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Working Group of the Parties

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Item 3 (b) of the provisional agenda

Reporting requirements

Issues concerning the editing and translation of national implementation reports

Note by the secretariat¹

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¹ This note has been prepared pursuant to a request made at the eleventh meeting of the Working Group of the Parties (ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2009/2, para. 53). It should be read in conjunction with the note on options for addressing issues relating to the Convention's reporting mechanism prepared for consideration at that meeting (ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2009/6). The present note was submitted on the above date due to resource constraints.

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Introduction

1. At its eleventh meeting, the Working Group of the Parties discussed various options for addressing problems related to the workload and resource demands imposed on the secretariat by the current system of national reporting on implementation on the basis of a note prepared by the secretariat (ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2009/2, chapter X, and ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2009/6). Through decision III/5, the Working Group had been requested to review these matters in the context of a general review of the reporting system (ECE/MP.PP/2008/2/Add.7, paras. 20–21).

2. The Working Group recognized the concern about the workload and strain on the resources of the secretariat posed by the national implementation reports. However, a number of delegations indicated their preference for continuing to have the reports available in all official languages, as required under decision I/8. The secretariat was requested to make a comparison with the reporting mechanisms of other United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) conventions, and also to provide more information on the calculations made in the discussion paper, taking into account the financial implications of the fact that in subsequent reporting cycles only new information would need to be translated.

3. Following the Working Group's request to provide information about the costs of partial translation of the national implementation reports, the secretariat has made additional calculations regarding the costs of translation under the various options proposed in the paper on the national reporting mechanism that was discussed by the Working Group at its eleventh meeting. These calculations were made on the assumption that Parties will use their implementation reports from the previous reporting cycle as a basis for drafting their new reports, and that they will submit their new implementation reports in a 'track changes' version so that the new text in the reports can be distinguished. The present note also addresses the approaches with respect to national reporting on implementation that are being used by the secretariats of other multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) administered by the UNECE.

I. Outsourcing the editing and translation of implementation reports

4. The note on options for addressing issues relating to the Convention's reporting mechanism presented to the eleventh meeting of the Working Group (ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2009/6) set out a number of options for dealing with the problems identified by the secretariat. Under the first option, the national implementation reports would be published as official UN documents, but editing and translation would be outsourced, with the costs covered from the Convention's trust fund. In the event that only the changes to earlier implementation reports were to be edited and translated, the costs of outsourcing translation and editing would vary depending on the proportion of new text in the reports. Calculations were therefore made for two different scenarios, one assuming that on average fifty percent of the text of the reports is new, the other assuming that twenty-five percent of the text is new. The costs corresponding to these percentages give an indication of the sliding scale of costs for other percentages, e.g. if the reports would be submitted with an average of thirty-five percent of new text, the costs of translation into two other languages would lie in a range between USD 40,000 and 80,000 (see table 1).

Table 1**Estimated costs of translation and editing of national implementation reports**

<i>Estimated costs in United States dollars (to nearest thousand)</i>			
	<i>Editor beginner's level</i>	<i>Experienced editor</i>	<i>Experienced translator employed as editor</i>
Editing of 25% new text	9,000	10,500	12,000
Editing of 50% new text	18,000	21,000	25,000
Editing of 100% new text	35,000	42,000	49,000
	Standard text	Technical or difficult text	Very difficult or urgent text
Translation into two other languages – 25 % new text	41,000	43,000	45,000
Translation into two other languages – 50 % new text	82,000	86,000	90,000
Translation into two other languages – 100 % new text	163,000	171,000	179,000

II. Publishing national reports in their original languages²

5. The second option referred to in the secretariat's previous note (ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2009/6) is to publish the reports only in the official UNECE language in which they are submitted. Within this option, the reports could either be produced as official United Nations documents, which could entail editing (outsourced as described above) and would involve processing of the reports by the Division of Conference Management; or they could be produced as informal documents, meaning that the reports would be made available to other Parties and to the public more or less in the form in which they are submitted by the Party.

6. Either of these options could be supplemented by the preparation of informal English translations, for operational purposes, of reports that are not submitted in English, so as to facilitate the work of the Compliance Committee (which uses English as its primary informal working language) and the preparation of the synthesis report by the secretariat. Since the total number of reports to be translated would be far less than if all national implementation reports were translated into the three official languages, and since they would be translated into only one language rather than two, the costs would be significantly lower than described under the option described in section I above (see table 2).

² In this context, original language (as opposed to national language) means the official UNECE language (English, French or Russian) in which the report is submitted.

Table 2

Estimated costs of informal translation of reports submitted in French and Russian

<i>Estimated costs in United States dollars (to nearest thousand)</i>			
	Standard text	Technical or difficult text	Very difficult or urgent text
Translation only – 25% new text	4,250	4,500	4,7500
Translation only 50% new text	8,500	9,00	9,500
Translation only – 100% new text	17,000	18,000	19,000

III. Approaches to reporting used under other UNECE multilateral environmental agreements

7. In order to provide an opportunity to compare the reporting mechanisms in use among the environmental treaties administered by the UNECE, the following section contains an overview of the various approaches being taken with respect to national reporting under the respective UNECE MEAs.

1. Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution

8. Under the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution (Air Convention), Parties have an obligation to report annually on their emissions of polluting substances under the European Monitoring and Evaluation Programme (EMEP) established under the Convention. The data on emissions reported by the Parties is collected and made publicly available through an online database, the EMEP Centre on Emission Inventories and Projections (CEIP)³, hosted by the Austrian Environment Agency. The CEIP database is in English only.

