Item 7: Environmental Partnerships in the UNECE Region: (a) Environment Strategy for countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia

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SPEAKING NOTES

• We very much welcome the adoption of an environmental Strategy for the EECCA region;

• The Strategy is one of the most important achievements of the Kiev conference, reflecting the desire of Ministers increasingly to concentrate the efforts of the Environment for Europe process on this part of the UNECE region and to ensure a sub-regional follow-up to the World Summit;

• The Strategy provides a framework for future co-operation both between “EECCA” countries and, just as importantly, with the other countries of the region; we do not want to see EU enlargement lead to new barriers in Europe or a decline in pan-European co-operation;

• We welcome the role which is proposed for the Environmental Action Programme task force in steering the overall Strategy; however, we believe it is essential to get as much clarity as possible at this conference on which other international organisations can support the follow-up to the respective objectives of the Strategy; UNECE environment Ministers should make sure that they send a consistent message to the international organisations about the importance which we attach to strengthening support to the EECCA countries;

• To demonstrate the commitment of the UK to increasing the focus on the EECCA countries and implementing this Strategy, I am [today] launching a new fund to replace the former Environment Know-How Fund which had been administered by my Department since the early 1990s; the new fund - worth nearly €3m this year - will concentrate most of its activities on the delivery of the Kiev conference decisions and the EECCA environment strategy; further details on the fund are available at the DEFRA stand in the exhibition area.