

Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference

Astana, Kazakhstan

***European Environment Assessment of Assessments:
Key Findings***

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INTRODUCTION

[Cover of AoA EN]

Your excellency

Good afternoon Honourable Ministers, distinguished delegates, colleagues.

First, let me thank our hosts, Kazakhstan and UNECE national representatives for giving me the opportunity to present a summary of the main findings and recommendations in Europe's Environment: An Assessment of Assessments – the AoA.

[Cover of AoA RU]

Under the guidance of a strong steering group, and my Kazakhs co-chairs, the European Environment Agency (EEA), has worked with national representatives, partners in the 4 Regional Environment Centres in Eastern Europe, Caucasus, Central Asia and Russian Federation, and international organisations to produce the report you have before you today.

[Map in portal]

Overall, more than 1100 global, regional, national and sub-national assessments and reports from the past 5 years were identified and shared. They covered the two themes for this Ministerial meeting, water and related ecosystems, the green economy and resource efficiency. More than half of the

assessments were reviewed. In the picture, we can see the map showing the geographic distribution of the submissions.

[Zoom into Map in portal]

Using the AoA portal, we can zoom in and find the titles and source of each original report. Here we can see a report relating to the green economy, from Kazakhstan.

[List of reports in portal]

It is clear that over the 16 years since the first pan-European environmental "Dobris" assessment was produced for the Ministerial meeting in Sofia in 1995, the amount of information and assessments to support the policy process has increased significantly.

However, we can see from the inventory of reports and assessments that these have often been designed to support many different purposes across the region, and are unlikely, individually, to be suitable for the regular assessment process, and political decision-making processes.

What we are seeking in the regular process is improvements in the timeliness and consistency of assessments, integration of information from different sources and sectors, including environmentally harmful subsidies, costs savings in infrastructure, genuine capacity building, a more obvious

uptake of the results in policy processes and wider accessibility of the underlying information by applying the principles of sharing environmental information.

So let us look at the report's findings to establish how such a regular process could best be built.

What is in Europe's Environment Assessment of Assessments?

[List of contents EN]

The report covers the background and methodology of the assessment of assessments, detailed analyses of the reports and assessments covering water and related ecosystems and the green economy, a cross-thematic analysis and finally a set of 14 recommendations.

[List of contents RU]

The on-line service has been complemented with a boxed set of the English and Russian versions of the assessment and executive summary. In addition there are four sub-regional reports for: Eastern Europe, Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Russian Federation in English and Russian.

Setting the Scene

[Chap 1 EN]

It should first be noted that Europe's Environment introduced a number of key principles including a strong participatory, flexible and modular process, guidelines to ensure consistency across each thematic focus and a highly interactive setting in which to build up knowledge, make comparisons and share results.

[Chap 1 RU]

One of the major conclusions from this part of the report is that because assessments put significant demands on many parties to deliver data and review information, the lack of co-ordination is leading to competing needs, problems with coherence and a strain on overall resources.

[Map of assessments]

A second conclusion is that there are serious gaps between the information being collected, the analyses undertaken and the policies developed. In other words, even though the number of assessments has increased, there is no obvious evidence that their impact on decision making has grown.

There is an urgent need to revisit the links between policy demands and the assessment process, so as to be able to answer the questions of decision makers more appropriately.

Thematic aspects

[Chap 2 Water EN]

From the report it is clear that water-related issues are serious and worsening in many parts of Europe, that floods and droughts are increasing and that an estimated 120 million people in the pan-European region do not have access to safe drinking water or adequate sanitation.

Whilst the vast majority of the reports submitted were water-related - indeed, we suspect that as many as **100 water-related reports** are produced in the region **every year** - the vast majority are not **'fit for purpose' from a policy perspective**. Most of them are not actually assessments, they are something else – descriptions, statistics, data often without context. And most of them are not directly linked to the policy cycle.

