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**Meeting with the Chair of the Committee on Environmental Policy**

**Report by the Chair**

## **Report by the Chair of the Committee on Environmental Policy\***

### **I. Achievements over the past twelve months**

1. In the reporting period, the Environment subprogramme under the general governance of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Committee on Environmental Policy and the other governing and subsidiary bodies under the Environment subprogramme continued to support countries to enhance their environmental governance and transboundary cooperation as well as strengthen implementation of the UNECE regional environmental commitments and advance sustainable development in the region.

#### **Advancing sustainable development and environmental governance in the region**

2. The 25th session of the Committee on Environmental Policy was held in Geneva from 13 to 15 November 2019. Agenda items included sustainable development in the region; selection of the themes and other organizational issues for the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference; work related to environmental monitoring, assessment and reporting; peer review of the environmental performance of Uzbekistan; developments in a number of cross-cutting activities (such as: education for sustainable development; transport, health and environment; environment and security; environment and health; and mainstreaming a gender perspective in environmental activities); review of subprogramme performance and programme planning; presentation and exchange of views on the fourth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme; and procedural matters of the work of the Committee.

3. The Committee on Environmental Policy expressed its gratitude to the Government of Cyprus for the proposal to host the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, including the Third High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries, in Cyprus, and decided to organize the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, including the Third High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries, in Nicosia from 3 to 5 November 2021. It encouraged the member States, partner organizations and all interested stakeholders to actively participate in the preparation and conduct of the Conference.

4. The Committee on Environmental Policy also agreed on the following two themes for the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference:

- (i) Greening the economy in the pan-European region: Working towards sustainable infrastructure;
- (ii) Applying principles of circular economy to sustainable tourism.

5. In 2019, the Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Programme continued to serve as a platform to advance the monitoring and assessment of environmental conditions and trends, the production, harmonization and sharing of environmental data, statistics, indicators and information for reporting to policymakers, international forums and the public. It also continued to support policy development and its implementation, including the monitoring of relevant SDGs. Under a United Nations Development Account (UNDA) project on “Improved environmental monitoring and assessment in support of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda in South-Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Caucasus”, gap analysis reviews were completed on environmental data and information needed to produce regional and international environmental indicators and for the establishment of a Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS). The Working Group on Environmental

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\* This document was not formally edited.

Monitoring and Assessment and the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators both met in 2019, focusing on among others the integration of economic, social and environmental data with regard to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Preparations for the 7<sup>th</sup> pan-European environmental assessment (a light indicator-based assessment, as decided by the Committee in its latest session) and the final review of the establishment of SEIS were started.

6. In 2019, the third environmental performance reviews (EPRs) of Kazakhstan and North Macedonia were published. The third EPR of Kazakhstan was launched in Nur-Sultan in June 2019 and the third EPR of North Macedonia in Skopje in November 2019. The review mission for the third EPR of Uzbekistan took place in March 2019 and that of Romania in December 2019. Activities started for the second phase of the United Nations Development Account (UNDA) project on “Evidence-based environmental governance and sustainable environmental policies in support of the 2030 Agenda in South-East Europe”. In particular, missions to Montenegro and North Macedonia were carried out to validate respective needs assessments. Montenegro is working on a policy package on health, air quality and energy, Serbia on a policy package about circular and green economy and North Macedonia on a programme of measures for improving environmental inspection and the development of a new law on environmental inspection.

7. The Committee expressed appreciation to countries and organizations supporting financially and in-kind activities carried out under the UNECE Environment subprogramme.

#### **UNECE multilateral environmental agreements – highlights**

8. The UNECE Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) continued their work focusing on improving the implementation and compliance by Parties. Meetings of the governing bodies under three MEAs were organized in 2019, namely the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention) and the Meeting of the Parties to the Espoo Convention serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) (5-7 February 2019), the session of the Executive Body for the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution (Air Convention) (December 2019).

##### *Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution (Air Convention)*

9. In a special session dedicated to the fortieth anniversary of the Convention, organized as informal segment of the thirty-ninth session of the Executive Body, representatives of Parties, countries from the UNECE region and outside of it, organizations and international financial institutions endorsed the anniversary declaration on clean air for 2020-2030 and beyond as contained in document ECE/EB.AIR/2019/6, discussed the progress made by Parties, shared their vision of the future of the Convention and ideas for international cooperation beyond the UNECE region, in particular through the forum for international cooperation on air pollution launched at the special session. In the framework of the anniversary, the secretariat published two new publications, one on the development of the Convention and the other one on the capacity-building programme. The secretariat also produced a video for the anniversary. As a result of continued capacity-building activities under the Air Convention, Parties in the Caucasus, Central Asia and Eastern Europe improved their emissions reporting in 2019. Subregional and in-country workshops on Best Available Techniques and on national legislation analyses, coupled with high-level awareness raising events helped in promoting ratification and implementation of the Convention and its key protocols. On 7 October 2019 an important step in international efforts to address air pollution was made by the entry into force of amendments to the

Protocol to Abate Acidification, Eutrophication and Ground-level Ozone (Gothenburg Protocol), adopted in 2012.

*Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention)*

10. In 2019, the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) effectively expanded its reach at the global level. Accession of Chad and Senegal to the Convention in 2018, the provision of guidance to more than 15 countries in the process of accession, and the organization of several national, subregional and regional events to strengthen the understanding of the Convention accelerated engagement of countries mostly from Africa but also Latin America, the Middle East and Asia in the Convention's activities as well as progress towards accession. In total, more than 20 countries have announced interest in acceding to the Convention. Countries such as Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Iraq, Republic of Congo and Togo are at the final stages of decision-making in the accession process. A regional training organized for francophone African countries (in June) resulted in regional partners such as the Niger Basin Authority or the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) actively promoting accession to the Convention among its members. The high interest in the Convention opens new opportunities at the global level to strengthen the sustainable management of transboundary water resources, prevent conflicts and promote regional stability and development.

11. New thematic activities were launched, in particular on facilitating financing of transboundary water cooperation, and on supporting equitable and sustainable water allocation in the transboundary context. In line with the Strategy for implementation of the Convention at the global level, partnerships were strengthened for cooperation with financial partners (especially the World Bank, the African Development Bank, the European Investment Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank) and other regional partners.

12. Global events on water and adaptation to climate, with a focus on ecosystem-based adaptation (April), and on exchange of data and information in transboundary basins (December) as well as the meeting of the Working Group on integrated water resources management (October) provided global platforms to exchange knowledge and good practices and report on progress in improving transboundary water cooperation, attracting more than 120 participants each. UNECE also continued supporting countries in jointly adapting to climate change through the launch of the publication *Financing Climate Change Adaptation in Transboundary Basins* (jointly developed with the World Bank) and active involvement in the 25<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (COP 25).

