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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. Following initial national consultations in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, ENVSEC partners have developed a work programme around four main priority clusters as identified by national governments:

- Environmental degradation and access to natural resources in conflict zones;
- Management of trans-boundary natural resources including water resources, areas prone to natural disasters such as floods and landslides, and areas affected by Soviet-era industrial and military complexes;
- Rapid population growth in capitals and unmanaged development in urban centres;
- Cross-cutting issues including public environmental awareness and strengthening of media reporting on critical environmental issues.

Current activities in the region are presented below in more details.



Project Update

Cluster One: Environmental degradation and access to natural resources in the conflict zones

OSCE-UNEP Joint Assessment of Environmental Impacts of the August 2008 Conflict in Georgia

Partners: OSCE and UNEP with the assistance of the Global Fire Monitoring Center; Status: Completed in October 2008

As a result of the conflict in Georgia in August, 2008, several uncontrolled forest fires broke out in and around the Borjomi-Kharaguali National Park as well as in Ateni Gorge (Inner Kartli District). Following an official request to the ENVSEC Initiative from the Ministry of Environment of Georgia, the OSCE and UNEP organized a joint technical mission from 29 September to 3 October 2008 to assess the damage caused by forest fires in and around the Borjomi-Kharaguali area. In addition to these fire-affected areas, the technical assessment team also visited areas adjacent to South Ossetia and conducted some limited assessments of the extent of the environmental damage in these areas. As a result, the OSCE-UNEP Assessment Mission formulated detailed recommendations for damage mitigation and rehabilitation including confidence-building measures requiring cooperation across lines of conflict.



Soil Erosion and Flood Risk Assessment in Fire Affected territories

Partners: OSCE in cooperation with Klenkhart Consulting; Status: Completed in April 2009

The OSCE-UNEP Joint Assessment had proposed a further detailed assessment of threats posed by floods, landslides and mudslides to the settlements located in the severely fire-affected areas in and around the Borjomi-Kharaguali region. In April 2009, ENVSEC funded an expert from an Austrian engineering firm, Klenkhart Consulting, to evaluate the risks of possible floods, landslides and mudslides and propose recommendations for risk mitigation.



The assessment identified the village of Daba as the most sensitive and high erosion hazard risk area that requires immediate intervention. Other medium-term mitigation measures were suggested including various control and defense mechanisms for stabilizing soil and protection of other nearby villages from the erosion as well the continuation of afforestation activities started by the Ministry of Environment of Georgia.

Enhancing National Capacity on Fire Management and Risk Reduction in the South Caucasus

Partners: OSCE in cooperation with the Global Fire Monitoring Center; Status: Ongoing until November 2009



This ongoing project provides several opportunities to the countries of the South Caucasus region to improve national capacities in forest fire management as well as to enhance international cooperation in fire management within the Southeast European and South Caucasus region.

Contaminated by Unexploded Objects (UXOs), Land Mines and Radioactivity” which will be organized by the Global Fire Monitoring Center in Kiev/Chernobyl in October 2009. National experts from the South Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus regions will be also invited to participate in this Seminar.

In December 2008 national experts from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia participated in a preparatory meeting in Skopje for an Advanced Seminar Wildfires and Human Security “Fire Management on Terrain

The second component of this project provided an opportunity to the South Caucasus countries to improve national capacities in forest fire management. In June 2009 in Borjomi National Park, four international experts from the Global Fire Monitoring Center, operating under the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR), provided a training course for agencies responsible for fire management in Georgia and Armenia. The training covered issues of the fire science, fire management, including prevention, preparedness, suppression, and post-fire measures in fire-damaged ecosystems. EuroFire Competency Standards were also introduced to course participants. The training also included field demonstrations using new firefighting equipment (hand tools, rapid-attack vehicles) and personal protective equipment purchased for Borjomi National Park.





Experts from Turkey and Macedonia gave presentations on the forest fire situation and fire management capacities of Turkey and Macedonia. Training participants were briefed about the mechanisms and progress of the regional cooperation for fire management in the Balkan countries.



