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Introduction:

The Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC) is an inter-agency partnership which facilitates co-operation on critical environmental issues as a way to promote peace and security in four regions: Eastern Europe, the Southern Caucasus, Central Asia, and Southeastern Europe. Recognizing that environmental problems do not stop at national borders, ENVSEC partners (OSCE, UNDP, UNEP, REC, UNECE, and associate partner NATO) have developed a platform that turns the potential for conflict between states into opportunities for confidence-building and co-operation.

ENVSEC has been active in the Southern Caucasus region since 2004 when, as a result of country consultations in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, it published a Regional Assessment Report outlining priority environment and security issues for the region. ENVSEC partners are now implementing a work programme of projects and activities, in cooperation with national governments, to build inter-state cooperation to address these priority issues.

ENVSEC in the South Caucasus would like to extend its gratitude to its main donor - the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) for its generous support of the regional work programme.



Project Update:

Cluster One: Environmental Degradation and Access to the natural resources in the conflict zones

Environmental Programme in conflict zone of South Ossetia, Georgia

1. OSCE/UNEP: Waste Assessment in Tskhinvali and Surrounding Area



Source: Report Waste management Assessment in and round Tskhinvali

In February, the OSCE Mission to Georgia had discussions with the de-facto authorities in Tskhinvali on the problems of waste management in the region. With the agreement of both parties to the conflict, the ENVSEC Initiative subsequently funded a team of experts to provide an in-depth assessment of the waste problems in Tskhinvali from 17-25, March. As a result, UNEP experts have prepared an assessment report designed for decision makers with recommendations for improving the current waste management system in the zone of conflict. Further steps are now being explored to follow up on these recommendations.

2. OSCE Mission to Georgia: Environmental Clubs in Tskhinvali University and Public School of Kurta

In summer 2008, ENVSEC is planning to launch two environmental clubs in Ossetian and Georgian communities in the conflict zone of South Ossetia. The project aims at increasing environmental awareness and facilitating an exchange of information between the communities. Clubs also will serve as a platform for dialogue on important environmental issues between the local authorities and civil society. In June, 2008 a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the OSCE Mission to Georgia and Tskhinvali State University on opening an environmental club in the premises of the University. A Lease Agreement with a Public school in Kurta is also ready for signature.

Preparation phase of the project envisages procurement of office equipment, furniture and renovation works in Tskhinvali University. Specific activities are expected to be launched in autumn.

3. UNEP: Green Week

After the environmental clubs have become fully operational, ENVSEC will launch a Green Week campaign in the conflict zone that will include a series of public discussions and assessments by international experts on different environmental issues. The public discussions will include both Ossetian and Georgian communities and are expected to start in autumn.

**Cluster Two:** Degradation of Transboundary Natural Resources***UNDP/GEF: Development of legal and institutional frameworks for the cooperation in the Kura-Aras river basin***

On 27-28 March, UNDP held the first regional meeting in the framework of this project in Tbilisi. During the meeting, a discussion paper on various short and long term management options for cooperation in the Kura-Aras river basin was presented to the participants. Country representatives provided their recommendations and comments on the paper and decided that a revised options paper would be sent out to the countries in June. At that time, a high level meeting in Geneva was scheduled for September. However, due to the recent decision of the GEF to fund the next phase of the project "Reducing Transboundary Degradation in the Kura-Aras River Basin," slight changes were made in the ENVSEC project work plan. The GEF project envisages the establishment of the Kura-Aras Environmental Programme (KAEP) which will be underpinned by declaration of the riparian countries and donors on cooperation in preparation and implementation of KAEP. It is hoped that implementation of this GEF project will start in the autumn 2008 and UNDP will be implementing agency of the project.

In the light of these latest developments, the ENVSEC project team re-adjusted its activities and considered it more rational to focus on the development of only one option for the cooperation in the Kura-Aras basin – the Kura-Aras Environmental Programme (KAEP). The project team will prepare draft documents of the KAEP, Kura-Aras Declaration and paper on institutional arrangements for KAEP. These documents will be discussed and reviewed at a second technical meeting in Tbilisi instead of a high level meeting in Geneva that was planned by the project originally. The second technical meeting is tentatively planned for the end of September 2008. It is hoped that the Kura-Aras declaration will be signed and the institutional arrangements for the KAEP will be endorsed at the GEF project inception meeting in November 2008 in Tbilisi.

