

**Chair's Summary from  
the meeting between the representatives of the governing bodies  
of the ECE Environmental Conventions and the Committee of Environmental Policy**

22 November 2011, Geneva

The meeting was initiated and chaired by Mr. Chris Dijkens, Chairperson of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents.

The purpose of the meeting was to exchange information on priorities under the ECE Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) and identify and discuss possible areas of cooperation and synergies that can be established among the agreements as well as with the Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) in light of recent and future key developments in the area of environment.

The list of participating Chairpersons and representatives of the MEAs and the CEP is attached. The list also contains the names ECE secretariat staff (attachment1).

Expectations of the joint meeting:

Before going into the agenda items, the chair of the meeting raised the question to all the participants to share with each other their expectations of this joint meeting.

The participants expressed that they expected the meeting inter alia to: exchange of ideas; explore possibilities for synergies that can lead to concrete cooperation; explore opportunities for better cooperation and identify concrete proposals; build on achievements; facilitate to get to know each other and establish personal contacts; discuss how to make the work of the MEAs more robust and efficient; find common methods, develop joint calendars and share workplans, make use of the existing tools to establish synergies and back up each other; enhance collaboration in addressing the needs of countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA); identify ways and means to strengthen implementation of the MEAs in the context of financial crisis; identify synergies that could help to address financial constraints that new tools, such as the Protocol on Water and Health, are experiencing; start the discussion on synergies and the development of joint actions in the context of lack of resources in the donor countries (doing more for less); discuss value for money; identify priorities and discuss existing challenges with the aim to ultimately turn them into opportunities; and ensure that there is willingness to cooperate from all sides.

**1. Outcome of the seventh "Environment for Europe" Ministerial Conference (Astana, 21-23 September 2011) and preparations for the Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio de Janeiro, 4-6 June 2012)**

A. Ms. Elisabete Quintas Da Silva, Chair of the CEP, shared the key outcomes of the seventh "Environment for Europe" Ministerial Conference (Astana, 21-23 September 2011). The main messages from the Conference that might influence the future work of the MEAs were:

- ECE should take the lead in the transition to a green economy;
- The Ministers underlined the role of ECE in assessing the obstacles to ratifying and implementing the ECE MEAs and in assisting countries to do so;
- The Astana Water Action containing initiatives aimed at improving water management and strengthening transboundary cooperation launched by interested countries and organizations was welcomed and endorsed;

- The "Green Bridge" Initiative and Partnership programme aimed at promoting an environmentally sustainable, equitable and prosperous future in both the pan-European and Asia and the Pacific regions was supported.

B. Ms. Monika Linn, Principal Adviser to the Executive Secretary, shared information on the preparations for the United Conference on Sustainable Development Rio+20. The possible input from the ECE MEAs to be taken up during the Regional Preparatory Meeting for the UNECE region (Geneva, 1-2 December 2011) was also mentioned.

Ms. Linn also mentioned that the Heads of the States are expected to decide a new institutional framework for sustainable development as the outcome of the Rio+20 Conference and, therefore, the role of each actor in terms of sustainable development and environment, which might have implications for the ECE MEAs.

In this regard, the participants agreed to prepare a joint input on behalf of the governing bodies of the ECE MEAs to be used, through the Co-Chairs Summary of the Regional Preparatory Meeting, as a contribution to the Rio+20 Conference preparation process, in addition to the one that the ECE has already submitted. The draft joint statement would be prepared by Mr. Dijkens, who requested assistance from the secretariat in collecting the inputs from the different agreements.<sup>1</sup>

It was agreed that the joint input should convey the role that the ECE MEAs could play in the transition to green economy.

The participants agreed on communicating the main areas of the activities highlighted in the zero draft of the outcome document of the Conference to the national focal points of the ECE member States as soon as it becomes available in order to engage them in the preparations for the Rio+20 Conference. They also agreed that the MEA's national focal points should take the lead in the process through identifying and establishing close contacts with their Rio+20 national negotiators.