[Chap 2 Water RU]

These findings are clearly identified in the regional reports. For example, from the Central Asian AoA the review concludes that most of the assessments are descriptive compilations of information that provide no clear guidance for decision making, while in the Caucasus the reporting process proved to be unsustainable.

To develop effective policy –as a basic first step - we must have the best available information in hand at the right time.

More critically, the policy relevance of the information needs to be improved.

[Chap 3 Green Economy EN]

With regard to Green Economy – this is an area at a very early stage of development compared to water, so there are fewer assessments: in fact, we found only one national assessment from Kazakhstan.

There are many strategies for future Green Economy policies, plus many reports which have a bearing on Green Economy, but few real assessments. This simply reinforces the need for a regular assessment process in this integrated, cross-cutting area.

[Chap 3 Green Economy RU]

In short, the AoA concludes that Green economy is not defined clearly or consistently, there are no appropriate institutional arrangements in place to meet these new challenges, and that assessments dealing with aspects of the green economy are largely driven from the bottom-up and do not form part of a clear framework.

More importantly, the reports cannot, in any way, be said to form a coherent assessment of Green Economy across the pan-European region.

[Chap 4 Cross-thematic EN]

These challenges – of building up a green economy and managing resources sustainably - are shared by all regions of the world.

Today, the underlying knowledge for developing the green economy in the region is highly fragmented. To begin the transformation process and develop goals for the Rio +20 process, we will need to build up and agree upon a comprehensive inventory of the key components, examples of best practice, plus information and indicators that can be used by institutions and civil society to measure progress.

[Chap 4 Cross-thematic RU]

But to begin the process of building a more sustainable, green economy, we will first need to find ways to improve data collection and reporting within an enhanced shared environment information system and services, that will make it possible to have access to consistent knowledge that is up-to-date and relevant to all stakeholders.

So what should we do? (Main recommendations)

[Chap 5 Recommendations EN]

In summary, the main findings and recommendations of the AoA are reflected in the proposed Astana Ministerial Declaration. They include the need for regular process of updating and assessment on progress towards a green economy and the sustainable management of natural resources such as water and related ecosystems; the usefulness of the AoA framework to determine the major weaknesses and strengths in the links between policy demands and assessments;

[Chap 5 Recommendations RU]

the development of SEIS, a shared environmental information system, to support the process; and the necessity to commit to increase the relevant capacity building and investments in monitoring, reporting and assessment.

[SEIS]

SEIS is a network of public information providers willing to share their environmental data and information.

A key goal of establishing SEIS is to maximise and expand the value of information: to collect it once and use it many times. It was a SEIS application that was used for this report.

[Eye on Earth 1]

To support SEIS, the EEA has developed Eye on Earth a free global web service for creating and sharing information between public institutions, the private sector and civil society. By bringing together all the major software systems and applications used today, Eye on Earth will make it possible for everyone to easily use and integrate information that is both up-to-date and quality assured.

Here on the slide you can see the web service, the underlying architecture and applications for bathing water in Europe and a multimedia atlas produced in partnership with UNEP and the European Space Agency.

[Eye on Earth 2]

Eye on Earth can be used across today's technology platforms, from computers to smart phones, to meet the information needs in the field for mobile workers and environmental inspection services. Here we can see examples of shipping, biodiversity, air quality monitoring and the integration of all the major social media.

EEA will use Eye on Earth to support the development of SEIS in the region according to the proposed Ministerial Declaration.

[Astana]

The findings of Europe's Environment: the Assessment of Assessments provide a first step in creating the knowledge base needed to transform the region's economy to one that is greener and safeguard its resources.

The accumulated assessments and analyses may not be fit for the purposes of decision making today. But the combination of political will to build a shared environment information system, and the engagement of the private sector and civil society through a more open web service, will help to ensure that the investments in information and knowledge that we make today will transform the Ministerial Declaration into reality over the coming years.

Thank you!