as maritime transport and refineries, are still significant.

Recommendations

- (a) Focus on the implementation of the existing environmental agreements in the pan-European region and at the sub-regional level (e.g. Black Sea, Caspian, Carpathian).
- (b) Set clear and realistic environmental targets; also develop and implement mechanisms / instruments to monitor progress towards reaching these targets.
- (c) Strengthen governmental support to the education for sustainable development process.
- (d) Strengthen governmental support to increase public participation and raise awareness.
- (e) Expand existing partnerships at pan-European and regional level.
- (f) Continue to regularly assess the state of environment in pan-European region by building a shared environmental information system.
- (g) Further develop key environmental indicators to assess progress and continue the streamlining process across the pan-European region.