13. In preparation of the second reporting exercise on SDG indicator 6.5.2 on transboundary water cooperation, to be launched by UNECE and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as co-custodian agencies in 2020:

- Several sub-regional workshops were organized (for Central America and the Caribbean, Central Africa and the pan-European regions) to build capacity in monitoring progress and reporting and to improve coordination and harmonization in reporting among countries sharing basins;

A Guide to reporting under the Water Convention and as a contribution to SDG indicator 6.5.2 was prepared.<sup>14</sup> In 2018, the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties and subsequently, in April 2019, the UNECE, at its sixty-eighth session recognized that due to the operationalization of the amendment to the Convention in 2016 and the growing number of Parties, the management and implementation of future programmes of work under the Convention would require additional regular budget resources. They requested the secretariat to take all necessary measures,

including the provision of additional human and financial resources from the regular budget, to ensure the effective management and full implementation of the programme of work. The Commission decided to submit this request to the Economic and Social Council.

*Protocol on Water and Health to the Water Convention*

15. In 2019, the Protocol on Water and Health, jointly serviced by UNECE and the World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe, has been further positioned as a key mechanism to implement the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, in particular Sustainable Development Goals 6 on clean water and sanitation and 3 on health and well-being, especially through the setting and implementation of tailored national targets and reporting.

16. In 2019, Azerbaijan and Finland communicated their new targets under the Protocol. The following Parties were in the process of revising their targets: Belarus, Hungary, the Netherlands, the Republic of Moldova, Serbia and Ukraine. Other States not yet Parties to the Protocol, such as Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, also set national targets on water and health in the context of the Protocol voluntarily. All 26 Parties and seven other States submitted their reports within the fourth reporting exercise carried out in 2019.<sup>1</sup>

17. The Protocol has also been increasingly considered as major regional home for policy and technical developments in the areas of water, sanitation and health. In particular, the work supporting the implementation of the Protocol's requirement to ensure access to water and sanitation for all, including those suffering a disadvantage or social exclusion, continued to be a flagship activity under the Protocol and prompted significant progress towards the progressive realization of the human rights to water and sanitation in the pan-European region. In-country activities for example in Serbia and Belarus and regional exchange of experience resulted in increased consideration of equity aspects in policymaking processes and contributed to improving the equity of access at national level.

18. The fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties (Belgrade, 19-21 November 2019), which celebrated the twentieth anniversary of adoption of the Protocol, was an important milestone in advancing the water, sanitation and health agenda of the pan-European region and in showcasing the progress achieved by countries in the last decade in the provision of good quality drinking-water and safely managed sanitation services for all in all settings, with support of the Protocol. The meeting brought together more than 200 participants representing 40 countries and partner organizations.

19. The meeting adopted an ambitious programme of work for 2020–2022 that aims at addressing existing and emerging challenges in the area of water, sanitation and health, in support of the achievement of objectives of the 2030 Agenda. Six new publications were launched. Seven UNECE countries announced progress in accession to the Protocol and one country, Montenegro, announced completion of the ratification process and deposit of the instrument of accession with the Secretary-General of the United Nations. In his video message to the meeting, the Secretary-General highlighted the role of the Protocol in supporting the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and urged all countries to ratify the Protocol and strive for its full implementation.

20. Parties recognized that the programme of work of the Protocol for 2020–2022 embodies a new mandate to expand the scope of programme areas 1 and 5 related to 2030 Agenda implementation and safe and efficient management of water supply and sanitation

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<sup>1</sup> All summary reports are available at [https://www.unece.org/env/water/protocol\\_fourth\\_reporting\\_cycle.html](https://www.unece.org/env/water/protocol_fourth_reporting_cycle.html). The information provided by countries is summarized in the regional report on the status of implementation of the Protocol (ECE/MP.WH/2019/4-EUPCR/1814149/1.2/2019/MOP-5/10).

systems, respectively. The Meeting of the Parties therefore recognized that the implementation of the current and future programmes of work under the Protocol would require adequate United Nations regular budget resources. It also recognized that, in addition to the above new mandates, eight UNECE Member States were on their way to accession to the Protocol, which implied providing core services to extended membership and addressing growing number of requests for support in implementing the Protocol and its programmes of work. Parties, therefore, requested the United Nations Secretary-General to increase the support by UNECE, in order to ensure the effective management and full implementation of the expanded programme of work of the Protocol for 2020–2022 and to support the accession to and implementation of the Protocol by the acceding countries.

*Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents (Industrial Accidents Convention)*

21. 2019 saw the recognition of the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents (Industrial Accidents Convention) as a “a multilateral legal instrument that supports countries in establishing and enhancing governance, policymaking and transboundary cooperation on industrial accident prevention, preparedness and response.” The Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction (GAR-2019) further recognizes that “while developed initially for the European region following the Sandoz accident in 1986, the approaches and experience offer insights to countries pursuing Sendai Framework commitments in technological risk management.”

22. Progress towards implementation of the Convention was inspired through the conduct of the following activities, under the auspices of its Assistance and Cooperation Programme:

- (a) A sub-regional workshop on land-use planning and industrial safety (Chisinau, 22-24 May 2019), which improved the coordination among land-use planners and experts on industrial safety and environmental assessments;
- (b) Finalization of the Project on Strengthening Industrial Safety in Central Asia, and publishing of an Implementation Guide on the Convention for Central Asian countries in Russian;<sup>2</sup>
- (c) Implementation of two Projects on “Strengthening the Safety of Mining Operations, in particular tailings management facilities, in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and beyond in Central Asia”, with an introduction workshop and on-site training (Koshetau, Kazakhstan, 11-13 June 2019) and a sub-regional workshop on tailings safety in Central Asia (Almaty, Kazakhstan, 20-21 November 2019). The latter saw the participation of over 70 representatives from competent authorities and operators from all Central Asian countries, and partner organizations. It was held back-to-back with a regional consultation on the Global Tailings Review,<sup>3</sup> co-convened with the Convention secretariat.

23 Furthermore, the secretariat contributed significantly to the several events organized by partners, such as:

- (a) OECD Workshop on Mining and Green Growth in the region of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (Paris, 19 April 2019)
- (b) UNIDO Conference on Ensuring industrial safety and security: the role of government, regulations, standards and new technologies (30 - 31 May 2019), Vienna (Austria)

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<sup>2</sup> An English and French version will be published in 2020.

<sup>3</sup> An initiative by the International Council on Mining and Metals, United Nations Environment Programme and Principles for Responsible Investment.

- (c) Regional Forum – Meeting of Heads of Emergency Authorities of Central Asian Countries (Bishkek, 11-12 July 2019);
- (d) Annual technical meeting of the Coordination Group on Uranium Legacy Sites (Issyk-Kul, Kyrgyzstan, 17-21 June 2019);
- (e) XVII meeting of the CIS Inter-State Council on Industrial Safety (Saint-Petersburg, 12 - 13 September 2019).