## **2. Review process of ECE activities by member States**

Mr. Sergiusz Ludwiczak, Deputy Director, Environment Division, informed the participants about the modalities of the 2011-2012 review of the 2005 ECE reform and how it may affect the "Environment" sub programme, including the ECE MEAs, in terms of new challenges and possible opportunities.

The participants reiterated their concern that regular budget human resources available for the work of MEAs are already very limited. Therefore, any cuts would have a significant negative effect on implementation of the work programmes adopted by MOPs and on the secretariat's capacity to carry out its core functions and support the implementation of the agreements. Moreover, it was stressed that the secretariat would not have, in such a situation, a sufficient capacity to respond to the growing demands from an increasing number of countries joining the work under these MEAs within the ECE region and beyond.

To this end, the participants decided to prepare a joint statement promoting the MEAs and their importance for Ms. Quintas Da Silva intervention at the meeting with the Executive Committee (EXCOM) during which the "Environment" sub programme will be reviewed (tentatively scheduled for April 2012).

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<sup>1</sup> At the time of finalizing these minutes, a joint statement of the ECE MEAs, prepared and consulted among the participants, was successfully reflected in a few statements by delegations at the Regional Preparatory Meeting for the Rio+20 Conference (Geneva, 1-2 December 2011).

They further agreed that the joint statement should include .(i) impact and results achieved by the MEAs, (ii) the political relevance of the MEAs and their activities in the ECE region and beyond, (iii) the efficient use of available resources (what has been done in terms of efficiency). The statement should also introduce challenges to the work of the MEAs, in particular, it should identify the activities (and their impacts), which would not be continued if a cut in the resources is implemented. In addition, the statement should highlight the possible new areas of work if additional resources would be made available.

The draft of this joint statement, to be prepared by Mr. Dijkens, will be circulated among the participants and finalized before the planned review meeting of the CEP Chair with EXCOM.

### **3. Exchange of information on priorities and identification of possible synergies between the ECE MEAs**

A. The participants shared the priorities and challenges faced by their respective MEAs and discussed possible areas of cooperation between the agreements as well as exchanged the views on potential synergies.

#### Priorities specific to each agreement:

1. Air Pollution Convention: A long-term strategy was adopted by the Executive Body listing the priority directions;
2. Water Convention: The Second Assessment of Transboundary Rivers, Lakes and Groundwaters and the Astana Water Action (an initiative to improve the management of water to which 23 countries and 4 organizations committed) will define the future activities to be undertaken. Among the priority issues are: (i) transboundary groundwaters; (ii) implementation of National Policy Dialogues – tailor-made, national high-level political process integrating different sectors; (iii) a third assessment focused on a specific theme to be decided; (iv) implementation mechanism; and (v) the opening of the Convention beyond the ECE region;
3. Protocol on Water and Health: The priority issues are: (i) setting national targets by an increasing number of countries; (ii) surveillance and early warning systems for water-related diseases; (iii) small scale water supply and sanitation; and (iv) equitable access to water and sanitation;
4. Espoo Convention and the Protocol on SEA: (i) Compliance with and implementation of these agreements; (ii) sub regional cooperation and capacity-building to strengthen contacts between the Parties and other countries, including those outside the ECE region; (iii) promoting ratification and application of the Protocol;
5. Industrial Accidents Convention: (i) countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia - implementation of the provisions and self-evaluation of the progress made by countries; (ii) Western countries - further progress and transfer of knowledge; involving USA and Canada in the work due to the important knowledge they possess; approaching China and possibly Afghanistan as ECE neighbouring countries;
6. Aarhus Convention: (i) compliance; (ii) access to justice; and (iii) public participation;
7. PRTR Protocol: delivering technical assistance through the organization of sub regional capacity building workshops.

