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**The Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference:
developing the Shared Environmental Information System and
establishing a regular environmental assessment
in the pan-European region**

Outcomes of the work of the Group of Friends of the Shared Environmental Information System for the period November–July 2015*

Report by the Group of Friends of the Shared Environmental Information System**

Summary

At its nineteenth session (Geneva, 22–25 October 2013), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) established a Group of Friends of the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) to support the development of SEIS in the pan-European region. Subsequently, the ECE Executive Committee formally approved the establishment of the Group of Friends of SEIS, its mandate and its terms of reference and financial requirements (ECE/EX/11).

In 2014, the Friends of SEIS accomplished the first part of the mandate by preparing targets and performance indicators to measure progress in developing SEIS across the pan-European region (ECE/CEP/2014/8), which were adopted by CEP at its twentieth session in October 2014 (ECE/CEP/2014/2, paras. 76 and 98 (ff) (ii)).

To fulfil the second part of the mandate, the Friends of SEIS worked via electronic consultations and met in Geneva on 11 May 2015. The present document outlines the outcomes of the work of the Friends of SEIS, including its May meeting, with a view to supporting the CEP deliberations on SEIS at its twenty-first session. The report is

* This document was submitted on the above date due to resource constraints.

** This document was not formally edited.



complementary to the report submitted to CEP in 2014 (see ECE/CEP/2014/7).

Background and mandate for 2015

1. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) established a Group of Friends of the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) to support the development of SEIS in the pan-European region and requested the Group to look into several related issues, including monitoring and evaluating the progress in SEIS development and organizing and shaping the regular assessment process, taking into account the benefits of SEIS (ECE/CEP/2013/2, paras. 38–39 and 116 (g) (v)).
2. At its twentieth session in October 2014, CEP welcomed the work of the Friends of SEIS accomplished thus far (ECE/CEP/2014/7) and invited the Group to continue working on fulfilling the second part of the mandate given by CEP, i.e., to answer the question “how should the regular environmental assessment process be organized and shaped, taking into consideration the benefits of SEIS?” (ECE/CEP/2014/2, paras. 75 and 98 (ff) (i)).
3. To fulfil the second part of the mandate, the Friends of SEIS worked via electronic consultations and met in Geneva on 11 May 2015. The present document outlines the outcomes of the work of the Friends of SEIS, including its May meeting, with a view to supporting the CEP work on SEIS at its twenty-first session.
4. The report is complementary to the report submitted to CEP in 2014 (ECE/CEP/2014/7).

I. Workplan for 2014–2015

5. The Group of Friends of SEIS developed a workplan for 2014–2015, as contained in its previous report (ECE/CEP/2014/7, annex). With the conclusion of the second part of the mandate, the workplan was considered as fulfilled, pending consideration by CEP and its decision on the second outcome of the Group’s work, i.e., approval of the proposed organization and shape of a regular environmental assessment process in the pan-European region (ECE/CEP/2015/10).

II. Monitoring and evaluating progress in developing the Shared Environmental Information System

6. At its meeting in May 2015, the Group of Friends of SEIS welcomed the information provided on the work of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment to monitor progress in developing SEIS across the pan-European region. Monitoring was based on the targets and performance indicators developed by the Group and adopted by CEP. The participants emphasized the importance of an operational SEIS to enable and support the regular environmental assessment process in the pan-European region.

III. Organizing and shaping the regular environmental assessment process

7. At its meeting in May 2015, the Group of Friends of SEIS prepared a proposal on the organization and shape of a regular environmental assessment process across the pan-European region. The work of the Group was supported by the ECE secretariat, working in

close collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and with the European Environment Agency (EEA).

8. The Friends of SEIS welcomed a draft proposal prepared by the secretariat and provided comments for finalizing it for submission to the CEP Bureau at its meeting in June 2015 and, subsequently, to the twenty-first session of CEP in October 2015. Participants agreed that the pan-European SEIS should serve as the common pan-European environmental knowledge base for the generation of assessments commissioned at the pan-European level. In that regard, the establishment of an operational, well-functioning and regularly updated pan-European SEIS was highlighted as being a prerequisite for enabling the regular environmental assessment process (i.e., to serve as a vital fuel for sustaining the process).

9. Furthermore, the Friends of SEIS supported the idea to use UNEP Live¹ as a central platform, linking it to existing technical infrastructure and platforms as well as to national and subregional platforms, with a view to provide centralized access to the knowledge database, including assessments, data and information regularly published by countries.

10. Concerning the governance structure of the regular environmental assessment process, the Friends of SEIS agreed that CEP should continue to provide the overall political oversight and decide on whether to commission a pan-European environment assessment or specific thematic assessments and policy briefs for relevant events, such as the Environment for Europe Ministerial Conferences. At the same time, following up on CEP requests, the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment would serve as the specialized body for the generation of pan-European or thematic assessments, with its work being supported by the ECE secretariat in cooperation with UNEP and EEA. The Working Group would also serve as the regional environmental information and assessment network of networks, bringing together the UNEP Global Environmental Outlook (GEO) expert teams and the EEA European Environment Information and Observation Network (Eionet) to formulate the regional priorities and scope for the pan-European assessments. The Working Group would also link with thematic networks, including those under the ECE multilateral environmental agreements.

11. Concerning the assessment product, the Friends of SEIS supported the proposal to use the European regional component of GEO as the assessment of the state of the environment in the pan-European region. It was emphasized that the development of the regional component of GEO should build on the existing assessments, such as the EEA state of the environment report (SOER), as well as on national state of the environment assessments.

12. Regarding the timing for the assessment, the Friends of SEIS agreed that the generation of assessments should be carried out in accordance with the political demand for such assessments, following a decision by CEP.

13. CEP will be invited to consider for approval the proposed shape and organization of the regular environmental assessment process based on SEIS as contained in document ECE/CEP/2015/10.

¹ Available at <http://uneplive.unep.org/>.