24. A Seminar on accidental transboundary water pollution prevention – contingency planning, early warning, mitigation (Budapest, 4-5 November 2019) was held under the auspices of the Joint Expert Group on Water and Industrial Accidents. It significantly improved information-sharing and knowledge-exchange with international river basin commission, and supported awareness-raising of the Checklist on contingency planning for accidents affecting transboundary waters and other guidance and good industry practice.

*The Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention)*

25. In February 2019, the Meeting of the Parties to the Espoo Convention held an intermediary session that succeeded in finalizing and adopting all outstanding decisions on compliance by several Parties with their obligations under the Convention. In the course of the year, two stakeholder workshops and four intergovernmental ad hoc meetings of environment and energy sector representatives (in Geneva, Lisbon, Rotterdam and Vienna) contributed to progress in the development of guidance on the applicability of the Espoo Convention to the lifetime extension of nuclear power plants.

*Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assistance (Protocol on SEA)*

26. As a result of legislative assistance and capacity building provided to it over several years, the Republic of Moldova ratified the Protocol on SEA in February 2019, becoming its 35<sup>th</sup> Party. In Spring 2019, UNECE concluded an agreement on a new large regional multi-stakeholder project “European Union for Environment” funded by the European Union that will allow the treaty secretariat to continue supporting the ratification and/or the effective implementation of the Protocol on SEA by Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine during four more years (2019–2022) (with a budget of some 2,7 Mio USD). In the first year, a total of four training workshops were held in Belarus, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova. In Central Asia, the secretariat continued to assist Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in the alignment of their national legislation with the Convention and the Protocol (organizing five technical assistance meetings in the countries). To support the development of national strategic environmental assessment systems in all the five Central Asian countries, the secretariat also initiated another project in cooperation with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), with funding mainly from Germany, and co-funding from UNECE and OSCE. In December 2019, as part of that project, a study tour was organized in Germany to exchange experiences in the implementation of the Protocol. Progress was also made in developing guidance for all Parties to the Protocol regarding the assessment of health and the involvement of health sector in strategic environmental assessment, implemented in cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO) with funding from the European Investment Bank: in November, a workshop on the topic was organized and attended also by health sector representatives, to share good practice; and a task force established to steer the finalization of the guidance in advance of the Meetings of the Parties next sessions in December 2020.

*Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) and its Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (Protocol on PRTRs)*

27. Due to their cross-cutting nature and wide substantive scopes, the Convention and its Protocol supported Parties' efforts for furthering a number of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and in particular SDGs 3, 12 and 16. At the twenty-third meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to Convention (Geneva, 26-28 June 2019), Parties, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other stakeholders addressed systemic challenges, shared positive trends and outlined actions to improve public participation during decision-making processes on projects, plans and programmes, as well as normative acts related to a wide range of issues e.g. public participation in strategic environmental assessments, in mining activities, normative acts on fishing as well as public participation in a transboundary context. Further, Parties considered synergy in implementing the Aarhus Convention and relevant UN human rights treaties. In this regard, Parties reaffirmed their obligation to improve legal frameworks and practical arrangements as to ensure that persons exercising their environmental rights are not penalized, persecuted or harassed in any way for their involvement. Representatives of international financial institutions reported about their efforts to involve the public in projects they finance and to review their policies to improve transparency and public engagement. Participants also considered key systemic challenges and positive and negative trends across the region as regards effective public participation in international decision-making, focusing on the key importance of countries hosting international events adhering to the Convention's principles.

28. The Task Force on Access to Justice (28 February and 1 March 2019) provided a platform for governments, members of the judiciary, international organizations, international financial institutions, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders to discuss practical measures to enable effective access to justice in air-related cases and to remove existing barriers in that regard. In addition, they identified different tools to promote effective access to justice, discussed recent developments and challenges related to standing, the scope of review, effective remedies, costs and collective redress, in order to further advance the implementation of the third pillar of the Aarhus Convention.

28. bis The Task Force on Access to Information (2-4 October 2019) focused its agenda on (a) how to effectively produce environmental information harnessing benefits of e-government, open data initiatives and the increased use of modern digital technologies by the public, including examples of citizen science, local and traditional knowledge, reuse of public sector information and other citizen engagement initiatives regarding air quality monitoring, biodiversity and environmental law enforcement; and (b) how to put in place effective legislative and practical measures enabling whistle-blowers and other environmental defenders to report violations in this regard. Synergy was promoted among respective commitments of the Aarhus Convention, Protocol on PRTRs, the relevant International Labour Organization instruments and the respective principles regarding human rights and the protection of workers from exposure to toxic substances. Further, to promote synergy in implementing relevant obligations under the Aarhus Convention, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 and the UNECE Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents, the Task Force considered how to effectively provide information to the public in the event of any imminent threat to human health or the environment.

29. At its seventh meeting (28 and 29 November) the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs) considered the role of the Protocol for promoting the modernization of reporting by industry in support of Sustainable Development Goals, through e.g. upgrading PRTR systems to improve monitoring and controlling of input and output parameters from industrial activities, such as energy consumption, pollutant releases and transfer of waste. The Working Group also considered progress achieved by developing countries and by countries with economies in transition in establishing PRTRs. Relevant international organizations presented opportunities for capacity-building to help those countries, Kazakhstan reported that it finalized national procedure on the Protocol's ratification.



## II. Major activities planned for 2020 and beyond

30. The Environment subprogramme will continue its work to support countries to enhance their environmental governance and transboundary cooperation as well as strengthen implementation of the UNECE regional environmental commitments and advance sustainable development in the region. An overview of planned activities is contained in the programme of work of the Environment subprogramme for 2020 (ECE/CEP/2019/18). The 26<sup>th</sup> session of the Committee will be organized in Geneva from 9 to 11 November 2020.

31. In 2020, the Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Programme will continue to support member States in advancing the environmental knowledge-base for effective reporting to policymakers, international forums and the public and continue to support policy development and its implementation, including the implementation of SDGs related to environmental monitoring and assessment. Within the framework of the programme, a light indicator-based pan-European environmental assessment will be developed, subject to the funding available, and a final review of the Shared Environmental Information System will be conducted. Within the framework of an UNDA project on environmental monitoring and assessment, national training sessions to provide guidance on how to streamline the production of regionally and internationally agreed environmental data flows and indicators are planned in 2020 in Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, North Macedonia and Tajikistan. The twenty-second session of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment will be held on 4-5 May 2020 and the seventeenth session of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators in October 2020.

32. In 2020, the implementation of the UNDA project on EPRs will continue with the validation of the needs assessments and the review of policy packages for the four countries; a mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina is planned to perform tasks related to the first phase. The review mission for the third EPR of Azerbaijan will take place from 20–30 April 2020. Preparatory and review missions for the third-cycle EPR of Morocco will be held in spring and autumn 2020, respectively.

