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“ENVIRONMENT FOR EUROPE” COMMUNICATION PLAN

Prepared by a consultant with the assistance of the secretariat

1. Following the mandate received by the Environment Ministers in Kiev, the Committee is developing a communication strategy to raise awareness of the “Environment for Europe” process among stakeholders and the general public with a particular focus on the achievements of the process and the value added by its broad and inclusive cooperation.
2. Taking into account the discussions held by the Committee at its tenth session, a consultant was appointed to develop a communication strategy with the assistance of the secretariat and in consultation with key partners.
3. The draft strategy will be presented for discussion at the Committee’s eleventh session and further input will be provided so that the consultant can finalize it. To guide delegations in the discussion some questions are put forward at the end of this paper for their consideration.
4. It is suggested that the draft strategy should be further discussed by the Bureau in 2005, and thereafter finalized and adopted at the Committee’s twelfth session.
5. To involve the stakeholders in the preparation of the strategy, the Committee may wish to consider organizing a consultation in early 2005 (e.g. back to back with a Bureau meeting) to receive input on the draft strategy and to discuss how the strategy could best be implemented once adopted.

I. COMMUNICATION PLAN GOALS AND NEEDS

6. The two primary goals of the communication plan are:

(a) To raise awareness of the “Environment for Europe” process and its achievements, particularly among key stakeholders and the general public; and

(b) To encourage communication among stakeholders and interested members of the public regarding the process and the issues that it seeks to address.

7. There is a secondary goal that can be accomplished at the same time: supporting efforts to raise funds from both public and private sources.

8. These goals are related in important ways: the manner in which awareness is raised, success reported and issues addressed will affect the willingness of stakeholders, members of the public and potential funders to become engaged.

9. If the “Environment for Europe” communication strategy rests solely on reporting meetings, studies or agreements after the fact, it will have limited impact on media coverage. Important as these activities will be, the nature of news coverage will be to focus briefly on including “Environment for Europe” activities into a crowded news cycle and then moving quickly to something else.

10. Since the goal is to build interest and engagement rather than merely to capture fleeting news coverage, the need is for a strategy that focuses on the issues being addressed and the impact of the “Environment for Europe” process. This means that there is a need to distinguish between what media professionals call “hard news” content from “editorial” content.

11. The difference is important to the “Environment for Europe” process. First, hard news content typically consists of reporting current events as they occur; editorial content typically consists of a thoughtful discussion of issues and their importance. Second, hard news usually takes the form of a factual summary from the perspective of reporters or correspondents. Editorial content takes the form of more analytical or interpretive pieces, often from the perspective of a credible third party such as a respected scholar, scientist, public figure or policy advocate.

12. The recommended strategy focuses on the need to deliver both editorial and hard news content and also addresses several other needs that arise from the nature and structure of the “Environment for Europe” process:

(a) Because of the large and diverse nature of the UNECE region and among the countries in the process, there is a need to ensure that communications are sufficiently specific to the region and to the countries. This includes both the message and the method of delivery;

(b) The need for financial or human resources to implement the communication plan may compete with other needs, therefore the plan must be somewhat flexible in its requirements and not depend entirely on the limited staff within the UNECE secretariat.

13. There is both participation in, and support for, the “Environment for Europe” process among international organizations and a number of significant NGOs. This creates an opportunity to use effectively the various partners within the “Environment for Europe” process to assist either in providing communication content, encouraging media coverage or stimulating continuing media attention to the process.

II. STRATEGY FOR THE COMMUNICATION PLAN

14. The communication strategy will focus primarily on distributing issue-related editorial content targeting opinion leaders, decision makers and what are often called “thought leaders,” and secondarily on distributing hard news content targeting interested members of the general public.

15. Content will fall into four categories to meet distinct needs: editorial content; interviews/reports; news releases and interactive content (Chap. III).

16. Content development and distribution will be facilitated by a small ad hoc group of communication partners with roots in the various countries in the UNECE region, coordinated by the secretariat. The central coordinating function organizes the process and the communications partners provide the local perspective necessary to generate media coverage and continued interest.

17. Traditional print media will be the focus of initial distribution of content to establish the “Environment for Europe” process as a priority in public discourse. The Internet will be emphasized for wider dissemination of content, for reporting progress, and for fostering discussion and participation, especially by advocacy groups and interested members of the public. Broadcast media will play only a modest role, focusing largely on coverage of major meetings.

18. Implementation steps are in tiers or layers. This guarantees a core set of communications distributed throughout the region and also provides opportunities for regional or national partners or media to add content or to participate. This also allows communication activities to expand as resources become available.