### Common challenges identified:

1. Long-term, predictable and appropriate financial resources;
2. Dependency on a limited number of donors for voluntary contributions (in most cases only a few countries bring up to 70% of the needed funding), need to involve new countries;
3. Appropriate human resources available to the conventions in order to implement the activities in accordance with their programme of work;
4. To secure sufficient human and financial resources to meet requests from growing number of Parties as well as from the non-Parties interested in the works of the Conventions.

### Existing or possible cooperation between instruments:

1. Water and Industrial Accidents Conventions - organization of joint events, Joint Expert Group on Water and Industrial Accidents;
2. Protocol on Water and Health and the Aarhus Convention - public participation and access to information;
3. Espoo Convention/SEA and the Aarhus Convention - on public participation;
4. Espoo Convention, Water Convention and Industrial Accidents Convention - activities in transboundary context;
5. Air Pollution Convention and Water Convention - water pollution with specific focus on agriculture (these types of pollution are inter-related and can negatively affect each other).

### Exchange of views on potential synergies:

1. Synergies and cooperation must be connected to priorities; they must increase the value for money; there is no room for artificial synergies;
2. MEAs strategies should be, as far as possible, complementary and avoid a silent competition for financing; a common fund raising strategy could be considered, in particular when dealing with certain thematic issues or certain geographic region;
3. Experience and approaches on implementation, reporting and compliance: should be exchanged;
4. Cooperation and synergies should be seen at three levels: MEAs and their Bureaux; national level among focal points; and the secretariats. The synergies could reduce the burden of the secretariat, increase its efficiency but they should also facilitate the work at national level. Some synergies could be specific to subregions;
5. Calendar of meetings and information on planned workshops could be exchanged, through a joint convention webpage (possibly maintained by a Division webmaster, which would require additional resources), workplans could also be shared among Bureaux;
6. Back-to-back meetings should be considered, where appropriate;

7. Outreach to countries of Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia at ECE level - delivering assistance to these countries in a coordinated and mutually supportive manner;
8. Promotion of the MEAs and advocacy (Awareness-raising events can be shared across the five instruments);
9. The Division's regional advisor should support all 5 MEAs in their operational activities, in particular those where synergies exist;
10. Synergies with CEP and EPR (the reviews are good instruments to use as they include a chapter on international cooperation and monitoring); These assessments of the progress made by the countries can be raised during the meetings of the governing bodies; On the other hand convention experts can participate in selected EPRs;
11. Cooperation within the scientific support and work on air pollutants (Air Pollution Convention), hazardous substances (Industrial Accidents Convention) and Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers.

B. The secretariat shared a number of issues related to the need of harmonizing certain planning activities and to the resources of the secretariat. The participants considered them as useful information for further discussion and requested the secretariat to make it available in written form (attachment 2).

The participants decided to prepare a strategic document on the opportunities for achieving synergies and harmonization of the activities among the MEAs for consideration at their next meeting as a starting point for further discussion. The document will be prepared by Mr. Dijkens, Ms. Sybille Vermont and Ms. Jasmina Karba. It should take into account the points raised in the discussion of item 3, among others: (i) difficulties faced by some donors to provide funds directly to cover secretariat staff costs; (ii) MEAs' websites would need to be enhanced in terms of their significance in providing information in view of the planned reduction in issuing paper documents and printed publications; (iii) rationalization and, where appropriate, harmonization of activities among the MEAs is recommendable in order to increase the overall cost-effectiveness

#### **4 Strengthening implementation and ratification of ECE multilateral environmental agreements and enhancing cross-border interaction in Central Asia (5 Conventions project for Central Asia)**

With regard to the concept of the 5 Conventions project for Central Asia, the participants expressed their concerns about embarking in a new activity in the current context of the financial crisis. They were of the opinion that the project should be demand-driven, tailor-made, flexible and that existing mechanisms and tools should be better used to promote it.