33. The major event planned for the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme (THE PEP) in 2020 is the Fifth High-level Meeting on Transport, Health and Environment (Vienna, 26-27 November 2020). The event was postponed at the request of the Austrian organisers. The High-level Meeting will be preceded by a special session of THE PEP Steering Committee. Preparatory meetings will take place before September 2020, to finalize the documents for the High-level Meeting. THE PEP Bureau is discussing exact dates and venues. THE PEP will also continue carrying out relay races workshops.

34. The implementation of the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) will continue in accordance with the “Batumi Framework for the future implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD” (adopted at the High-Level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries in Batumi, Georgia, 08 June 2016). The fourth mandatory reporting of national implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD has been completed in 2019; the summary evaluation report will be finalised in 2020. The draft concept note for the post-2019 implementation framework to be considered by the 15<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Steering Committee (7-8 May 2020) is under preparation by the Ad hoc group for Strategic Planning, established by the Steering Committee in 2018; the Group held its second meeting in September in Nicosia, Cyprus, where also the third meeting is to be held in March 2020. Two meetings of the Ad hoc group on Indicators (established by the Steering Committee in 2019), tasked with updating and/or revising the existing format for reporting for the next implementation phase from 2020 to 2030, took place in October (Utrecht, the Netherlands), and in December (Podgorica, Montenegro). with the third meeting planned for February 2020 (in Brussels, Belgium). The first meeting of the Ad hoc Group on youth

(established by the Steering Committee in 2019) will take place also in February 2020 (in Vienna, Austria) involving youth representatives from the member States in the activities implemented in the framework of the UNECE Strategy for ESD. All the meetings of the three ad hoc working groups mentioned above were made possible thanks to the kind cooperation and support of the relevant government agencies of the host member States. The series of annual capacity-building workshops will also continue with the support of the Swiss Government.

35. The UNECE MEAs will continue their work focusing on improving the implementation and compliance by Parties. Meeting of the governing bodies under MEAs take place in 2020, namely the fortieth session of the Executive Body to the Air Convention (14-18 December 2020).

36. In 2020, the work of the Water Convention will continue strengthening transboundary water cooperation at the global level. Two thematic global workshops will support the implementation of the Convention, focusing on developing transboundary agreements (1-2 April), and on financing transboundary basin development (16-18 December). A Handbook on Transboundary Water Allocation will be developed in an intergovernmental process through two meetings of the dedicated Expert Group and the organization of regional workshops. The Convention and its implementation will be further promoted, for example through several national and basin workshops planned in countries interested in accession and recent Parties. Countries will also be invited to report under the Water Convention and on SDG indicator 6.5.2 by 30 June 2020 (second reporting cycle).

37. In 2020, work under the Protocol on Water and Health will focus on implementing the newly adopted programme of work, with a particular focus on promoting setting of targets under the Protocol in support of implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Ostrava Declaration, particularly by disseminating and promoting use of *the Protocol on Water and Health and the 2030 Agenda: a practical guide for joint implementation*.<sup>4</sup> Activities under the Protocol will also further support progressive realization of the human rights to water and sanitation building on the new publication *The human rights to water and sanitation in practice - Findings and lessons learned from the work on equitable access to water and sanitation under the Protocol on Water and Health in the pan-European region*.<sup>5</sup> Finally, the Protocol will increasingly focus on increasing resilience of water and sanitation infrastructure to climate change, including by deepening synergies with the global climate change programme of the Water Convention.

38. In 2020, the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents (Industrial Accidents Convention) will continue to support progress towards the implementation of the Convention's vision, as set out in its long-term strategy: to significantly increase industrial safety and reduce the risk of technological disasters by ensuring its full implementation, its wide recognition as a legal instrument for risk reduction under the Sendai Framework and its contribution to achievement of the SDGs. Activities will support implementation of the Convention by all Parties, in particular in the areas of risk assessment, through the development of a study and land-use planning, through the development of an information repository. The 11th meeting of the Conference of the Parties of the Convention (Bonn, Germany, 1-3 December 2020) will place a specific spotlight on mine tailings as critical safety hotspots, and the Convention's tools and approaches available to improve their management and prevent accidents. Dedicated support to beneficiaries of the Assistance and Cooperation Programme will also be provided.

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<sup>4</sup> See [www.unece.org/index.php?id=52057](http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=52057).

<sup>5</sup> See <https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=52870>.

39. In 2020, the work under the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol will continue assisting countries in achieving environmental dimension of SDG 16 and other Goals. A number of multilateral activities are planned in this regard. In addition, to strengthen capacity of Uzbekistan to further effective access to information and justice and public participation in environmental matters, an international round table on the Aarhus Convention will be held in Tashkent (March) for representatives of different national authorities.

40. For the Espoo Convention and its Protocol, the year 2020 will culminate in the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention and the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol that will take place in Vilnius, Lithuania, from 8 to 11 December. Aside from celebrating the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Espoo Convention, the Meetings of the Parties are expected to adopt several key decisions and documents that will shape the implementation of the two treaties in the next intersessional period 2021–2023 and beyond. One of them is a much-awaited guidance on the applicability of the Espoo Convention to the lifetime-extension of nuclear power plants, which is needed for clarifying Parties' obligations regarding the multiple power plants in the UNECE region that are about to reach the end of their lifetime. Other key documents to be adopted include a long-term strategy and action plan for the Convention and the Protocol that is to consider also any future accession of countries from outside the UNECE region; guidance on the assessment of health in strategic environmental assessment, and a new funding scheme that would provide for a more sustainable and equitable extrabudgetary funding for the treaties.

41. Technical assistance and capacity building activities carried out under the two treaties in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia will continue to be extensive, focusing mainly on promoting the implementation and the ratification of the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment. This work is funded by the European Union's EU4Environment project in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine; and in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan it is carried out in cooperation with OSCE, with funding from Germany and co-funding from CEE and OSCE.

### **III. Any proposed change to the subsidiary structure of the Committee**

42. The Committee did not propose any changes to its subsidiary structure.

### **IV. Intersectoral activities: new activities and/or progress in existing intersectoral activities**

43. The Environment subprogramme is supporting the cross-sectoral work under the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development, the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme (THE PEP), the Protocol on Water and Health, the EPR Programme and the Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Programme. Under the Water Convention the work is on-going on the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus. Under the Industrial Accidents Convention, the Espoo Convention and its Protocol on SEA work has continued on land-use planning and industrial safety. Under the Environment for Europe (EfE) process together with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), OECD and other partners, the Environment subprogramme is supporting the implementation of the Pan-European Strategic Framework for Greening the Economy. Furthermore, the subprogramme is also actively participating in the activities under the European Environment and Health Process.