Cluster Two: Degradation of Transboundary Natural Resources

Development of legal and institutional frameworks for the cooperation in the Kura-Aras river basin

Partners: UNDP; Status: Ongoing, until Dec 2010

In the framework of this project, a draft of the Ministerial Declaration and paper on Institutional Arrangements for Establishing a Kura-Aras Environmental Programme (KAEP) were prepared. The KAEP proposal was submitted to Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia as the most appropriate short-term option for cooperation in the basin. Discussions on the KAEP that started in the framework of the ENVSEC project will be later continued by the recently approved UNDP/GEF Kura-Aras project. This project will support development of the KAEP as one of its key objective.

The next steps within the ENVSEC project include the revision of the draft KAEP documents. Revised documents will be discussed by an international expert with the national stakeholders in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. A revised framework will be re-submitted to the countries for their formal feedback. Then the final recommendations of the ENVSEC project for the KAEP will be submitted to the countries through the UNDP/GEF Kura-Aras project in March 2010.



South Caucasus River Monitoring Project

Partners: NATO and OSCE in cooperation with the Academies of Sciences of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia; Status: Completed in December 2008

In December 2008, the South Caucasus River Monitoring Project, jointly sponsored by NATO, the OSCE, ENVSEC, and SatoilHydro, completed its sixth year of monitoring of the Kura-Aras



river basin. The project's objectives was to re-establish a regional transboundary river monitoring system, including the introduction of new parameters of the water quality monitoring, harmonized sampling and testing methodologies in all countries. Over the course of the past six years, scientific institutions in each country carried out regular monitoring and analysis of heavy metals, pesticides, and radio-

nuclides at over 30 monitoring stations. The three country teams have established a data-base system with data provided to the public via the internet. The project was finished in December of 2008 and ENVSEC is exploring ways to integrate this project into forthcoming water management initiatives in the South Caucasus.



Technical Assistance to Georgia in Identification of the Legal and Institutional Needs for Ratification and Implementation of the UNECE Transboundary Water Convention

Partners: UNECE and OSCE; Status: Ongoing until December 2009

The objective of this project is to assess the capacity of Georgia for ratification and implementation of the UNECE Water Convention and to strengthen transboundary water cooperation between Azerbaijan and Georgia. In the framework of this project, legal and institutional requirements associated with the accession of Georgia to the UNECE Water Convention were assessed. International and national experts also evaluated the economic implications associated with the implementation of the Water Convention in Georgia.



An international expert was hired to review and evaluate the current status of the Georgian-Azerbaijani cooperation on transboundary waters.

A national working group meeting was held in June 2009 in Georgia to review prepared reports and get feedback from the Ministry of Environment Protection and Natural Resources of Georgia. Reports will be finalized and submitted to the Ministry of Environment of Georgia



for further action. The project also foresees working on a draft bilateral agreement on the shared water resources between Georgia and Azerbaijan, as a part of the accession process.

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

Partners: UNDP Azerbaijan; Status: Ongoing, until December 2010

The overall aim of the SEA project is to strengthen the capacity of the local stakeholders in integrated urban planning and facilitating a multi-sectoral dialogue in Azerbaijan. In the framework of the project, an assessment report analyzing national SEA capacity needs is being finalized now. It has been agreed with the World Bank office in Baku that SEA pilot project will be applied to the elaboration of the Absheron Peninsula Regional Development Framework.



The process of elaboration of this framework document will start in September 2009, thus marking the start of the pilot SEA project implementation. Representatives of the State Environmental Expertise department of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources have agreed to provide substantive support to the project implementation since the project would assist the country in the process of accessing to the SEA Protocol of the UNECE Espoo Convention.