Ms. Martine Rohn suggested, for example, to use the framework of the Environmental Performance Reviews Programme for this purpose, e.g. the launch of the Environmental Performance Reviews in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan in 2012. The two governments expressed a clear demand to launch the project's activities in their countries. The participants welcomed the idea to initiate the project in steps (e.g. awareness activities in the two mentioned countries).

## **5. Any other business**

The participants agreed on the need to hold future meetings to further discuss and follow up on the issues that were raised. They agreed on the tentative dates for the next meeting (6, 7, or 8 March 2012).

## List of Participants



### Attachment 1

#### Meeting between the representatives of the governing bodies of the ECE Environmental Conventions and the Committee of Environmental Policy

Geneva, 22 November 2011

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## Attachment 2

### **Harmonizing planning activities and resources**

(Issues raised by the secretariat - 22 November 2011)

#### **Harmonizing planning activities**

- ECE principle bodies, including convention governing bodies use individual, different approaches to plan their work;
- The member States requested that sectoral committees harmonize their planning procedures and documents;
- In the case of convention governing bodies, workplan documents are also different in appearance/form; they use different terminology and are different in duration - from 1 to 3 years, while the official UN planning and budget cycle is 2 years; in some cases, they are difficult to find on the Internet.

The Bureaux may need to work together with the secretariat in the near future on this issue. Their understanding and flexibility will be important to move forward.

#### **Core/additional activities**

- RB resources of the secretariat are made available to ensure the servicing of core activities under the conventions (meetings of governing bodies and key subsidiary groups);
- The level of these RB resources are determined by M/Ss through relevant decisions in the 5<sup>th</sup> Committee and later in GA;
- RB resources are not enough, therefore, activities that go beyond the core mandate (workshops, capacity building etc), for which there is demand from some (transition) countries must be financed through XB funds;
- These additional funds must be appropriate to cover not only the activities but also the staff, both professional staff and programme assistants, needed to implement them.

We would like to see all governing bodies applying these principles when planning future activities and drafting budgets.

#### **Work plans/budget**

- The governing bodies, when deciding on their work plans should at the same time agree on the budget and ensure that sources of appropriate additional XB resources are identified.
- We believe that the secretariat should not be tasked with fund raising, this takes up significant amount of resources at all levels;
- Activities for which no funding can be identified should not be included in the work plan or be included on a waiting list until appropriate funding is made available.

This realistic approach would allow the secretariat to use its limited human resources on the implementation of agreed activities.

#### **Level of resources – savings**

- The secretariat assesses its resources as limited, especially when compared to the staffing of other convention secretariats (non-ECE);
- Within the current UN-wide staff cuts, the Environment Division (subprogramme) is losing two posts (1P and 1 G) starting with the 2012-13 biennium. Further cuts may come;
- There will be savings in other areas than staff costs, they will target publications and documents (the secretariat has already been asked to significantly reduce the number of printed items and move to electronic publications; to reduce the length of printed documents, to this end no more waivers will be granted for documents exceeding the standard length).

The governing bodies may thus seriously consider reducing the number of requested documents and their length, in particular those that need translation. You may also consider giving up the official status in cases of documents of background nature.

#### **Efficiency and effectiveness of the use of our limited resources**

- As mentioned, the secretariat considers its staff resources as being limited and therefore would like to use them as efficiently and effectively as possible.

In order to achieve this, the involvement of the governing bodies is necessary, among others through:

- Assessing the organizational structures under the agreements with the aim of streamlining it by reducing the number of working groups and task forces – all of them should undergo a critical review of their mandates, some of them may be perhaps abolished, some of them merged and others should have sunset clauses;
- Assessing the frequency of meetings of each body, e.g. some governing bodies meet every three years others every two years and one of them meets annually, which is a real challenge to the resources of both the secretariat and the Parties. Is it really necessary?
- Possibly accept a change in the usual calendar of meetings so that the secretariat could more evenly distribute the meetings that it services throughout the year – this will also require a high degree of internal coordination.

**The above issues are raised with the Bureaux in order to move forward and provide the governing bodies with the best possible services.**