44. In the reporting period, the work under the UNECE Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) focused on the promotion of SDG 4 and its target 4.7 in

the region, via the implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD. 14<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Steering Committee (Geneva, 02-03 May, 2019) considered the outline of the directions of its work for the next period of the implementation, taking into consideration the preliminary results of the ongoing work on post-2019 implementation framework, being elaborated by the members of the Ad hoc group for Strategic Planning. UNECE continues its cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to align its work to the global framework of actions on ESD. At its 24<sup>th</sup> session, the Committee encouraged its members from the countries participating in the Strategy to establish and maintain working contacts with the Steering Committee members and focal points from their national administrations and non-governmental organizations;

45. The Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme (THE PEP) is intrinsically an intersectoral activity. The secretariat is a collaboration between UNECE (Environment and Sustainable Transport Divisions) and the World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe. As an example of cooperation between THE PEP and universities, on 12 September 2019 Kazan (Russian Federation) and its University of Architecture and Engineering hosted a relay race workshop dedicated to “smart urban mobility”.

46. On 21-23 October the Steering Committee of THE PEP had its seventeenth meeting, mainly dedicated to the preparations for the Fifth High-level Meeting on Transport, Health and Environment (Vienna, 26-27 November 2020). At the meeting:

(a) The Austrian delegation confirmed the new dates for the High-level Meeting. It will be on 26-27 November 2020 at the United Nations in Vienna. The Ministerial segment will be on 26 November in the afternoon and 27 November in the morning. Side events are mainly expected to take place in the morning of 26 November. A special session of the Steering Committee will take place in the afternoon of 25 November at the premises of the Ministry of Transport. More information on side events and logistics are to be provided by the host country.

(b) The Steering Committee:

- o Adopted a study on mobility management and one on green jobs in green and healthy transport. Their publications will be launched at the High-level Meeting
- o Continued working on the draft declaration and on its annexes
- o Decided to carry out a review of facts and figures related to transport, health and environment in the UNECE region
- o Mandated the Bureau to continue working on the draft documents for the High-level Meeting
- o Decided to organize at least two preparatory meetings before the High-level Meeting.

47. Under the Water Convention, work is continuing on the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus, in particular in the Western Balkans and in North Africa to promote dialogue between water management, energy production, rural development, and environmental protection. The innovative publication “Towards sustainable renewable energy investment and deployment. Trade-offs and opportunities with water resources and the environment”, developed in cooperation with the UNECE Group of Experts on Renewable Energy, will be finalized, to help policy makers plan for sustainable renewable energy deployment, taking into account water and environment- related trade-offs and synergies, as well as transboundary considerations.

48. The UNECE secretariat of the Water Convention co-coordinates the UN-Water Expert Group on Transboundary Waters and the UN-Water Expert Group on Water and Climate. In this framework, UNECE co-coordinated the development of the UN-Water Policy Brief on Climate Change and Water, published in July 2019 as a joint view of the UN system on the topic. As the 2020 edition of World Water Day will focus on “Water and Climate Change”, UNECE is also co-coordinating the preparations together with UNESCO and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) in the framework of UN-Water.

49. The European Union Water Initiative National Policy Dialogues (NPDs) on Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM), carried out by UNECE in cooperation with OECD, and in particular the European Union Water Initiative plus programme (EUWI+), continued in 2019 in the countries of Eastern Europe and the Caucasus in the areas of legislative and institutional reforms, River Basin Management Planning, monitoring and public participation and awareness raising in the Eastern Partnership countries. It served as an important platform to promote the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the integration of sectoral policies.

50. The work under the *Protocol on Water and Health* serviced jointly by UNECE and the WHO Regional Office for Europe requires the health, environment and water communities to strengthen their cooperation to improve human health and environmental outcomes. Recent work under the Protocol has also promoted cooperation and integration of policies with other sector: for instance, work under the Protocol to promote equitable access to water and sanitation supports intersectoral analysis of the equity gaps, bringing together not only the water and health sectors but also finance, education, municipal authorities and water supply and sanitation suppliers.

51. The Industrial Accidents Convention will continue to closely cooperate with the Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management and, as relevant, also with the Espoo Convention and its Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessments and the Aarhus Convention, in the organization of a sub-regional workshop on land-use planning and industrial safety for South-Eastern Europe (Belgrade, 18-20 March 2020), and the development of an information-repository on land-use planning and industrial safety. It will continue its close cooperation with the Water Convention under the National Policy Dialogues for Integrated Water Resources Management, and the prevention of accidental water pollution, in particular in relation to mine tailings safety in Central Asia. The Convention’s activities will continue to support implementation of the respective implementation of the recommendations contained in the Environmental Performance Review (EPRs). The Convention’s activities in the area of mine tailings safety, and beyond, will naturally contribute to the broader policy debate on sustainable infrastructure development, in the framework of the eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Cyprus, November 2021).

52. The meeting of the Aarhus Convention Task Force on Access to Justice was preceded by the 2019 Judicial Colloquium (27 and 28 February 2019) which brought together representatives of the judiciary, judicial training institutions and other review bodies. Participants discussed the role of the Aarhus Convention and its linkages with other UNECE multilateral environmental agreements in enforcing environmental law in the context of environmental constitutionalism and sustainable development. They also considered challenges and successful experiences regarding the effective handling of cases related to environmental matters and the application of constitutionally entrenched environmental rights.

53. A joint workshop on “Open Data for the Environment” was organized under the auspices of the Aarhus Convention Task Force on Access to Information and the European Environment Agency. The main subjects for discussion included open data maturity reports and road maps for six countries of the European Neighbourhood Policy East region that also participate in the implementation of the Shared Environment Information System principles

(Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine) and how these countries to improve the dissemination and sharing of environmental data through e-government and open data initiatives.

54. The UNECE Environment Division (Environmental Monitoring and Assessment programme) and UNECE Statistical Division co-service the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators. The Joint Task Force continues to assist countries with economies in transition to understand indicator methodologies and supports them in applying the methodologies to produce and share specific environmental indicators.

55. The Espoo Convention and its Protocol on SEA are key instruments for promoting intersectoral cooperation and consultation by Parties in the assessment and addressing of environment, including health, impacts of projects, plans and programmes originating from across the economic sectors. Since late 2017, governmental and intergovernmental representatives of energy sector, and in particular nuclear energy sector, have actively participated in the development of guidance for the applicability of the Convention to the lifetime-extension of nuclear power plants, that is expected to be finalized by December 2020. To this end, in 2019, four intergovernmental meetings and two stakeholder workshops were held and, in 2020, three more meetings are planned for. Under the Protocol on SEA, efforts are underway in close collaboration with WHO to improve the assessment of health and the participation of health sector in strategic environmental assessment. The guidance document on this topic that is funded by European Investment Bank is foreseen to be adopted in December 2020.

