

Workshop on Progress Made under the Eastern part of the ENPI-SEIS Project “Towards a Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) in the European Neighbourhood”

Summary Minutes

**21-22 November 2012
Copenhagen, Denmark**

Purpose and participation

The purpose of the workshop was to facilitate dialogue and communication with the project partners in the East (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and the Russian Federation) to enable smooth running of the project and to secure country perspective in the future implementation. The meeting took stock of the activities undertaken in 2012 and contributed to the development of the workplan for 2013. Representatives from ministries of environment and statistical offices from the countries-beneficiaries of the project took part in the workshop, as well as representatives from the European Commission, EEA, UNECE, UNEP, REC-Caucasus, REC-Moldova and Zoi Environment network.

Day 1 - Plenary Session 1: Towards a shared vision

Recent developments in the cooperation with the EU neighbours and progress achieved in the implementation of the project

Peter Jensen, Head of the Governance and Network Programme, EEA opened the workshop and welcomed the participants making a brief overview of the meeting agenda.

Jesús Laviña, Directorate-General for the Development and Cooperation – EuropeAid (DG DEVCO), touched upon the recent developments in the cooperation with the EU neighbourhood. He stated that yet even though SEIS has been identified as a solid element of cooperation among all regions, political commitments still cause a key issue. Good technical cooperation cannot assure big results without political support. Mr. Laviña pointed out that ENPI-SEIS is still making implementation steps: country reports for all the countries has been made, the first capacity building activities has been delivered, but not all the needs has been covered. He also expressed his hope that during the meeting all the expectations from the process of ENPI-SEIS implementation will be identified.

Andrew Murphy, from DG Environment presented an outline of the development with ENP with the focus on the details of its environmental components. He stated that with the help of UNECE in the East and UNEP/MAP in the South the ENP becomes more structured and focused. Before, there used to be a country strategy and at present it has to be an internal process, and the countries should put forward to their local governments that there is a need for this project. Internal lobbying, further negotiations with the Foreign Affairs and then additional input from the side of the Commission should be remembered as the way forward.

Peter Jensen Head of the Governance and Network Programme of the European Environmental Agency (EEA), gave an overview of progress made in implementation of the project: indicators were defined, data – mapped out, the next step included testing the dataflow and the indicators, bringing it into structural level to be followed by country and regional assessments. However, there remains a need to look at the national level and its networking structure and context for data sharing.

The discussions on the accomplishments under the project and the workplan for 2013-2014 were held in two parallel sessions, on the East and the South.

Regional Session: East

Briefing on UNECE- EEA cooperation on SEIS implementation

There were three presenters for this agenda point. The first presentation was made by Mr. Kokine from UNECE, who made a presentation on how activities under the UNECE MEAs, WGEMA, the Joint Task Force on Environmental Indicators and EPR assist the publication of regular assessments and SEIS development in the Pan-European region. For the moment, there are 16 countries in the UNECE Joint Task Force on Environmental Indicators: 12 from the former Soviet Union and 4 from the Balkans. It was noted that the work made so far had a good impact on underpinning the production of indicators for national assessments. The focus is on the establishment of a structured process of reporting with a governing body. Such a structure is important for the development of SEIS, but governance remains an issue. In the work done by UNECE, there is a clear move from the ideas and concepts to what type of indicators could send a clear message to the policy makers and the public.

Good progress was noted for several countries:

- Moldova, Belarus and Georgia have started publishing indicator-based reports.
- Russian Federation – new regulation on environmental reporting. An annual report will be produced on the basis of the indicators.
- Ukraine plans to move in a similar direction to the Russian Federation.
- There are clear indications that in order for Azerbaijan to comply with the Aarhus convention, it has to start producing state of the environment reports.

In the next presentation, Ms. Etropolska (UNECE) talked more specifically on the work done by the Joint Task Force (JTF) on environmental indicators since its establishment in 2009 with an objective to improve environmental data collection and use. The JTF is defining indicators needed and used for periodical assessments and for decision-makers, as well as with the purpose of raising public awareness. The JTF has been reviewing through six sessions (2010 – 2012) 36 indicators contained in the 2007 UNECE Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia.

A third presentation by Ms. Iliukhina from UNECE offered a more detailed summary of the last two JTF sessions (in 2012). At its last 6th session in 2012, the Joint Task Force agreed to start revising the text of the UNECE Guidelines by introducing agreed amendments to the descriptions of the individual indicators, adding tables on calculation of indicators with relevant glossaries of terms and references, as well as by including additional indicators into the Guidelines, whose descriptions have been agreed by the Joint Task Force. The 7th and 8th JTF sessions will be held in Geneva on 2-4 July and 4-6 November 2013.

Responding to a question on plans to include waste into the work on indicators, Mr. Kokine specified that there have already been a lot of discussions on waste during the past few years, and several challenges have already been identified and addressed. In 2012, a two-day workshop on waste statistics was conducted, but no data collection has been done. Lena Nelsen, Programme Manager from the European Commission, reminded the meeting that there is a separate project devoted to waste governance currently ongoing in the ENPI-East countries (www.wastegovernance.org).

Continuing the discussion, Mr. Jensen, Head of the Governance and Networks programme of the EEA, asked how the countries saw their ability to produce indicators within the specifications of the UNECE guidelines, bearing in mind that having comparable data is only one of many issues. Ms. Shashlova, Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation, responded saying that on the one hand countries have all the data, but on the other, more descriptive indicator specifications should

be made. She encouraged initiating creation of indicator specifications with detailed descriptions and data profiles, to guide the work by the countries. Mr. Snetkov from the National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus, added that some countries also face a challenge of sharing information between the various institutions at the national level, which slows down the process.

