

Economic Commission for Europe

Committee on Environmental Policy

Twenty-third session

Geneva, 14-17 November 2017

Item 8 (d) of the provisional agenda

Cross-sectoral activities: environment and security

Information paper No. 5

30 October 2017

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe activities in the framework of the Environment and Security Initiative

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC) was launched in 2003 at the Fifth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference in Kyev, Ukraine, to strengthen national capacities, regional coordination mechanisms and international cooperation for addressing environment and security risks in countries of the Caucasus, Central Asia and Eastern and South-Eastern Europe.

At its twenty-second session (Geneva, 25-27 January 2017), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Committee on Environmental Policy took note of the information provided with regard to ENVSEC and the technical assistance provided to the member States within its framework (ECE/CEP/2017/2, para. 66).

The present paper provides a brief overview of the Initiative, as well as a summary of ECE ongoing activities carried out under ENVSEC.

The Committee on Environmental Policy may wish to consider the information provided.

I. The Environment and Security Initiative

1. Environmental problems ignore political boundaries and call for cooperation among countries, including Parties to the multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), in order to sustainably manage limited natural resources. Challenges that the transboundary natural resources pose may on the other hand provide for opportunities for mutually beneficial cooperation. Joint environmental monitoring programmes, international river basin management, dam safety initiatives and environmental impact assessments are some examples of how environmental initiatives can increase dialogue and strengthen cooperation.

2. The Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC) is a partnership that supports the development of cooperation and confidence building through concrete projects that develop capacity across the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)

region. Established in 2003, ENVSEC provides a platform for international dialogue and neighbourly cooperation on assessing and addressing environmental challenges. The partnership consists of five international agencies: the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), ECE, and the Regional Environment Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC-CEE).

3. All ENVSEC projects are agreed among the partners, in cooperation with the concerned ENVSEC National Focal Points in each of the beneficiary countries representing Ministries of Environment and Ministries of Foreign Affairs, and in consultation with national experts and non-governmental organizations. Key elements in the project selection include: identifying hotspots for rising tensions over environmental resources; strengthening policies, awareness and participation; building capacities and frameworks to prevent and address environmental threats; supporting coordination and concrete actions at country and regional level; providing solutions for safe environment and sustainable development; and mobilizing financial support and technical expertise for environmental clean-up and remediation.

4. Representatives from each of the ENVSEC partners make up the ENVSEC Management Board, which has a rotating Chair and a joint Secretariat, to administer projects and their assessment. In 2017, REC-CEE is serving as Chair of the Initiative. The ENVSEC Secretariat consists of the Coordinating Unit that is hosted by UNEP (Regional Office for Europe), representatives of each partner organization and Regional Desk Officers (RDO) for each of four sub-regions (the Caucasus, Central Asia and Eastern and South-Eastern Europe).

5. ENVSEC supports the development of regional programmes to respond to regional priorities identified in a consultative process with national counterparts. The regional programmes, which comprise of a number of individual projects, contribute to the overall ENVSEC goal.

6. Through implementation of the regional programmes, ENVSEC encourages its stakeholders to coordinate and participate actively in the achievement of national objectives according to regional contexts and priorities. This approach allows donors to support one or several ENVSEC programmes or distinct projects, in line with their own priorities and special interests. ENVSEC regional programmes serve as mechanisms for creating and sharing knowledge and experiences on a multi-country and multi-stakeholder basis.

7. The ENVSEC Secretariat works closely together to coordinate activities, report periodically on progress made and share experience for an optimal functioning of the Initiative across the different regions. Key results achieved by the ENVSEC partners over the past few years include:

(a) Improved monitoring, information exchange and cooperation in several transboundary river basins;

(b) Strengthened legal, institutional and administrative capacity to carry out environmental impact assessment and strategic environmental assessment for managing security challenges of transboundary nature;

(c) Enhanced stakeholders' dialogue and access to information in relation to projects with transboundary environmental impacts;

(d) Remediation solutions for hazardous mining sites and the elimination of hazardous chemicals such as obsolete pesticides and rocket fuel as well as strengthened capacity of national authorities to prevent the illegal transboundary movement of hazardous wastes;

- (e) Strengthened regional coordination and capacities for radioactive waste management (e.g. uranium) and affected site rehabilitation;
- (f) Improved policies and regulations on environmental challenges such as dam failures, illegal logging and wildfires;
- (g) Increased regional coordination on adaptation to the impacts of climate change in particular in transboundary basins;
- (h) Increased awareness and participation of civil society in decision making at local level; and
- (i) Strengthened capacities in the area of industrial accident prevention, preparedness and response.

