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COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

Ad Hoc Working Group on Environmental Monitoring
(Fourth session, 4-5 September 2003)
(Item 3 of the provisional agenda)

TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE WORKING GROUP

Note by the secretariat

1. The Committee on Environmental Policy adopted the terms of reference for the Ad Hoc Working Group on Environmental Monitoring at its seventh session in September 2000 (ECE/CEP/74, annex III). Some elements of the terms of reference related to support for the preparation of the third assessment report on the state of the environment. The report was submitted to the Kiev Ministerial Conference in May 2003 and these elements have, therefore, become obsolete. The Ministers in Kiev stressed the need to further develop the cooperation framework provided by the Working Group and identified additional areas where concerted effort was required at the regional level. These include, among other things, environmental assessments and reporting.

2. To respond to the decisions on environmental monitoring and assessment taken by the Ministers in Kiev, the assessment component could be explicitly reflected in the name of the Working Group and its updated terms of reference could cover elements referred to in the Ministerial Declaration. The proposal annexed to this note reflects also standard provisions for working groups operating within UNECE.

3. The terms of reference prepared by the Working Group at its fourth session will be submitted to the Committee on Environmental Policy for adoption.

Annex

UPDATED TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE WORKING GROUP ON ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT

1. Pursuant to the decisions of the Fifth Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe" (Kiev, 2003), the Committee on Environmental Policy renames the Ad Hoc Working Group on Environmental Monitoring as the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment. The Working Group should serve as an instrument for UNECE member States to provide recommendations, to propose action plans and to strengthen international initiatives within the region in the areas of environmental monitoring, assessment and reporting, with a view to supporting decision-making processes.

2. The Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment will promote the coordination of efforts in the above areas, and in particular towards preparations for the Ministerial Conferences "Environment for Europe". It should contribute:

(a) To the development of assessment reports on the state of the environment by the European Environment Agency (EEA);

(b) To an appraisal of reporting requirements within the framework of the "Environment for Europe" process taking account of broader reporting required by the relevant multilateral environmental agreements.

3. The Working Group should take fully into account the work of existing international networks and forums, and give priority to the following specific areas:

(a) Improvement of data collection, transfer and use;
(b) Enhancement of international comparability of environmental information;
(c) Promotion of the use of indicator-based mechanisms for periodic environmental assessments and evaluation of the effectiveness of environmental policies and decision-making;
(d) Improvement of coordination and optimization of environmental assessments, including outlooks, and reporting;
(e) Outlining compatible standards and formats for environmental monitoring, assessment and reporting;
(f) Cooperation on a harmonized environmental meta-database, on sources of data and data sets, institutes, reports and other information products using modern information technologies;
(g) Linking of relevant web sites;
(h) Strengthening environmental information and observation capacity in countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

In addition, the scope for application of satellite and other remote-sensing technologies to complement ground-based environmental monitoring systems and networks should be considered.

4. Pursuant to a decision by the Ministers in Kiev, donors will be invited to provide support for the Working Group's activities and the preparation of assessment reports on the state of the environment by EEA.

5. The Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment will be open to all UNECE member States and include EEA. Participation of international organizations and NGOs active in the UNECE region should be guided by normal UNECE procedures.

6. The work of the Working Group should be conducted within a spirit of such full and open access to environmental data as is compatible with the legislation of the participating member States.

7. The UNECE secretariat will provide the necessary secretariat assistance and conference facilities to the Working Group at the United Nations Office at Geneva, in accordance with UNECE rules and practices.

8. The Committee on Environmental Policy will review the present terms of reference after the Sixth Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe”.