

PROPOSED INITIATIVE ON STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT ("Belgrade SEA Initiative")

DRAFT BACKGROUND PAPER, 21 September 2006

1. This document defines a proposed initiative on strategic environmental assessment (SEA), to support implementation of the UNECE Protocol on SEA, as a means of promoting sustainable development in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA).

I. Background

2. The Third Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe" (Sofia, 1995) welcomed an initiative on "environmental impact assessment", which aimed to accelerate implementation of the Environmental Action Programme for Central and Eastern Europe (EAP). This initiative, later known as the "Sofia EIA Initiative", was implemented by Croatia and the Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe (REC) in 1995-2003 through a series of comparative studies, subregional workshops for senior government officials and policy recommendations for the "Environment for Europe" and "Environment and Health" processes, and for the Meeting of the Parties to the UNECE Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) in a Transboundary Context (Espoo, 1991). Activities under the Sofia EIA Initiative also significantly accelerated debates on the introduction of SEA in Central and Eastern Europe and provided subregional support for the launching of the negotiations on the Protocol on SEA to the Espoo Convention.

3. An extraordinary meeting of the Parties to the Espoo Convention was held in Kiev during the "Environment for Europe" Ministerial Conference, 2003. The Meeting of the Parties adopted the Protocol on SEA to the Espoo Convention and emphasized "the importance of capacity building for the effective implementation and application of the provisions of this Protocol" (MP.EIA/2003/2, para. 7). Further, Ministers in Kiev declared "We invite all interested UNECE States to sign this Protocol and to work actively for its ratification and implementation" (ECE/CEP/94/Rev.1, para. 34).

4. Ministers at the Kiev Conference also adopted the "EECCA Environment Strategy",¹ with the objective to "strengthen efforts of these countries in environmental protection and facilitating partnership and cooperation between EECCA countries and other countries of the UNECE region, including all stakeholders". Objective IV of this strategy is to "Integrate Environmental Considerations into the Development of Key Economic Sectors". Thus capacity development for the implementation of the Protocol on SEA is fully in line with and supports implementation of the EECCA Strategy.

5. In 2004, the third meeting of the Parties to the Espoo Convention, held in conjunction with the first meeting of the Signatories to the Protocol on SEA, adopted a workplan that included activities supporting capacity development in SEA. The Meeting of the Parties also encouraged "the Signatories to the Protocol to develop capacity for its ratification and implementation on the basis of demonstrated need, giving particular support to the countries of South-Eastern and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia and, wherever possible, working with regional institutions to make expertise and resources available as necessary" (ECE/MP.EIA/6, annex XIII, para. 16).

¹ Environmental Partnerships in the UUECE Region: Environment Strategy for Countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (ECE/CEP/105/Rev.1)

6. Subsequently, UNDP, with support from the REC and the Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC), has implemented an SEA capacity-development initiative.² This initiative has been undertaken in collaboration with the UNECE secretariat and the Meeting of the Parties to the Espoo Convention. Together with Armenia, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine (signatories to the Protocol) and Belarus, these organizations have, with regard to SEA and the Protocol:³

- (a) Undertaken national capacity-development needs analyses
- (b) Developed a subregional overview of capacity-development needs
- (c) Undertaken pilot projects
- (d) Developed national capacity-development strategies⁴
- (e) Prepared subregional initiatives to support the national capacity-development strategies⁵

7. This work is continuing and being carried forward by the above-mentioned organizations and others in the five countries and elsewhere in EECCA.

II. Priority actions⁶

8. The national strategies (Armenia, Belarus, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine) identify short-term priority actions, typically to be undertaken in the period 2006-2008, and longer-term actions. These actions, together with proposed subregional initiatives, are outlined below.

9. The national short-term priority actions are:

- (a) Elaboration or modification of national regulations and laws on SEA (Armenia, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine)
- (b) Undertaking pilot SEAs (Armenia, Ukraine)
- (c) Training and networking (Belarus, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine)
- (d) Raising awareness of SEA and its benefits (Belarus, the Republic of Moldova)

10. The subregional initiatives are:

- (a) Networking of government officials responsible SEA system development
- (b) Networking of EIA and SEA practitioners in EECCA
- (c) Subregional projects supporting national capacity-development activities in the target countries and awareness raising of the SEA Protocol across EECCA

11. The proposed Belgrade SEA Initiative would correspond broadly to the networking of government officials, identified above.

III. Belgrade SEA Initiative

12. The Ministerial Declaration might include support for this initiative, for example:

² ENVSEC is an initiative originally established by UNEP, UNDP and OSCE, joined by UNECE and the REC in 2006, and supported financially by various donors.

³ For documentation on these activities, see http://www.unece.org/env/sea/eecca_capacity.htm.

⁴ Strategies were developed in Armenia, Belarus, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. Georgia prepared a *Programme for the period 2005-2009: a framework for future SEA activities in Georgia* with support from the Dutch Environmental Assessment Commission.

⁵ Comments have been invited on the "draft for consultation" *Proposed Subregional Initiatives to Support National Strategies for the Implementation of the SEA Protocol in EECCA*.

⁶ Consultations are continuing on the strategies and initiatives, so minor changes may be envisaged.

“We recognize the importance of strategic environmental assessment (SEA) for the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes and, to the extent appropriate, policies and legislation that may have significant environmental effects. We appreciate the signing of the UNECE Protocol on SEA by those States wishing to share a common legal framework for SEA. We also recognize the successful implementation of the Sofia EIA Initiative. We therefore welcome the initiative by Armenia and Belarus to promote SEA systems in EECCA through facilitating the sharing of experience and knowledge among EECCA countries that signed the Protocol or plan to accede to it. This initiative should also enable the transfer of relevant lessons learnt from Central and Eastern Europe. We encourage UNECE, UNDP, the REC and interested donors to support its practical implementation.”

13. If this initiative receives support at the Conference, Armenia and Belarus propose that the EAP Task Force be invited to develop a more detailed work programme. The work programme should be designed to reinforce on-going work [and to accelerate the implementation of the EAP]. As far as possible, activities should be led by EECCA countries and emphasize the sharing of experience, East-East. Donors, international organizations and financing institutions should also be fully involved, sharing their experience and providing much needed support for subregional and country-specific activities. Some indications of the types of activities that might be included in a work programme are identified below. Results of the work should be reported to the next “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference.

14. Possible actions to be implemented under this initiative could include comparative studies, subregional workshops for senior government officials and policy recommendations related to the following issues in implementation of the Protocol in EECCA:

- (a) Development of effective SEA procedures;
- (b) National transposition of the Protocol requirements;
- (c) Development of appropriate SEA guidelines;
- (d) Developing necessary capacities for SEA;
- (e) Evaluating SEA processes; and
- (f) Explaining benefits of SEA to decision-makers.

15. [UNECE, UNDP and the REC might support Armenia and Belarus through the provision of a joint programme and by:⁷

- (a) UNECE providing linkages between this initiative and the Espoo Convention and “Environment for Europe” processes
- (b) UNDP coordinating fundraising and programme management, in line with its mandate for resource mobilization
- (c) REC providing overall coordination based on lessons learnt from the Sofia EIA Initiative]

⁷ To be further detailed prior to implementation of the Initiative