## V. Technical cooperation activities

56. Technical cooperation activities in the Environment subprogramme include activities carried out by the UNECE Regional Adviser on Environment as well as a number of other activities undertaken under MEAs and policy programmes.

57. The Regional Adviser supports the implementation of the technical cooperation activities, contributes to fund raising efforts and provides policy advisory services to the countries in close collaboration with the secretariats of the UNECE MEAs. The work aims at supporting ratification and implementation of the MEAs and strengthening cooperation on common environmental problems in the countries of Central Asia, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe and the Caucasus.

58. The work undertaken by the Regional Adviser in the reporting period resulted in the implementation of the transboundary water cooperation projects in Drin basin (South-Eastern Europe) and in the Dniester basin (Republic of Moldova and Ukraine), and initial negotiations of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Global Environment Facility (GEF) project to be implemented in the Bug-Neman basin (Belarus and Ukraine).

59. Further advisory services were provided to assist Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to review their national legislation in line with the Espoo Convention and its Protocol under the technical cooperation projects implemented by the Espoo Convention Secretariat.

60. Two subregional workshops were co-funded by the Regular Programme for Technical Cooperation for Environment i.e. a workshop on “Land-use planning and industrial safety for Eastern Europe and the Caucasus” and a workshop under the UNECE projects on “Improving mining/tailing safety in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and beyond in Central Asia”, which were held in Chisinau in May 2019 and in November in Almaty respectively. The third capacity building workshop on monitoring the implementation of EPR recommendations on energy policies and strengthening national capacities on applying sustainable energy policies

and practices in the selected UN programme countries which was planned to be organized in cooperation with the Sustainable Energy Division had to be postponed due to the budget liquidity issues.

61. A workshop on validation for the UNDA Project “Evidence-based environmental governance and sustainable environmental policies in support of the 2030 Agenda in South-East Europe” was held in Budva, Montenegro in June 2019. A peer-learning workshop on “Sustainable urban transport and mobility: Policies and practices on the basis of UNECE Environmental Performance Reviews” for the sharing of lessons learned in integrating the relevant SDGs and targets in recent environmental performance reviews, was also held in Budva, Montenegro in June 2019.

62. Technical cooperation projects were implemented in more than 15 countries in the Caucasus, Central Asia and Eastern and South-Eastern Europe.

63. Under the Espoo Convention and in particular its Protocol on SEA an extensive amount of technical cooperation activities is implemented in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. In Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine the European Union (EU) funded “EU for Environment” project allow the treaty secretariat to continue supporting the ratification and/or the effective implementation of the Protocol on SEA for four more years (2019–2022) (with a budget of some 2,7 Mio USD) building on the outcomes of its previous EU funded support (2013–2018). In 2019, a total of four training workshops were held in Belarus, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova. In Central Asia, the secretariat continued to assist Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in the alignment of their national legislation with the Convention and the Protocol (organizing five technical assistance meetings in the countries). To support the development of national strategic environmental assessment systems in all the five Central Asian countries, another project was launched in cooperation with OSCE, with the funding mainly from Germany, and co-funding from UNECE and OSCE. In December 2019, as part of that project, a study tour was organized in Germany to exchange experiences in the implementation of the Protocol.

64. Under the Water Convention, technical cooperation activities are implemented in numerous basins inside and outside the ECE region such as the Chu Talas, Drin, Drina, Dniester and Neman-Bug basins as well as the North-Western Sahara and Senegalo-Mauritanian Aquifer Systems. The Convention also supports transboundary water negotiations, for example between Kenya and Uganda, between the riparian countries of the Comoé-Bia-Tanoé basin in Western Africa, between Central Asian countries on the negotiation of a region-wide agreement on the safe management of dams and under the auspices of the Economic Community of Central African States on the creation of a joint body for the joint management of the Ogooué, Ntem, Komo, Nyanga, Woleu and Mouni River Basins.

65. Under the Protocol on Water and Health, several countries, such as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were supported in setting or revising their national targets under the Protocol, and support was provided to Armenia, Belarus and Serbia to carry out self-assessments and/or develop action plans on equitable access to water and sanitation.

66. The Industrial Accidents Convention will continue to foster progress by non-Parties towards accession under its Assistance and Cooperation Programme and seek to support beneficiary countries of the Assistance and Cooperation Programme in enhancing inter-institutional cooperation, through the establishment of National Policy Dialogues on Industrial Safety. A major focus of the technical cooperation activities will be on the strengthening of mine tailings safety in Central Asia, including through the initiation of a follow-up Project on supporting countries' efforts to strengthen the safety of tailings management facilities in Central Asia and beyond.

## VI. Cooperation with other organizations

67. The Environment subprogramme is working with a number of organizations in and outside the United Nations system with the aim of combining efforts, ensuring mutual benefits and avoiding overlap and duplication. Cooperation takes place through information and communication technology tools, internal coordination meetings and the organization of joint events, as well as involving relevant partner organizations in various activities. Among the many organizations involved in the work of the Committee and of other governing bodies under the Environment subprogramme, the following activities mark highlights of cooperation during the reporting period:

### *United Nations Regional Commissions*

68. The Water Convention is cooperating with the other regional commissions in the framework of the Convention's global opening. In particular, a regional workshop on enhancing transboundary water cooperation in the Middle East and North Africa region is being organized jointly with the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in March 2020.

69. The Aarhus secretariat is providing continuous advisory support to United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), notably assisted in the implementation of a regional instrument on environmental rights in the ECLAC region and cooperates on the establishment of PRTRs. UNECE has also continued its joint efforts with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) to promote the cooperation on transboundary air pollution in North-East Asia as part of Air Convention's outreach activities, including during the informal dialogue with countries from outside the UNECE region at the thirty-eighth session of the Executive Body. The review also contributed to the ESCAP-led Sustainability Outlook for Mongolia and aims to feed eventually into the Pathways for Implementation of the Internationally Agreed Commitments of Mongolia.

### *United Nations Environment Programme*

70. The Environment subprogramme has long-standing cooperation with United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) through many joint activities and partnerships.

71. The work of UNECE and UNEP is complementary: UNECE provides the regional political platform, expert and intergovernmental bodies and policy expertise; UNEP brings its global policy leadership, specific technical expertise and country and regional policy and programmatic engagement. Such a symbiosis enables the two organizations to address in an effective way the existing and emerging environmental concerns across the UNECE region.

