ENVSEC NEWSLETTER

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE ENVIRONMENT AND SECURITY INITIATIVE
JANUARY - JUNE 2014
The Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC) is an inter-agency initiative of international organizations comprised of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the Regional Environmental Centre (REC) for Central and Eastern Europe and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as an associated partner. The ENVSEC partnership aims to reduce security risks and increase cooperation on the management of natural resources and environmental threats in Central Asia, Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and South Eastern Europe.

Inside the Aarhus Centres - Side Event at the Fifth Session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention

On 30 June 2014, the OSCE organized a side event at the Fifth Meeting of the Parties to the UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (“Aarhus Convention”) in Maastricht, Netherlands. Representatives of the OSCE and UNECE welcomed the participants, followed by the Chair of the ENVSEC Initiative and the Representative of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management.

Practitioners from Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Ukraine showcased how an expanding network of 56 Aarhus Centres is helping the public make the most of the Aarhus Convention.

ENVSEC – EU Partnership: Climate Change and Security in Central Asia, Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus

The ENVSEC Initiative organized in the first half of 2014 a series of national multi-stakeholder workshops to review potential security risks that are associated with climate change. Results from the discussions will feed into regional assessment reports providing participatory analysis and policy recommendations for reducing security risks associated with climate change. The findings of the assessments will be further discussed at regional consultation meetings in the second half of 2014. The national workshops were arranged in collaboration with the countries of Central Asia, Eastern Europe and South Caucasus, in partnership with the EU Instrument for Stability and the Austrian Development Agency (ADA), and under the leadership of the OSCE.
In Central Asia, national stakeholder workshops were carried out by UNDP in Kazakhstan (28 March 2014), Kyrgyzstan (18 March 2014), Tajikistan (31 March 2014), Turkmenistan (29 January 2014) and Uzbekistan (5 March 2014). This enabled a broad collection of perspectives on the security implications of climate change at national and regional levels. Based on the findings of a regional desk study on security implications of climate change, conducted by local and international experts as a first step of this project, the workshops facilitated a participatory process for identifying geographic hot-spots, analyzing how climate change will impact key economic sectors and reviewing means for reducing potential security risks.

In South Caucasus, the OSCE and UNEP organized national stakeholder workshops in Georgia (8 May 2014), Armenia (12 May 2014) and Azerbaijan (30 May 2014). The workshops enhanced the awareness of climate change as a security challenge and its consequent need for transboundary cooperation. Participants from national ministries and agencies, civil society and international organizations discussed innovative policy options to enhance the capacity of national and local stakeholders to identify, prevent and mitigate climate change related security risks.

In Eastern Europe, the OSCE, REC and UNEP organized national stakeholder workshops in Ukraine (24 April 2014), Moldova (11 June 2014) and Belarus (17 June 2014). The workshops brought together representatives from several government agencies, NGOs, academia, the European Commission and ADA. The stakeholders reviewed the links between climate change and different sector vulnerabilities, discussed security implications at national and transboundary level, and identified geographic priority areas that require action, thereby contributing to the development of recommendations for climate change and security adaptation and risks reduction.

Climate change is a global issue and its prevention, response and adaption measures require international collaboration. Armenia appreciates the efforts of the international organizations and, in particular, the ENVSEC Initiative, in supporting the country’s measures on tackling the challenges posed by climate change.

Mr. Vartouhi Asatourian, Head of the UN Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Armenia

The assessment reports are prepared under the ENVSEC project “Climate Change and Security in Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the South Caucasus”, which was launched in 2013, and the workshops took place across the three regions.
Climate Change and Water Management in the Chu and Talas River Basins

UNECE and UNDP organized a stakeholder workshop on 27 February 2014 in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, to discuss climate change adaptation measures and policy responses for the Chu and Talas rivers basin, located in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, with the national authorities.

As part of the project, a comprehensive assessment of climate change impacts on water resources had been prepared for the Chu and Talas transboundary river basin. These results indicate an increase in temperature in the area of the water basin, especially during the summer and autumn, accompanied by changes in rainfall, likely to result in drier conditions during this time of the year. In the mountains, hotter summers and milder winters with more rain instead of snow can be expected. As a consequence, the area and volume of glaciers is predicted to significantly diminish. The impact of these climatic changes will concern both countries’ water management measures. The impacts may propagate across borders, requiring transboundary coordination.

The assessment identified technical, policy and financial adaptation measures for agriculture, which is one of the most vulnerable sectors in the Chu and Talas region. Key adaptation opportunities to consider are improvement of water use efficiency, monitoring robustness of water management practices and investigations of possible long-term infrastructure investments.

The adaption and policy recommendations were considered in the light of the national climate policies of both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and the Chu-Talas Commission, which has facilitated information sharing and efficient implementation of joint projects in the transboundary river basin since its establishment in 2006. The Chu-Talas Commission has also contributed to conflict prevention, rapid settlement of problematic situations and joint transparent decision-making on water allocation and maintenance costs by the two riparian states.