19. This strategy is intended to meet the goals established by the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy and the larger goal of fostering understanding of, and support for, environmental progress generally. It will also support other efforts such as environmental education for sustainable development, recognized by Ministers at the Kiev Conference as vital to the eventual success of the process.

20. The strategy is illustrated in the table below. Implementation will recognize the different role played by official government and intergovernmental sources, compared to the role played by NGOs.

21. To generate the desired level of attention, communications on the “Environment for Europe” process must come from official sources in UNECE countries. Examples include:

- (a) Press releases, official findings, reports of meetings; and
- (b) Interviews with officials or reports of their public speeches.

22. Such communications can include an editorial or analytical article by a respected scholar, scientist, writer or retired official, as long as the piece is issued by an official source as a contribution to public awareness and discussion of the “Environment for Europe” process.

23. NGOs cannot create content for official UNECE communications, but can play a very important partnership role, especially once the content has been created. They can:

- (a) Stimulate coverage and awareness by assisting in distributing communications on the “Environment for Europe” process to the media; and
- (b) Promote public participation by distributing communications to their own constituents and stakeholders and encouraging them to comment and discuss.

24. Both governmental and NGO partners can assist in ways that require minimal resources but can have great impact:

- (a) They help ensure broad coverage by providing UNECE with recommended contacts for media and web distribution; and
- (b) They increase awareness of communications through web site links and references in publications.

Table
Communication strategy summary

Content	Recipients			
	Editors	Web sites / publications	General press	Donors
Editorial / analysis	X	X		X
Interviews / reports	X	X	X	X
News releases	X	X	X	X
Interactive content		X		X

III. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMMUNICATION PLAN

25. The following steps describe how the strategy will be implemented and why.
26. As the originating point for communications, the UNECE secretariat will require assistance. Recognizing the budgetary issues involved, the plan calls for a communications assistant for the UNECE secretariat to help produce news releases, periodic and annual “Environment for Europe” progress reports, gather editorial content even though it may be written elsewhere, maintain a central contact list, and ensure that there is an adequate plan for timely communicating the achievements of meetings and activities related to the “Environment for Europe” process. This can take place in a phased manner, and be supplemented by volunteer assistance.
27. A small representative group of communication partners should be identified to assist with content development and distribution. Partners can be an agency of a UNECE government, communications personnel in a United Nations agency, an NGO or other appropriate partner. Their role will be to suggest or provide editorial/analysis content, suggest or provide interview content, and assist in the distribution of content in their constituencies and/or countries.
28. Existing communication contact lists should be improved in an effort to ensure that all categories of communications targets and all subregions are well represented. Guidelines for contacts in the four target categories are:
- (a) Editors: senior editors at major publications including leading newspapers, magazines, national news agencies, and other publications that reach a broad audience or are recognized as sources of credible information and discussion on public issues;
 - (b) Web sites/special publications: this group includes government and intergovernmental agencies with publications or web sites focused on issues such as the environment, health, sustainable economy, etc. Examples include the European Commission and the European Environment Agency, other United Nations agencies, such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Health Organization (WHO), and other organizations such as the Task Force for the Implementation of the Environmental Action Programme (EAP) and the Regional Environmental Centres. Examples of specialty publications include Environment Daily and the Society of Environmental Journalists. Key recipients in this group also include NGOs that range from international groups like the European Eco-Form and the World Wildlife Fund to national groups like the Latvian Fund for Nature and the Lithuanian Society for Biodiversity Conservation;
 - (c) General press: this category generally includes the same media outlets as the editors category but the contacts will be the news editors, not the editorial units;
 - (d) Donors: this includes foundations, individuals, corporations, government agencies or others who are potential financial supporters of the “Environment for Europe” process.

29. An “Environment for Europe” web site should be developed with the following elements, as well as others that may emerge during the process:

(a) An overall set-up that is both by country and by environmental topic. Note the importance of this in terms of resources: a UNECE country, intergovernmental organization or NGO can be asked on an ad hoc basis to provide a single bit of content relevant to its specific situation or interest (an interview, existing article, web site link, schedule of meetings, etc.). This will add depth and usefulness to the site and allow the UNECE secretariat to coordinate rather than create extensive content;

(b) An area that highlights a timeline, going back to the origins of the process and looking forward to future plans, allowing visitors to select a point in time, including the present, and learn the status of the “Environment for Europe” process;