UNECE/OSCE: Development of bilateral agreement on the management of transboundary watercourses between Azerbaijan and Georgia

The project will be jointly implemented by the UNECE and OSCE. Activities related to drafting bilateral agreements will start in August when a UNECE expert starts working on the background information. A set of the questions will be prepared by a consultant for Azerbaijan and Georgia to identify the main areas which will be covered by a bilateral agreement. The responses will form the basis for the first draft of the agreement. This will be followed by the bilateral negotiation meetings in Baku and Tbilisi.

Project envisages also gap analysis and assessment of the costs for the ratification and implementation of the UNECE Water Convention by Georgia. This task will be implemented in cooperation with the Legal Board of the UNECE water convention body. Implementation of this activity started in July.



South Caucasus River Monitoring Project



out monthly water sampling and analysis of the heavy metals, persistent pesticides and radionucleoids in the Kura-Araks/Aras river basin.

The South Caucasus River Monitoring project entered its 6th year of implementation in 2008. Funds, provided by NATO, Statoil and ENVSEC, cover the expenses of the operation of the laboratories, field measurements and salaries of the staff. Labs in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia are carrying



Cooperation for the Protection and Sustainable Development of Mountain Regions in the Southern Caucasus

The communication and consultation process has continued with governmental representatives of the countries. Official letters with the final report of the Liechtenstein meeting and a proposed roadmap for the development of the process have been sent out to the countries, with a request to provide their opinion on the roadmap. The presentation of the Caucasus mountain process was communicated to the partners in Turkey in April 2008.

The regional meeting of experts is tentatively planned for the second part of September. UNEP, together with the REC-Caucasus, are in the process of consultation with the governments about organizational matters of the meeting, to be held in Tbilisi, Georgia. The background documentation is being redrafted in greater detail, with the help of local experts.

The web-site was set up for the Caucasus mountain cooperation, with information about the process: http://www.unep.ch/roe/programme_law_caucasus.htm. Information brochure is also under development.

Cluster Three: Management of rapid population growth in capitals and urban centers

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) - promotion and capacity development in Azerbaijan with focus on spatial planning

The overall aim of the SEA project is to support the integration of environmental sustainability principles into integrated urban planning, strengthen local stakeholders in performing multi-sectoral dialogue and increase involvement of civil society in urban planning in Azerbaijan. The application of SEA provides a platform for balancing the



economic, social and environmental issues in planning and helps to prevent future significant and costly environmental damage.

It has been preliminary agreed that the SEA will be applied to the Absheron peninsula Regional Development Plan, to be elaborated with the support of the World Bank. The SEA project document was officially approved by Government of Azerbaijan in January 2008 and annual Work Plan was signed in June 2008. The project will be launched in July and completed in December 2009.

Cluster Four: Cross-cutting Issues

Implementation of the Aarhus Convention in the South Caucasus

The OSCE has commissioned an Independent Evaluation of the Aarhus Centres. The overall objective of the evaluation is to generate knowledge from the experience of the Aarhus Centres within the context of OSCE's efforts in raising awareness on environmental issues as well as in promoting participatory approaches in environmental decision-making and thus implementing the principles of the Aarhus Convention. The evaluation has been conducted by an independent expert who visited all countries with OSCE-supported Aarhus Centres and met with relevant national and local stakeholders. Within this framework, the expert also visited the South Caucasus region between 7-18 May 2008 and had consultations with representatives of the Ministries of Environment, regional administrations, civil society organizations and business community as well as the National Aarhus Focal Points and Aarhus Centre managers. The Evaluation Report is currently under preparation and will be available by end August 2008.