This meeting presented the results of the project “Promoting Cooperation to Adapt to Climate Change in the Chu and Talas Transboundary Basins” implemented by UNDP and UNECE with financial support from the Government of Finland.
Improved Transboundary Cooperation and Climate Change Adaptation in the Neman River Basin

The meeting on 19 and 20 June 2014 convened experts and representatives from environmental authorities in Belarus, Lithuania and the Kaliningrad oblast of the Russian Federation. It was hosted by the Lithuanian Ministry of Environment in the framework of an international process on river basin management and climate change adaptation led by UNECE and UNDP Belarus.

The Neman Basin conference was organized as part of the project “River basin management and climate change adaptation in the Neman River Basin”, which is carried out by UNECE and UNDP Belarus in the ENVSEC framework.

The project aims to improve integrated river basin management and transboundary cooperation in times of a changing climate in the Neman River basin, to strengthen the capacity of the riparian countries to adapt to climate change by supporting dialogue and cooperation on the necessary steps to design an adaptation strategy in the transboundary context. The project has, for the first time, enabled modelling and forecasting of climatic and hydrological characteristics for the entire transboundary Neman River basin. It has also resulted in a strategic framework for basin adaptation, similar to a transboundary adaptation strategy. It has reached a common understanding on future water availability and water use, taking into account possible climate change impacts.

The project was launched in 2011 and is funded by Finland, Sweden and Switzerland. It is one of the pilot projects on climate change adaptation in transboundary basins under the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (“Water Convention”).
Environmental Crime and Cross-Border Transport of Hazardous Waste

In Moldova, the OSCE has trained customs, border guards and environmental officers to detect and prevent criminal trafficking of environmental goods. The two days training, on 27 and 28 March 2014, contributed to raising awareness and strengthening the national capacity of Moldova to prevent trafficking of environmentally sensitive commodities, as governed by three international conventions: the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal, the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, and the Convention on International Trade in the Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. The training was organized under an ENVSEC project on prevention of illegal cross-border transport of hazardous waste and other cross-border environmental crimes in Moldova.

On 15 May 2014, the OSCE organized an on-line workshop on detection and prevention of transboundary environmental crimes in Kiev, Ukraine, at the request of the Secretariat of the Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova (GUAM) Organization for Democracy and Economic Development. With the help of video-link, 38 staff members of border management and environmental authorities in Baku, Chisinau, Kiev and Tbilisi learned about detection and prevention of trafficking in hazardous waste, ozone-depleting substances and rare species of animals and plants. Similar work has been carried out in Eastern Europe in the framework of the ENVSEC Initiative since 2008.
Implementing the Aarhus Convention in Belarus

The Republic of Belarus has committed to implementing the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers, the only two legally binding international instruments on environmental democracy. From 29 to 31 January 2014, the OSCE and UNECE organized a three days multi-stakeholder workshop in partnership with the Belarusian Scientific Research Center Ecology and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of Belarus to advance the implementation of the Aarhus Convention. Mr. Vitaly Kulik, First Deputy Minister of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of Belarus, opened the meeting.

Over 50 representatives of central and local governments, academia, environmental civil society organizations and the Minsk and Hrodno Aarhus Centers gathered. They reviewed challenges and solutions for advancing the Aarhus Convention, including its amendment on genetically-modified organisms in Belarus. The diverse participation of practitioners from central and local levels of the government demonstrated the commitment of Belarus to environmental democracy.

New Publication: Dniester Without Borders

On 22 January 2014, a new publication titled “Dniester without borders” was issued, presenting the outcomes of transboundary cooperation and sustainable management in the Dniester River basin, located in Moldova and Ukraine.

Highlights of this collaboration – facilitated by the OSCE, UNECE and UNEP – include the development and signing of the Moldovan-Ukrainian Dniester River basin Treaty. The signing ceremony took place at the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (“Water Convention”) in Rome, in November 2012.

The report gives recommendations for further activities in the Dniester basin, and is a valuable reference for the further development of transboundary water resources management.
ENVSEC Technical Mission to Arsenic Mining Site in Georgia

50,000 tons of arsenic containing waste pose significant risks to the surrounding environment and health of local communities in the Lentekhi municipality of Georgia. The waste is stored in steel containers with a high probability of leakage or remains unprotected in surface impoundments. The ENVSEC partners OSCE and UNEP established a technical mission of national and international experts to address the risks in collaboration with the Government of Georgia.

From 2 to 6 May 2014, the technical mission assessed the situation at three waste storage sites (Tsana 1-3). Based on the findings of the mission, the technical team identified immediate contingency measures and appropriate waste management options for the arsenic waste, and gave recommendations for the design of waste containment structures. The team also provided guidance for completely sealing the mining waste site. These recommendations include the removal of all soils and rums at high contamination and development of drainage systems, surface water management and monitoring to minimize risks for human health and the environment.