(c) An interactive area consisting of surveys or polls, online forums, question-and-answer areas, search for information by country or topic, etc. This area can be highly automated, relying on user-generated content, relieving the UNECE secretariat of the task of maintaining the area, and fostering more genuine participation by visitors;

(d) Three resource areas for visitors – press, government or agency officials, and interested citizens, scholars, businesses, etc., in the UNECE countries:

- (i) The “online press room” area will not only provide full background and resources needed for effective coverage of the “Environment for Europe” process, but also tools that allow members of the press with greater interest to identify themselves for follow-up. Strategically this allows the press to fall naturally into two categories: contacts needing simply to be kept aware of “Environment for Europe” information, and contacts who can be assisted in their desire for more in-depth coverage, e.g. an interview, informal discussion;
- (ii) The public area will contain full information on the “Environment for Europe” process and also provide links to government, intergovernmental and NGO sites where more extended or local discussion of issues can take place;
- (iii) A password area for member countries, “Environment for Europe” partners and others who need to communicate among themselves about activities, report communication developments, seek advice on initiatives, etc;

(e) An update area with video or photo archives of meeting highlights, calendar of future meetings, report of projects, etc., and also interviews with experts, advocates, scholars or even ministers;

(f) A registration area to allow future e-communications with interested visitors and to monitor the effectiveness of site elements.

30. A model should be developed for publishing “Environment for Europe” reports with two elements: an annual report directed to country policy makers, citizens and NGOs, summarizing

recent accomplishments and promoting interest in the coming year's activities, and periodic, ad hoc "Environment for Europe" updates that allow for more timely communication as needed. The updates may occur as "Environment for Europe"-wide reports, or targeting a specific UNECE subregion if needed and appropriate. This helps address the widely varying situations among the UNECE countries. Note that the updates can be printed, like the annual report, or can be limited to electronic distribution to save costs. Recognizing that the level of Internet access also varies widely by country, electronic distribution would require active promotion of the updates and local distribution by government and/or NGO sources, to ensure maximum public access.

31. A budget and resource plan should be developed. The current concept is to distribute tasks as follows:

(a) Add only a single individual, perhaps part-time, supported by a small volunteer group, to coordinate official communications;

(b) Leverage the intellectual capital and support of the communications partners for content such as editorial pieces or interviews;

(c) Outsource the development of an "Environment for Europe" web site and the automation of interactive content;

(d) To minimize demands on the UNECE secretariat and partners, and to promote timely delivery of information, implementation should rely on automation of the communication process wherever possible, for example posting periodic updates or surveys on the "Environment for Europe" web site and automatically forwarding links and actual content to other appropriate sites.

IV. RESPONDING TO CHALLENGES: A RESOURCE STRATEGY

32. There is no lack of agreement or support for an effective communication plan for the "Environment for Europe" process. Indeed, it is essential to the success of its goals: awareness, public support and wide participation. Whether this plan is adopted as it stands or is amended, there will be a clear need for more resources for its implementation. The challenge is to implement a communication plan with limited resources while meeting many other responsibilities. Thus a "resource strategy" is as important as a communication strategy.

33. A sound resource strategy can rest on three principles:

(a) Implementing the communication plan in phases as resources become available;

(b) Supporting the UNECE secretariat with a small group of communication partners (governmental and NGOs) to assist with ad hoc initiatives, as appropriate, such as making content available, improving the media contact list or assisting in distributing communications; and

(c) Seeking funds as well as volunteers (e.g. interns) to permit full implementation on the plan.

34. Specific action items include:

(a) Complete a fund-raising approach to a limited number of qualified potential donors. The objectives would be funding a communications assistant for the UNECE secretariat or providing one as a contribution in kind, and supporting the online and print publishing needs of the “Environment for Europe” process;

(b) Identify member countries and organizations taking part in the “Environment for Europe” process able and willing to provide resources in kind as described above;

(c) Divide the communication plan into two phases: first, the tasks that can be accomplished with existing resources in the coming 12 to 18 months and, second, the initiatives that can be implemented as resources are secured. For example, a web site can be launched that is largely informational, with the more interactive elements added later. In addition, an “Environment for Europe” annual report can be developed in the first phase, with “Environment for Europe” updates added later.

V. DISCUSSION AND COMMENTS

35. Three broad areas require particular attention from the Committee on Environmental Policy, to ensure the most effective communication plan:

(a) The soundness of the general strategy, particularly distinguishing news and editorial content, and the concept of phased implementation;

(b) Areas of the plan needing further attention; and

(c) Identification of potential communication partners for the “Environment for Europe” process.