72. UNEP is a key partner in the EfE process. In particular, UNEP actively participated in the themes selection for the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, including mapping its work on the short-listed themes for the Conference

73. At its 25<sup>th</sup> session, the Committee welcomed the information provided by UNEP on the outcomes of the fourth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme (Nairobi, 11–15 March 2019) and the ongoing preparations for the fifth session and invited UNEP to continue to inform the Committee of relevant developments under the Assembly. The Committee also noted with interest the information provided by UNEP on the follow-up activities with regard to United Nations Environment Assembly resolution 4/5 on sustainable infrastructure and expresses interest in being informed of future developments in this regard

74. The United Nations Development Account (UNDA) 11th Trench - 615.2b Enhancing sustainable public procurement for the regional transition to inclusive green economy in



Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) is being jointly implemented by UNECE and UNEP. A Regional Workshop on Good Practices and Lessons Learned on Sustainable Public Procurement took place on 19-20 March 2019 back-to-back with the UNECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development.

75. UNEP is actively involved in the activities of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment and the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators, including, but not limited, to the monitoring of SEIS establishment in Europe and Central Asia and the final review on SEIS establishment and the 7<sup>th</sup> pan-European environmental assessment, to be conducted in 2020. In addition, UNEP is engaged, as part of a common approach between UNECE, the European Environment Agency (EEA) and UNEP, in supporting national, regional and global reporting on the state of the environment. Representatives of the three organizations meet regularly at senior (January 2019) and operational levels. UNEP is also involved in relevant activities of the UNECE-led UNDA project on environmental monitoring and assessment.

76. UNEP provided expertise for the third EPR of Uzbekistan on the chapter related to environmental monitoring and information.

77. THE PEP cooperated with UNEP in the past in one phase of a study on green jobs in green transport. The UNECE secretariat looks forward to continuing the cooperation in other phases of the work.

78. The United Nations Environment Programme is also actively contributing to the implementation of many UNECE MEAs. The secretariat of the Aarhus Convention cooperates closely with UNEP on global promotion of Principle 10, of the participatory international decision-making, of access to justice and of PRTRs.

79. Since 2013, the secretariat of the Espoo Convention and its Protocol on SEA has promoted the implementation of these instruments and, in general, greening the economies of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine in partnership with United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), OECD and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), with funding from European Union. In 2019-2022, it will continue to assist the same countries in cooperation with the UNEP, UNIDO, OECD and the World Bank under the EU4Environment programme.

80. As regards the Air Convention, there is an ongoing active exchange of information between the Convention and relevant UNEP MEAs and subregional initiatives, including the East Asia Acid Deposition Network and the Asia Pacific Clean Air Partnership and with regards to the resolutions on air quality of the first and the third meeting of the United Nations Environment Assembly (2014 and 2017, respectively).

81. The Industrial Accidents Convention will seek to further build on its partnership with UNEP, by contributing to the broader policy debate on sustainable resource governance, in the framework of the fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (Nairobi, February 2021) and the preceding regional consultation in 2020.

*World Health Organization (WHO)*

82. UNECE and WHO/Europe continue to jointly provide secretariat services for the Protocol on Water and Health and THE PEP. The UNECE and WHO/Europe secretariats are in constant communication to coordinate the activities. UNECE is also represented in the Bureau of the European Environment and Health Task Force, serviced by WHO under the European Environment and Health Process.

83. WHO provided expertise for the third EPR Uzbekistan on the chapter dealing with health and environment.

84. WHO/Europe also leads the Air Convention's Joint Task Force on the Health Aspects of Air Pollution, which is currently contributing to the update of the WHO Air Quality Guidelines. The UNECE Environment subprogramme is also actively working with WHO/Europe in the European Environment and Health Process and the EPR Programme, where WHO provides an expert to draft a chapter in some country reviews.

85. The Espoo Convention and its Protocol on SEA secretariat cooperates closely with WHO for the development of guidance for the assessment of health impacts and for the involvement of health authorities in strategic environmental assessment. The work is funded by European Investment Bank.

*United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)*

86. The UNECE Strategy for ESD is implemented in close cooperation with UNESCO, the lead agency for the Global Action Programme, as a key partner in the Partnership Network for its implementation, including the joint activities carried out in the framework of the first priority action area on advancing policy. For the reporting period UNESCO also continued to participate in the work of the UNECE Steering Committee on ESD and its Bureau.

87. UNECE and UNESCO are the custodian agencies for SDG indicator 6.5.2 and cooperate for the preparation of the 2020 second reporting exercise. This work is carried out in the framework of the UN-Water Integrated Monitoring Initiative for SDG 6.

*United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)*

88. UNDP office in Uzbekistan supported the EPR Programme in substantive and logistics matters. Also, UNDP is supporting organization of activities on the national level, in particular implementation of the UNECE MEAs and other environmental policy instruments.

89. UNECE will further seek to continue its cooperation with UNDP in the area of mine tailings safety, building on an exchange of letters to that effect in 2019.

90. UNECE and UNDP cooperate on the joint implementation of several GEF-funded projects in transboundary basins under the Water Convention, particularly in the Chu Talas, Dniester, Drin and Neman River basins.

*United Nations Statistical Division (UNSD)*

91. Cooperation with the UNSD continues on the monitoring and reporting of SDG indicator 6.5.2 for which UNECE acts as co-custodian agency, together with UNESCO.

92. UNSD participates routinely in the activities and meetings of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators and the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment.

*Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)*

93. For the capacity building in Central Asia, the UNECE treaty secretariat has worked closely with OSCE including to assist Kazakhstan in introducing a SEA system and in enhancing its EIA system through preparing amendments to its national legislation; and Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in reviewing their national legislation vis-à-vis the Convention and the Protocol on SEA. Since late 2019, the secretariat and OSCE jointly implement a project for the development of national strategic environmental assessment systems in all the five Central Asian countries, another project was launched in cooperation with OSCE, with the funding mainly from Germany, and co-funding from UNECE and OSCE.

94. Since 2002, the OSCE in partnership with UNECE has been supporting the establishment, operation and networking of Aarhus Centres that assist the governments in

implementing the Aarhus Convention. The network reached now a total of 60 Centres in 14 countries.

95. The Industrial Accidents Convention will continue its cooperation with OSCE in capacity-development to strengthen industrial safety in Central Asia.

96. The UNECE secretariat of the Water Convention cooperated with OSCE in providing support to the Dniester transboundary basin to adapt to climate change, as well as on facilitating regional dialogues on water diplomacy.

*Other partners*

97. Under the European Union funded EU4Environment project 2019-2022 UNECE (the Espoo Convention and the Protocol on SEA secretariat) cooperates with the European Commission, OECD, UNEP, UNIDO, UNDP and the World Bank.