This ENVSEC project was organized upon an appeal from the Georgian Minister of Environment and Natural Resource Protection to the OSCE and ENVSEC, after a flooding in September 2013 that further increased the risk of hazardous waste leakage when the wall of the container burial site was washed away, exposing the steel containers and escalating the risk of hazardous waste leakage.
Azerbaijan and Georgia both rely on the water in the Kura basin as a key source of drinking water, sanitation, hydropower, irrigated agriculture and other municipal and industrial water uses. Increased variation and reduction of water flow, deterioration of water quality, ecosystem degradation, flooding and bank erosion are among the issues that need to be addressed jointly by the two riparian states to protect the sustainability of this natural resource.

The draft agreement lays the basis for the final negotiations by providing a framework for cooperation on water pollution prevention and control, conservation of biodiversity, emergency situations, data and information sharing and public participation. It also envisages the establishment of a joint commission for the safe management and rational use of the Kura basin water resources. This project was established with support from the Government of Finland.
Integrated Water Management for the Lepenec River

Under the lead of REC, the ENVSEC Initiative organized a bilateral meeting between Kosovo* (territory under UN Resolution 1244) and the former Yugoslav Republic (FYR) of Macedonia to support integrated management of the shared water resources in the Lepenec river.

The meeting took place on 29 May 2014 in Skopje, FYR of Macedonia. In the meeting, high-level officials from the Macedonian and Kosovan ministries responsible for environment, physical planning, agriculture, transportation and economy, representatives from hydrometeorology and health-care institutes, the business sector, and non-governmental organizations met and jointly reviewed the management of the Lepenec transboundary river. A joint expert group was set up to assess the water supply and wastewater management.

The assessment will be made available in September 2014. Its results and technical documentation will serve as a basis for the joint expert group to analyze the legal and institutional arrangements of the Lepenec river and to create a stakeholder map that will help introduce integrated water management practices. The project is funded by the Government of Finland.

Discussing National Capacity against Forest Fire in Georgia

The risk of wildfire in the South Caucasus region is increasing. To enhance the national capacity of Georgia in fire management and disaster risk reduction, the ENVSEC Initiative organized a national roundtable on 24 March 2014 in Tbilisi. The round table was brought together in cooperation with the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection of Georgia and the Germany-based Global Fire Monitoring Center.

Led by the OSCE, this fifth national roundtable on forest fire management in Georgia brought together participants to review recent developments within the Georgian forestry sector and to prepare a draft National Policy on Forest Management. Future steps for how to apply the recommendations in view of effective forest fire management to better handle and prevent wildfires and its related damages were also discussed.

Previous achievements of this project comprise the 2013 establishment of the National Forest Agency within the Georgian Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection and a Forest Fire Strategy for improving forest wildfire management in Georgia. The progress made in this project indicates the level of concern from Georgia for forest protection and the commitment of the involved stakeholders to reducing risks of wildfire disasters, by working in partnership with the OSCE and ENVSEC.

*This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.
ENVSEC Embarks on a New Decade in South Eastern Europe

The ENVSEC Regional Coordination meeting for South Eastern Europe (SEE) was convened in Podgorica, Montenegro on 1 April 2014, following a meeting of the ENVSEC SEE National Focal Points on 31 March 2014.

Over 100 participants including high officials from the host country, national focal points, international organizations, academia, civil society, corporate leaders and other partners, reviewed environment and security challenges in SEE, the role of ENVSEC and opportunities to synergize with other partners for greater efficiency in mainstreaming disaster risk reduction and support political instruments and processes, such as the South East Europe 2020 Strategy of the Regional Cooperation Council. While the region’s first annual meeting of ENVSEC took place 10 years ago, this was the first to be held in Montenegro.

Participants in the meeting also stressed that regional cooperation is a key generator of political stability and economic process in the region, and that in this regard ENVSEC activities in the region give solid support to the Western Balkan countries in meeting the demanding requirements of EU membership.

The 2012-2015 ENVSEC SEE programme is funded by ADA, with additional financial resources made available for selected activities by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland and the Swiss Development Cooperation.
Access to Environmental Justice in South Eastern Europe

Three of the ENVSEC partners, REC, UNECE and the OSCE, are carrying out country studies and a regional study on access to environmental justice in the SEE region. By analyzing relevant legislation and practice in six countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo (territory under UN Resolution 1244), Montenegro, the FYR of Macedonia, and Serbia, the project has identified challenges and good practices in the implementation of the access to justice pillar of the Aarhus Convention.

A regional study provides targeted recommendations for removing barriers in access to justice on the basis of inclusive participation of all stakeholders. A summary of the preliminary findings and conclusions of the regional study was presented at the seventh meeting of the Aarhus Convention Task Force on Access to Justice, serviced by UNECE in Geneva from 24 to 25 February 2014, and was finalized for the Aarhus Convention Meeting of the Parties, which took place from 30 June to 2 July 2014.

If granted support, the project will continue by implementing the recommendations of the report. This includes multi-stakeholder dialogues and targeted capacity-building to key stakeholder groups, such as civil society, state institutions, judiciary, environmental lawyers and legal practitioners, to enable regional cooperation on environmental governance through participatory and well-informed decision-making.