II. The Environment and Security Initiative: regional overview

8. In 2017, ENVSEC continued to work in the countries of the Caucasus, Central Asia and Eastern and South-Eastern Europe in line with the work plan as agreed by the partner organizations and governments. Project activities have been implemented through the three main programmes of ENVSEC: the partnership with Finland under the Wider Europe Initiative (WEI) (Phase II), the partnership with Austrian Development Agency (ADA) in the field of climate change adaptation, the partnership with ADA and Finland in South-Eastern Europe, and with the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) in Eastern Europe, the ENVSEC partnership with Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation (SDC) in the field of disaster risk reduction, and with the European Union in the fields of climate change and uranium legacy sites.

III. Multilateral environmental agreements and the Environment and Security Initiative

9. MEAs administered by ECE are an important pillar of ENVSEC's activities and provide a value-added to the partnership. ENVSEC supports the implementation of several MEAs and enables ECE to implement activities on the ground, in cooperation with ENVSEC partners.

10. During the last years, funding for ECE-lead projects under ENVSEC has decreased due to changing donor priorities. Currently, all projects with ECE participation under the Initiative have been either completed or will be coming soon to an end. Below is an overview of the projects that were implemented under ECE MEAs.

11. The Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) is an important legal and intergovernmental framework for cooperation on transboundary freshwaters, requiring Parties to prevent, control and reduce transboundary impact, use transboundary waters in a reasonable and equitable way and ensure their sustainable management. ENVSEC projects played a prominent role in the Convention's programme of work. There are several examples of projects that supported the development of transboundary cooperation in specific basins (Drin, Kura, Dniester, Aral Sea basin). Most of the Convention's pilot projects on water and adaptation to climate change in transboundary basins were funded and implemented under ENVSEC, for example, on the Dniester, Neman and Chu-Talas.

12. The Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention) and its Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment (Protocol on SEA) provide legal obligations and institutional frameworks for addressing environmental and health risks of economic activities and for improving transboundary cooperation. Pilots

and capacity building projects implemented with ENVSEC partners contributed to effective national and regional application of these instruments. Examples include legislative reviews on strategic environmental assessment of Belarus with regard to the implementation of the Protocol on SEA, and post project-analysis of the exploitation of the Khotislavskoye quarry conducted in Belarus and Ukraine in 2013-2016.

13. The Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents (Industrial Accidents Convention) promotes active international cooperation between countries, before, during and after an industrial accident. The Assistance Programme of the Industrial Accidents Convention benefitted from cooperation with ENVSEC partners in sub-regions such as Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. For instance, in Belarus, risks from oil and gas pipelines have been assessed using standard ECE/Industrial Accidents Convention tools and checklists, starting in 2015. And country stakeholders have been trained to improve their understanding of the risks and preparedness to accidents, with particular emphasis on the cross-border dimension.

14. The Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) and its Protocol on Pollutants Release and Transfer Registers (Protocol on PRTRs) promote effective engagement of the public in decision-making, providing a comprehensive framework for Governments to ensure transparent and accountable governance and democracy in environmental matters. Cooperation with ENVSEC reinforced countries' capacities for implementation of both instruments. In the framework of ENVSEC, OSCE was engaged in a broad programme to establish and strengthen Aarhus Centres in regions where ENVSEC is active. Significant progress was made in strengthening capacity of institutions and integrating the Aarhus Convention into national legislation in Belarus in 2013-2016.

IV. The Environment and Security Initiative: challenges and priorities

15. Challenges and priorities for the future development of ENVSEC include:

(a) Further developing cooperation and synergies between ENVSEC partners;

(b) Despite intense fundraising efforts, the ENVSEC Initiative remains heavily underfunded. In 2016, as stated in the ENVSEC Annual Report, a total EUR 164'433 was disbursed to the ENVSEC Partners. The list, however, did not include ECE. It also appears that donors have shifted to other priorities than the environment/security interface. At the end of 2016, there was only EUR 3'984 left, and no new pledges were in sight; and

(c) The ENVSEC Management Board, during its recent meeting on 3 October 2017, decided to elaborate a vision on the future of ENVSEC, and if and how the initiative could be sustained.