9. Parties to the Air Convention are also obliged to report to the Convention's Implementation Committee on their implementation of the protocols to the Air Convention. On the basis of a questionnaire, Parties send information to the secretariat, which summarizes the information and periodically reports on it to the Implementation Committee. The Implementation Committee meets twice a year and reports annually to the Executive Body of the Convention, which makes decisions upon recommendations by the Committee. The Committee consists of nine Parties to the Convention, each elected for a term of two years. The Committee's reports are made available to the public in the three official languages, whereas the information provided by the Parties on their national implementation is not made public directly. However, once every four years the secretariat publishes a compilation of the information submitted by the Parties (the 'Review of Strategies and Policies for Air Pollution Abatement'). In the process of preparing this publication, the information submitted by the Parties is not edited, but informal translations

³ The EMEP/CEIP database is accessible online at <http://www.ceip.at>.

are produced by the secretariat for the purpose of compiling the information. It has been the practice of the secretariat to hire an external consultant to produce the compilation, the costs of which are covered by the Convention's trust fund.

2. Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes

10. The Parties to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) do not have an obligation to submit reports on national implementation of the Convention. Riparian Parties (i.e. Parties bordering the same transboundary waters), however, have an obligation to establish and implement joint programmes for monitoring the conditions of transboundary waters and to carry out joint or coordinated assessments of the conditions of transboundary waters and the effectiveness of measures taken to prevent, control and reduce transboundary impacts. The results of these assessments are made available to the public.

11. At their third meeting (2003), the Parties to the Water Convention decided to carry out an assessment of the status of transboundary waters with the aim to evaluate compliance with the obligations of the Convention and to assess progress achieved in improving the status of transboundary waters in the region. The Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment was mandated to prepare the assessment, under the leadership of Finland. As a basis for the assessment, Parties submitted answers to a questionnaire to the secretariat. The first assessment of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters in the UNECE region was finalized and adopted in 2007. While the Parties' answers to the questionnaire were not made public, the assessment is publicly available in English and Russian. The sixth "Environment for Europe" Ministerial Conference subsequently requested that a second assessment be undertaken. This is currently underway and will again be based on Parties' answers to a questionnaire. Parties may submit their answers to the secretariat in English or Russian; however the answers are not being edited or translated.

12. Article 7 of the Protocol on Water and Health to the Water Convention stipulates that each Party to the Protocol is required to provide to the secretariat, for circulation to the other Parties, a summary report of collected and evaluated data and an assessment of the progress achieved. The Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol is required to evaluate progress in implementing the Protocol on the basis of these summary reports. The Working Group on Water and Health is currently in the process of establishing guidelines for the summary reports, including a template, which are to be used by Parties in the preparation of their reports. The draft guidelines state that the summary reports should be submitted in one of the official languages of the Protocol (English, French, German or Russian). To facilitate the exchange of experience, each Party is also encouraged to submit, where relevant, a translation of its summary report in English. The submitted reports will be published on the website of the Protocol; however they will not be edited or translated and will not be published as official UN documents. The secretariat plans to hire a consultant to compile a synthesis report on the basis of the submitted reports, the costs of which are to be covered by the Protocol's trust fund.

3. Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context

13. Through decision II/10, the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention) established a task force to undertake a first comprehensive review of the Convention based

on experience gained in its implementation. On the basis of Parties' responses to a questionnaire, which were not made directly available to the public, the secretariat published a review of implementation, a summary of which was adopted by the Meeting of the Parties in 2004.

14. Through decision III/1, the Espoo Parties were requested to again complete a questionnaire on the implementation of the Convention and the secretariat was mandated to prepare a second review of implementation, using the responses to the questionnaire as a basis. The review was adopted by the Meeting of Parties at its fourth meeting in 2008. The Parties' responses during this second review were made available to the public through the website of the Espoo Convention secretariat. However, they were not published as official UN documents and were only made available online, unedited and in the UNECE language in which they were submitted. For the purpose of preparing the second review of implementation, informal translations into English were prepared of those reports that were submitted in Russian. The informal translations were prepared by an external consultant, the costs of which were covered by the Convention's trust fund.

15. At the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Espoo Convention, it was decided that the Parties would again complete a questionnaire to report on their implementation of the Convention, and that a third review of implementation based on the reports by Parties would be presented at the fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties in 2011.

4. Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents

16. The Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents stipulates in article 18, paragraph 2 (a), that the Conference of the Parties shall review the Convention's implementation. In order to facilitate this review, Parties are obliged to report on their implementation of the Convention according to the reporting requirement set out in article 23. The Conference of the Parties established a Working Group on Implementation to lead this process. On the basis of individual country reports submitted to the secretariat, the Working Group compiled the first and second reports on the implementation of the Convention, both of which were endorsed by the Conference of the Parties.

17. Individual national implementation reports submitted within the first, second and third reporting rounds were not made available to the public. Through a password-protected website, the reports were only made available to the competent authorities designated by individual Parties, in accordance with a decision of the Conference of the Parties. The reports were submitted in one of the three official UNECE languages and were added to the website in their original form, without having been edited. For the purpose of preparing the report of the Working Group on Implementation, informal translations into English were prepared of those reports that were submitted in Russian or French. The informal translations were prepared by an external consultant, the costs of which were covered by the Convention's trust fund.