The Aarhus Centres within the South Caucasus region and the support of the ENVSEC for implementation of the Aarhus Convention in the region were highly visible during the UNECE Third Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention that took place in Riga, Latvia on 11-13 June 2008. There have been a number of references to the Aarhus Centres within the official documentation of the Meeting as well as the official statements at the high level segment of the Conference. The Side Event on Aarhus Centres: Platforms for Co-operation, Participation and Partnership organized by the OSCE on 11 June 2008 provided an effective platform for sharing experiences, lessons learned and best practices among various practitioners of the Aarhus Centres, including the Government representatives, local authorities, Aarhus Centre Managers/representatives and representatives of the OSCE from Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The side event was attended by over 40 participants, including representatives of Governments, NGOs, international organizations and financial institutions. Various best practices from the Aarhus Centres in the South Caucasus region in the implementation of the three pillars of the Convention were shared with the audience. One of the primary outcomes of the side event has been the need for increased co-operation and co-ordination among the Aarhus Centres and the National Aarhus Focal Points at the sub-regional and regional levels.



The recently approved ENVSEC project on “South Caucasus Regional Co-operation for Implementation of the Aarhus Convention” is expected to contribute significantly towards this outcome by capitalizing on the varying strengths of the countries of the region and by responding to the varying challenges in relation to the three pillars of the Convention.

Recent ENVSEC meetings

National workshops

The ENVSEC Initiative, in coordination with national authorities in the South Caucasus, held National Workshops in Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan from April 3-10, 2008. The overall objective of the meetings was to broaden stakeholder participation in ENVSEC, review the progress of the ENVSEC work programme in the



South Caucasus during 2007 and receive feedback from the National Focal Points, government representatives, non-governmental organizations, and donors on the current ENVSEC work programme in the South Caucasus.



Additionally, the workshop participants in each country discussed the idea of creating an ENVSEC national advisory body or working group which would facilitate the exchange of information and intersectoral cooperation. While workshop participants in Azerbaijan and Georgia welcomed the creation of informal working groups, participants in Armenia were more in favor of establishing a formal consultative body. Armenian participants

recommended ENVSEC to draft a terms of reference for the National Advisory Body which will be sent out to the national focal points for comments.

ENVSEC was encouraged to further strengthen civil society and continue support of the Aarhus centers and focus on promotion and strengthening of the third pillar of the convention - access to the justice. Other project ideas discussed at the workshop will be developed further by respective agencies and submitted in the form of project proposals to the ENVSEC Secretariat and national focal points. These ideas include the creation of an emergency response system for epidemic outbreaks in the conflict zones of Georgia and a regional study on the impact of the climate change in the South Caucasus.





Seminars

On March 6, 2008, in Baku, UNDP together with UNEP/Grid Arendal held a half day seminar to introduce the concept of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and the GeoCities methodology. The objectives and outline of the SEA project was presented to the participants of the seminar. The possibility of considering on-going Baku planning as an entry point for the pilot SEA application and the role of different stakeholders in this pilot was also discussed. The meeting was hosted by the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Azerbaijan. Participants of the seminar were the representatives of sectoral ministries (environment, transport, health, and economy), Baku city planning authorities and institutes, OSCE Baku office and environmental NGOs.

ENVSEC Management Board Retreat

On June 30 –July 1, the members of the ENVSEC Management Board convened a management retreat in Sopron, Hungary to take stock of ENVSEC's progress as well as to address remaining strategic issues. Discussions centered on the following points:

- Reviewing the ENVSEC vision and subsequently its strategy for 2009 onwards;
- Discussing the management and coordination of the Initiative;
- Discussing the leadership of the Initiative;
- Improving the visibility of the Initiative;

One of the most important decisions reached during the retreat concerns ENVSEC's approach to its annual Advisory Board meeting. In particular, it was decided to discontinue the annual Advisory Board meeting and replace it with an annual ENVSEC Donors' Forum to address the specific concerns of existing and potential donors. Furthermore, the ENVSEC Management Board decided to establish a biannual Environmental Security Conference, aimed at enhancing the Initiative's visibility and contacts with research and academic communities.

Upcoming Management Meetings

ENVSEC Management Board Meeting - November 12, 2008 in Brussels

ENVSEC Environmental Security Conference - November 13, 2008 in Brussels

Tentative: ENVSEC Donors Forum - November 14, 2008 in Brussels

ENVSEC South Caucasus Regional Meeting: ENVSEC partners are proposing to hold the next Regional Meeting for the South Caucasus in late November-Early December in Tbilisi, Georgia. More details will be provided in September.



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