98. The Industrial Accidents Convention will continue to foster inter-agency cooperation with a range of international organizations, through the Inter-agency coordination group on industrial accidents and its contributions to the inter-agency coordination group on chemicals management. It will continue to closely cooperate with the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), incl. through its membership of the Scientific and Advisory Board on Natural-hazard triggering technological accidents (NATECH). It will also join forces with OECD and the UNEP/OCHA Joint Unit in the implementation of a joint NATECH-III project, to develop a brochure and a guidance on NATECH risk management. To foster synergies in advocacy and the implementation of assistance activities, further partners will be involved, including international organizations, such as UNIDO and regional actors, such as the Commonwealth for Independent States (CIS) Inter-State Council for Industrial Safety, the Center for Emergency Situations and Disaster Risk Reduction for Central Asia, and the Regional Environmental Centres.

99. The European Environment Agency (EEA) is involved in the activities of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment and the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators, including, but not limited, to the monitoring of SEIS establishment in Europe and Central Asia. EEA is engaged, as part of a common approach between the UNECE, EEA and UNEP, in supporting national, regional and global reporting on the state of the environment. EEA has also provided financial support to the Working Group and Joint Task Force inter alia through the project "Support production and regular update of the UNECE set of indicators and strengthening environmental statistics and accounting under the ENI SEIS II East project" that has been carried out by UNECE from 2017 until 2019. The cooperation with the EEA also focuses on supporting integration of environmental information systems in e-government and open data domestic frameworks.

100. Other important partners outside the United Nations system are OECD (for the Protocol on PRTRs, the EfE process, and in conjunction with the European Union Water Initiative (EUWI)), OSCE (for the Environment and Security (ENVSEC) Initiative, supporting Aarhus Centres and other different activities under the UNECE MEAs), the European Commission and the Regional Environmental Centers (RECs). OECD participates in the activities of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators and the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment on green growth-related work. UNECE is represented in the Bureau of the GREEN Action Programme Task Force, serviced by OECD under the Environment for Europe process.

101. The European ECO Forum and its members are active partners in the work of the Committee, MEAs, ESD, THE PEP and in the EfE process.

102. The Water Convention and its Protocol on Water and Health are cooperating, among others, with UN-Water, WHO and its Regional Office for Europe, the European Investment

Bank, Global Environment Facility (GEF), UNDP, the United Nations Environment Programme, UNESCO, international river basins commissions, such as the Rhine, Danube, Okavango (OKACOM), Chu Talas, Niger, Senegal, Volta commissions, the International Network of Basin Organizations, OSCE, OECD, the Global Water Partnership, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), the Alliance for Global Water Adaptation, the African Network of Basin Organizations, the Economic Communities of Central African and West African States, the Southern African Development Community, the Intergovernmental Authority for Development, the African Development Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, the Stockholm International Water Institute, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Organization of American States (OAS), the World Bank, the World Wildlife Fund, Green Cross International, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation and the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

103. The Air Convention continues its close cooperation with the European Union including in the implementation of capacity building activities in the Caucasus, Central Asia and Eastern Europe. The continuation of this project will run through 2021. Furthermore, the Convention regularly cooperates, among others, with the Arctic Council and WMO.

104. The secretariat to the Espoo Convention and its Protocol on SEA exchange information and cooperate regularly with International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) regarding transboundary environmental impact assessment and strategic environmental assessment of nuclear energy-related activities, including through commenting draft guidance documents or attending meetings, workshops or capacity building events.

105. The secretariat to the Espoo Convention and its Protocol on SEA has established cooperation with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) to support the ongoing negotiations on the new high seas agreement under that Convention (on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction – BBNJ) regarding aspects on environmental impact assessments and strategic environmental assessments

106. The secretariat of the Aarhus Convention continuously pursues a close cooperation with a number of partner organizations. OSCE, UNEP, UNDP, United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), Regional Environmental Centres (RECs), and EEA participate in the capacity-building coordination framework under the Convention, which is serviced by the secretariat.

107. In the reporting period, the third joint global round table was organized under the auspices of the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity (16-18 December 2019). It brought together representatives of Governments, academia, the private sector, NGOs and other experts engaged in the implementation of both instruments from numerous countries of Europe, Asia, Africa and North and South America. They explored new patterns for sharing resources and best practices and for combining various regional perspectives into a shared vision. The event resulted in a number of suggested actions to be taken at national and multilateral levels.

108. UNECE has worked with UNEP, OSCE, OHCHR and other partner organizations in supporting cooperation of judiciary, judicial training institutions and other independent review bodies in the pan-European region (in support of target 16.3 of SDG 16).

109. Cooperation between the secretariat and the special procedures of the Human Rights Council was further enhanced in the reporting period. The secretariat further provided

substantive input during expert consultations on human rights and air pollution and for the preparation of the report of the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment.

110. Furthermore, the secretariat also pursued cooperation with UNEP and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on environmental human rights defenders and cooperated with partners within the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals to assist Governments to implement different international obligations related to chemicals management.

111. The Aarhus Convention Parties and the secretariat continued to promote the application of the Convention in different international forums dealing with matters relating to the environment. At event at the PreCOP25 in San José, Costa Rica, UNFCCC Parties, other interested States and stakeholders were trained by the Aarhus Convention's secretariat on how to handle effective and inclusive public participation in climate-related decision-making. Moreover, at the request from ECLAC, the Signatories to the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (Escazu Agreement), other interested States and stakeholders benefited from the advisory support of the Aarhus Convention secretariat provided at the Signatories' first meeting.

112. The secretariat cooperated with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Human Rights Council secretariat, Special Rapporteurs appointed by the Human Rights Council, including Special Rapporteur the environment; Special Rapporteur the situation of human rights defenders; and Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes; ILO, the World Bank Group, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the European Investment Bank, European Environment Agency, International Union for Conservation of Nature World Commission on Environmental Law, the Global Judicial Institute on the Environment, the European Union Forum of Judges for the Environment and the Association of European Administrative Judges.

113. Secretariat cooperates closely with OECD, UNEP, GEF and UNITAR as to build capacities of Governments in the area of chemicals management, including through electronic tools for PRTRs (PRTR:Learn; OECD Centre for PRTR Data, OECD Resource Centre for Release Estimation Techniques; and PRTR.net.).

114. Furthermore, it continued servicing a region-wide inter-agency capacity-building coordination mechanism for the implementation of the Aarhus Convention and a global international coordinating Group for the Protocol.

115. Since 2016 UNECE has been an observer to the Inter-State Council on Industrial Safety under Commonwealth of Independent States, and has regularly attended the meetings of the Council, which recognized achievements under the UNECE Project on Strengthening Industrial Safety in Central Asia and supported future work by its members towards the preparation of national self-assessments and action plans under the Industrial Accident Convention's Assistance Programme.

116. The International Labour Organization (ILO) is one of the main partners in the third study on green jobs in green transport under THE PEP, identifying how transport policies privileging electric vehicles and public transport can have a positive impact on new, green job opportunities.

117. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) participates in the activities of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment, when relevant.

118. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) office in Romania supported the EPR Programme in logistics matters.