








# The Environment and Security Initiative: From analysis to action

At first glance, destroying left-over pesticides in Moldova, investigating the impact of wildland fires in and around the Nagorno-Karabakh region, and promoting best practices in closing down mines in south-eastern Europe appear to share little in common. But a closer look reveals that all three activities involve battling human-induced environmental hazards that have the potential of wreaking havoc on local communities and their neighbours.

**BY DAVID SWALLEY**

Keeping these threats from spilling across national boundaries and transforming them instead into opportunities for building confidence between States is the ambitious task that the Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC) has set for itself. Launched in 2003, this unique interagency partnership draws on the

## Eastern Europe

-  Environment and security priority areas
-  Areas under environmental stress
-  Areas contaminated by the Chernobyl explosion
-  Strongly polluted coastal areas
-  Important nature: near-border protected areas and transboundary regions of high ecological importance
-  Nuclear power plants (operating / closed)
-  Past / current (frozen) conflicts
- Land and territorial disputes
  -  Inter-state disputes in the process of international or bilateral resolution
  -  Inter-ethnic disputes

strengths and resources of the OSCE and UNEP, UNDP, UNECE and the Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe (REC). The Security through Science Programme of NATO's Public Diplomacy Division joined as an associate partner in 2004.

Starting with an on-site examination of "at risk" areas and culminating in a structured work programme, the six partners work closely with governments and tap local knowledge and expertise in Central Asia, the South Caucasus, south-eastern Europe and Eastern Europe. These collective efforts have resulted in several regional environmental assessments that have, in turn, led to the development of more than 70 projects so far. The focus is on building skills, strengthening institutions, developing policies, raising awareness and applying practical measures to remedy specific environmental problems.

With its comprehensive view of security, the OSCE injects valuable assets into the ENVSEC Initiative: its network of field offices as well as its wide-ranging contacts with national authorities, local environmental experts and NGOs active in environmental issues.

"Perhaps the OSCE's most important contribution to the Initiative lies in placing the most pressing environmental concerns higher on the political agenda of participating States in Vienna and in other capitals," says Bernard Snoy, Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities. "Countries are afforded the opportunity to engage in a dialogue and to co-operate with one another to come up with sustainable solutions before insecurity breeds confrontation or fans the flames of existing conflicts."

#### **SOUTH CAUCASUS**

This early-warning principle underpins the work of ENVSEC in the South Caucasus, where long-simmering tensions have given rise to additional pressure on the shared ecosystem of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. Responding to a request from the three governments, the ENVSEC partners analysed the condition of transboundary natural resources, including the quality and quantity of water in the Kura-Araks/Aras River Basin, which is a prime source of fresh water in the three countries and in their frozen-conflict zones.

#### **The OSCE's partners in the Environment and Security Initiative are:**

**UNDP** *United Nations Development Programme*  
**UNEP** *United Nations Environment Programme*  
**NATO** *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*  
**UNECE** *United Nations Economic Commission for Europe*  
**REC** *Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe*

[www.envsec.org](http://www.envsec.org) • [www.osce.org/eea](http://www.osce.org/eea)

"ENVSEC has been playing a useful role in bringing people together from both sides of the conflict in the South Ossetian region through mutually beneficial environmental projects," says Zaal Lomtadze, Georgia's Deputy Minister for the Environment.

Other OSCE-led projects within the ENVSEC Initiative seek to fill gaps identified during the priority-setting process: training judges to understand multilateral environmental agreements, establishing environmental information centres for the public and working with mayors' offices to develop action plans on urban environmental issues.

#### **EASTERN EUROPE**

How does ENVSEC go about translating its underlying philosophy into action? The environmental assessment focusing on Eastern Europe, completed just last May, illustrates how prime goals and activities are propelled by a strong sense of national and regional ownership.

Responding to requests from the Governments of Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine, and following reports by their environmental ministries, ENVSEC held extensive consultations with a diverse group of national representatives — government officials, scientists and members of environmental NGOs. Their most critical concerns were summarized and published in a comprehensive, 100-page regional report in English and Russian, including maps highlighting environmental issues that pose the greatest risk to security and stability.

The wealth of data assembled lays a solid groundwork for multi-year work programmes, comprising practical projects that are jointly developed with participating countries. Working in tandem with national focal



#### **OSCE-led environmental assessment mission to fire-affected territories in and around the Nagorno-Karabakh region**

Large wildland fires were the focus of this activity in October 2006, supported by a core financial contribution from ENVSEC. An international team worked alongside local experts from both sides of the Line of Contact to study the extent of the fires' impact on the environment. They also drew up recommendations to combat the detrimental consequences of the fires and to enhance national capacities to prevent and control similar incidents in the future.





PHILIP PECKLUND UNIVERSITY

## Best practices in closing down mining sites in south-eastern Europe

The cyanide spill from a mining tailing dam at Romania's Rosia Montana in 2000 was a grim reminder of the disastrous effects that a mining catastrophe can have on transboundary waterways and marine life. ENVSEC co-ordinated an assessment of the most vulnerable mining sites in south-eastern Europe. Local communities have teamed up with ENVSEC to carry out a number of demonstration projects aimed at rehabilitating abandoned mines and developing home-grown expertise.

points appointed by environmental and foreign ministries, ENVSEC partners are reassured that project design and implementation are on track and enjoy the backing of host governments.

Project activities under the 2007 work programme in Eastern Europe are already well under way. In Moldova, chemical wastes and pesticides are being collected and disposed of safely. Joint monitoring of the Dniester and Prut rivers — major shared sources of drinking water and irrigation, fishing and energy production — is being heavily promoted and encouraged.