Mr. Prokopenko, the State Statistics Committee of Ukraine saw the focus of the second half of the ENPI-SEIS project on setting the rules of “environmental democracy” for making the information and data available to the general public and for decision making.

Proposed actions for 2013 – 2014

Mr. Poussart, project manager at the EEA within the ENPI-SEIS project, continued the East parallel session with a brief presentation of the outline of the workplan, stressing that, as the project reached mid-point, it is proposed to move from the “definition” phase to advance with the implementation. The focus should be more on sharing data, and simultaneously increasing visibility of the SEIS implementation process. With the revised guidelines from UNECE, EEA would like to challenge the countries to see how national indicators can be produced based on these guidelines. To facilitate this process, the EEA can make reporting tools available, precisely already existing tools and structures for data sharing as “Reportnet”, which implies that countries should have thematic networks in place.

Mr. Poghosyan, the National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia, raised his concerns with the issues of data protection in case of sharing via Reportnet and pointed out that he sees one of the main challenges as presenting data in such a way that it will be clear and understandable for all users. He also referred to confidentiality principles used by UNEP. In order to provide a good practical example of sharing data, Ms. Santer, Zoi Environment Network, made a short presentation of the feasibility study done to help develop sustained data flows for a pilot set of 8 UNECE indicators, and presented the Slovenian environmental portal <http://kazalci.arso.gov.si/>.

Mr. Dafner, IT Architect and systems manager at the EEA, presented in detail Reportnet: a structured European reporting mechanism. The discussion following the presentation touched on several issues, including data quality, control and consistency, the technology used and technical requirements from the countries, and data formats and definitions.

Before closing the session, the countries were asked to reflect on how they see the workplan for 2013-2014. In the discussions, all beneficiary countries supported the continuation of using the UNECE Joint Task Force as a key project implementation tool. It was proposed, in particular, to prepare, on the basis of the revised Indicator Guidelines, a collective publication of what has been achieved so far, and start working towards sharing data; to develop indicator templates and to move towards the production of selected indicators on a regular basis; and to organize capacity building workshops in countries in order to invite a wider network of specialists who are able to help with SEIS implementation.

Day 2 - Continuation of the regional session

The objective of this session on the second day was to focus on coordination and implementation needs in order to execute the 2013-2014. The session started by reviewing a more detailed workplan and the proposal to use “Reportnet” as a tool to establish work flows and data flows with countries. The countries will need to populate the Directory in Reportnet, which means identifying the institutions and persons responsible for managing country folders and their roles in the reporting chain. The EEA will assure that guiding documents will be available.

Reflections and discussion on the project's coordination and networking structure

Ms. Clark, Head of Group, Eionet country coordination (EEA), made a short presentation of the Eionet coordination work in the context of international cooperation. She highlighted that the ENPI-SEIS project is a part of a global process, and made reference to the Rio+20 Document "The Future We Want" (e.g. Para76). The importance of national networking structures, including thematic networks, was emphasised.

GEMET

The meeting was introduced to the GEMET thesaurus as a valuable available resource. The need to expand GEMET with more languages, and review current languages was highlighted. The presentation was received with a lot of positive comments from the countries, who welcomed the proposal of expanding GEMET to their national languages, acknowledging the fact that expanding common terminology will also imply expanding the content.

Plenary Session 2: Workplan and Wrap-up

On the basis of the results of the discussions held at the session on the East, the Steering Committee agreed:

- To start with the establishment of data flows for a pilot set of datasets with the aim to produce the associated indicators;
- To use EEA reporting tools to initiate the sharing of environmental data;
- To establish bilateral dialogue with the countries, to follow-up on the country reports, and in particular evaluate how country priorities and needs can be best addressed through the ENPI-SEIS project;
- To continue dialogue between UNECE and EEA to define 2013-14 collaboration opportunities;
- To consider the Eye on Earth User conference (4-6 March 2013, Dublin) as one of the potential key events under the project in 2013;
- To hold the next Steering Committee meeting in September 2013.

Countries acknowledged that it was important to start delivering results: sharing data on a long term basis. This point was reinforced by the comment from Mr. Laviña, who reminded the participants that it is important to have concrete deliverables in order to show the importance of this project, underlining its place in the overall process of SEIS implementation.

Mr. Uhel, Head of the programme, EEA has made a short presentation of the First Eye on Earth Network Conference (read more: www.eyeonearth.org), which will take place in Dublin 4-6 March 2013, specifying that ENPI-SEIS intended to hold parallel Working Group meeting in Dublin.

During the discussion of the project's communication needs and opportunities the countries repeated their requests that timely translation of the key documents into Russian would be very much appreciated; the background documents should be available in a good time before the meetings; the visibility of the project should be improved together with the website. Ms. Jørgensen briefly presented the communication strategy of the project, which would focus on four pillars: publications, website, meetings and media. It has been agreed that for the informational benefits of the project it is important to have a number of paper and on-line publications available. The need in thematic briefings, general presentations and revised newsletter has been realised and extra focus would be put on the production of the above mentioned materials. The website will be reviewed with the considerations of the country's comments. The background documents and agendas for the meetings would be available on time and in the project languages. The overall idea is to streamline the communication around the meetings and to encourage the dialogues with the countries outside the meeting's setting.