



UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

**THE UNECE'S COOPERATION WITH OSCE IN THE ECONOMIC AND
ENVIRONMENTAL DIMENSIONS OF SECURITY**

**Prepared by
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Introduction

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) is one of the five regional commissions of the United Nations. It is the forum where the countries of western, central and eastern Europe, central Asia and North America – 55 countries in all – come together to forge the tools of their economic cooperation. That cooperation concerns economics, statistics, environment, transport, trade, industry and enterprise development, sustainable energy, timber and habitat. The Commission offers a regional framework for the elaboration and harmonization of conventions, norms and standards. The Commission's experts provide technical assistance to the countries of south-east Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States. This assistance takes the form of advisory services, training seminars and workshops where countries in transition can share their experiences and best practices.

The recent Report of the UN Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change noted economic, social threats and environmental degradation among the six main clusters of threats. The report also urged the United Nations to cooperate more closely with regional and sub-regional organizations. It appears that by virtue of the work undertaken together, both the UNECE and OSCE have jointly recognized the importance of economic development and the environment in the context of conflict prevention. In fact, in the area of economic and environmental dimension of security, the UNECE and OSCE have developed a close working relationship. There are many reasons for this. First, their respective areas of expertise are complementary. The OSCE provides a political platform and a network of field offices while the UNECE has secretariat capacity, expertise in economic analyses and its norms, standards and conventions. Second, both organizations share virtually the same membership and provide to their constituents the same neutral framework for resolving potential disagreements. This close overall relationship is encouraged and supported by member States at the meetings of the UNECE annual sessions and the participating States at the OSCE Economic and Environmental Sub-Committee.

Arguably, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe occupies a privileged position among all the organizations with which the OSCE has cooperated in the area of economics and the environment. This was partly reflected in the OSCE Strategy Document for the Economic and Environmental Dimension, adopted in 2003, which identified the UNECE as the key partner in its implementation. The Memorandum of Understanding, which both organizations signed at the Sofia Ministerial meeting last December provides further supporting evidence.

This effective partnership has been fostered through many activities and projects undertaken jointly in the last 15 years or so. Of particular significance are substantive reviews of the performance of OSCE participating States in implementing commitments in the economic and environmental dimension. The commitments stem from declarations since the Helsinki Final Act in 1975, including the Declaration of the Bonn Conference of 1990 and the Istanbul Charter of 1999. These review sessions have become a regular feature of the OSCE annual Economic Forums since 1996.

In general, in the area of **economics**, UNECE's involvement has focused on issues such as a review of OSCE commitments, participation in preparatory seminars for the Economic Forum and the design of an early warning mechanism (www.unece.org/ead/ead_sec_new.htm). For example, in 2004, at the annual OSCE Economic Forum in Prague, the UNECE contributed to the review of OSCE commitments by preparing a comprehensive report on the "Investment climate in the UNECE region". The report highlighted the current investment climate in all UNECE member States, discussed the prevailing shortcomings and suggested policy recommendations. In line with the MOU, in 2005, the UNECE reviewed OSCE commitments by preparing another report for the Economic Forum on fulfilling OSCE commitments in the areas of "Integration, trade and transport". In November 2004, the OSCE began to develop a work plan on the development of an early-warning mechanism (EWM) as part of the OSCE economic dimension. The UNECE participated in a workshop on a Joint Early Warning Mechanism as well as organized a follow-up in Geneva in 2005, but its involvement was limited to the conceptual and design issues with respect to EWM. The UNECE is currently preparing its contribution to the 2006 Economic Forum by reviewing the implementation of OSCE commitments in the area of transport.

Many joint UNECE and OSCE activities in the field of the **environment** are focused on the development and implementation of water-related projects and activities, in particular shared use and protection of water resources. These are typically undertaken according to the principles of the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes. Some activities have also been initiated on environmental impact assessment in a transboundary context. (See www.unece.org/env/welcome.html for more information). Joint activities with the OSCE are components of the OSCE-UNDP-UNEP Environment and Security Initiative, which UNECE intends to join. Geographically, there is an emphasis on Central Asia, but activities are also carried out in other CIS countries.

Some ongoing projects are:

- "Establishment of a Bilateral Kazakh-Kyrgyz Water Commission on the Rivers Chu and Talas" which aims at assisting Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in making operational the Agreement on Utilization of the Water Facilities of Interstate Use on the Chu and Talas Rivers between the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic. The project will be finalized in the beginning of 2006 (<http://www.talaschu.org>).
- "Transboundary Cooperation and Sustainable Management of the Dniester River" involving Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova began in September 2004 and will continue until the end of 2005. The objective is to facilitate the development of regional cooperation between the Dniester riparian states, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, including Transdnister, on the management of shared water resources in the Dniester River basin. A follow-up aimed to start a negotiation process is being developed (<http://dniester.org>).

- A three-year capacity building and networking project for managers and experts on transboundary waters in the CIS region – “Capacity for Water Cooperation” – began in Kiev in November 2004. Two more workshops in the series were held in June 2005 (St. Petersburg) and November 2005 (Tbilisi). The project is intended to strengthen the capacity of transboundary water management in the CIS countries. Both the UNECE and OSCE are discussing the possibility of co-organizing a workshop in 2007 in Central Asia.
- A project on the application of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Convention in Central Asia is being developed together with the OSCE. While the project is planned to start in December 2005, UNECE with collaboration of the OSCE regional office in Kyrgyzstan has already held a workshop in October 2004 in Bishkek: “Sub-regional workshop on the practical application of the UNECE Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context in Central Asia” (<http://carec.kz/news/18.10.2004/18.10.2004.htm/BL> in Russian only).
- There is also close cooperation between the Secretariat of the UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision- making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) and the OSCE Secretariat. The provisions of the Aarhus Convention are the focus of many OSCE activities such as the establishments of so-called “Aarhus-centres” in some countries in Central Asia and Caucasus.

In conclusion, it is generally recognized that a low level of economic development and environmental degradation are important sources of insecurity. However, successful development is, in turn, related to the presence of democratic, transparent and accountable governance. As UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan noted in his report *In Larger Freedom*, “not only development, security and human rights are imperative; they also reinforce each other”. In this respect, both UNECE and OSCE – fully supported by their members and participating States – have developed over time close and fruitful relationship in the areas of economic development and the environment. In the future, more joint work will be considered, in particular in regions such as Central Asia where closer regional cooperation may positively contribute to the region’s prosperity. In sum, both organizations – through joint projects and close cooperation – work to establish and nurture conditions, which seem necessary to secure a safer world.