“The destruction of dangerous chemicals and obsolete pesticides is an excellent example of how international organizations can contribute to solving ecological problems for the benefit of the people of Moldova,” says Emil Druc, National Focal Point of the ENVSEC Initiative, who is based in Chisinau.

Other planned activities in Eastern Europe later in 2007 and next year will zero in on environmental and security risks stemming from industrial and mining waste and the legacy of the Chernobyl disaster.

### CENTRAL ASIA

In the Ferghana Valley, ENVSEC is looking into abandoned Soviet-era uranium mines and pesticide dumps and the grave danger they pose to people's health and livelihood. Because the region is also prone to earthquakes, landslides, floods, droughts and deforestation, ENVSEC partners are assisting local communities to

prepare co-ordinated responses to natural disasters and emergencies. Recently, ENVSEC launched assessment activities focusing on environmental risks in the East Caspian region and the Amu-Darya river basin, affecting Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan.

### NEW AWARENESS

As the worldwide effects of climate change continue to shape a new public awareness regarding the environment, policymakers and communities are realizing the urgency of developing more thoughtful ways of managing and monitoring their natural resources.

For large swathes of the OSCE area that are already vulnerable to desertification, forest fires and flooding, the challenge is unprecedented: Global warming is likely to worsen their environmental plight, potentially leading to adverse consequences reaching across borders as States grapple with water and energy shortages and a host of socio-economic issues related to migration.

With an eye towards the planet's fragile ecological balance, ENVSEC is truly an initiative whose time has come, making it possible for OSCE participating States to tackle the by now undeniable interdependence between the environment and security in a co-ordinated and co-operative fashion.

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OSCEKILIAN STRAUSS

## Destruction of dangerous chemicals in Moldova

Obsolete chemical pesticides throughout Moldova are hazardous to human health. The first phase of the project, completed in June 2007, was jointly implemented within ENVSEC by the OSCE Mission to Moldova and the NATO Maintenance and Supply Agency. Following a laboratory analysis, 1,200 tonnes of chemicals and pesticides were repackaged and collected in warehouses.

## Empowering the Environment and Security Initiative



Nagorno-Karabakh region. Experts in the OSCE-led environmental assessment mission return from an inspection site.

The ENVSEC Initiative is made possible through voluntary contributions from, among others, Austria, Belgium, Canada, the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States.

The Initiative owes a special debt of gratitude to the

Government of Canada, whose generous contributions have enabled activities to flourish. Recently, an independent evaluation of the Initiative, funded by the Canadian International Development Agency, led the Government to infuse €2.9 million into ENVSEC for 2007-2009.

"It's clear why Canada is so strongly committed to the ENVSEC Initiative," says Ambassador Barbara Gibson, Head of the Canadian Delegation to the OSCE. "Reducing potential threats to the environment goes a long way towards fulfilling the OSCE mandate of early warning, conflict-prevention, conflict-resolution and post-conflict rehabilitation."

Furthermore, the ENVSEC approach is consistent with Canada's efforts in promoting environmental security, especially the Initiative's use of science-based methodology, its emphasis on fostering co-operation among States to overcome tensions, and its efforts to develop capacity and institutions.

"For example, the environmental assessment mission to the fire-affected areas in and around the Nagorno-Karabakh region is significant in that it brought people together to co-operate on a non-political problem of mutual interest," says Ambassador Gibson.

"Canada would like to encourage the OSCE to continue to be on the lookout for similar opportunities to promote peace and stability through environmental co-operation."

## About the cover: Living on a seabed

"I have never won anything before this," Shamil Zhumatov says from his office at the Reuters bureau in Almaty, Kazakhstan. "The top prize in the OSCE photo competition was the first ever in my career. Apart from the fact that it came with a Canon EOS-30D — the first camera I've owned in a long time — the recognition means a lot to me."

The 36-year-old journalism graduate — "the only one in a big family of 12 doctors" — explains that he has been too caught up in his work as a Reuters photographer since 1994 to pay much heed to photo competitions.

"I like what I do every day — depicting the news in images in the countries of Central Asia," he says. "It's my contribution towards a better understanding of the challenges in the region."

Whenever he can, he likes to slip away from the fast pace of breaking news. For the first OSCE photo contest, which was sponsored by the Spanish Chairmanship, Mr. Zhumatov submitted a reflective series of pictures which he took in the Kazakh fishing villages of Karateren and Zhalanash, and the regional centre of Aralsk.

"That was in April 2001 and I have not been back since then, as it is hard to organize such a long trip," he says. "I hear that life is getting slightly better, but it is still quite a long way from being paradise."

"The story of the Aral Sea has been told many times but the photos of Shamil Zhumatov not only show the despair of the people living in the area, but also reflect some of the positive changes," said Carlos Sánchez de Boado y de la Válgoma, Head of the Spanish Delegation to the OSCE, when he announced the contest winners last May.

"It shrank to less than half its original size and turned salty as diversion for irrigation slowly drained what was once one of the world's largest inland bodies of water. After a new dam and other projects in the northern part of the Aral were completed, fresh water is coming back."

The theme of the first OSCE photo contest was "Land and water, protecting our fragile environment". It attracted hundreds of entries,

comprising nearly 2,000 images, from 36 of the Organization's 56 participating States.

The winning images are featured on the OSCE website. They were also exhibited at the fifteenth OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum from 21 to 23 May 2007. Held in Prague, the event's theme focused on land degradation, soil contamination and water management.



In 2006, the *New York Times* illustrated its article on the Aral Sea with this photograph of fishermen near Karateren by Shamil Zhumatov.



Shamil Zhumatov