GEO-Cities

Partners: UNEP with the assistance of GRID-Arendal; Status: Ongoing, until 2010



The project, led by the UNEP/GRID-Arendal, aims at strengthening the capacities of cities in integrated urban assessment and development of environmental strategies. In particular, the project will promote better understanding of the interaction between urban development and environment, providing local governments, scientists, policy-makers and general public with up-to-date information for decision-making processes. The project is furthermore designed to assist in improving urban environmental planning and management. Activities under the project started in four cities of Armenia: Yerevan, Hrazdan, Gumry and Alaverdi.

For example, the Yerevan Assessment report developed under the GEO-city project helped in focusing attention of decision makers on the major environmental problems of Yerevan and



initiating amendments to the national laws. The report facilitated broad discussions on the environmental concerns of Yerevan and the drafting of a concept paper on public ecological monitoring in Yerevan.

On May 1, 2009, workshop on preparation of the “GEO-Alaverdi” report was held. The concept of GEO-cities and its application to Alaverdi town was presented to the workshop participants and current social-economic and environmental situation in Alaverdi was reviewed. Similar activities will be conducted in Gyumri and Hrazdan during the second half of 2009.

Cluster Four: Cross-cutting Issues

Implementation of the Aarhus Convention in the South Caucasus

Partners: OSCE; Status: Ongoing, until December 2010

Aarhus Centres Meeting, 23-24 January 2009, Vienna, Austria

On 23-24 January 2009, the Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities (OCEEA) organized an Aarhus Centres Meeting in Vienna. The meeting aimed to bring together the Aarhus Convention National Focal Points, Aarhus Centre Managers and the



OSCE Economic and Environmental Officers from Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and to provide an effective platform for sharing experiences, lessons learned, best practices and challenges in putting the Aarhus Convention into practice. In addition to the Aarhus Centre practitioners from above listed countries, representatives of the UNECE Aarhus Convention Secretariat and several OSCE Delegations participated in the meeting along with a number of

experts from various organizations. 13 representatives from the South Caucasus region participated actively in the meeting. Based on detailed presentations by the Aarhus Centre representatives, major strengths and weaknesses have been identified and several measures have been discussed and agreed upon to overcome these challenges. Capacity building, sustainability and communication and outreach were among the major issues discussed.

The report of the Aarhus Centres Meeting is available at http://www.osce.org/documents/eea/2009/06/38191_en.pdf.

Road Map for Aarhus Centres

The Road Map is designed as an Action Plan for Aarhus Centres for the next five years. It is based on the findings and recommendations of the Independent Evaluation of Aarhus Centres that was commissioned by the OCEEA in September 2008 and the strategic direction provided by the Third Meeting of the Conference of Parties of Aarhus Convention held on 11-13 June 2008 in Riga. The Road Map is composed of two major components: the Thematic



Component identifies those activities that are necessary to enhance the role and contribution of Aarhus Centres to the implementation of the Aarhus Convention; and the Operational Component identifies key actions needed to strengthen the performance, efficiency and impact of Aarhus Centres.



Aarhus Centre Guidelines

Based on the recommendations of the Independent Evaluation and the outcomes of the Aarhus Centres Meeting, the OCEEA launched the consultative process for preparation of Aarhus Centres Guidelines. The Guidelines have recently been finalized and will be publicized soon.

Regional Project for Implementation of the Aarhus Convention

The project was initiated in September 2008 in all three countries of the South Caucasus. The project aims to address varying priorities of the countries in the region. In Armenia, the project mainly aimed for contributing to the strengthening of the environmental legislation and ensuring its enforcement through participatory processes involving all stakeholders at the national and local levels. In Azerbaijan, the primary focus of the project is to strengthen the capacities of the Aarhus Centres in Ganja and Gazakh and support their activities in promoting the Aarhus Convention at the local level. In Georgia, the project specifically aims at strengthening knowledge and ability of Georgian judges to properly facilitate environmental cases and ensure the judiciary process to be conducted towards the compliance to the multilateral environmental agreements, particularly the Aarhus Convention. Some of the project achievements include:

In Armenia:

An Environmental Law Resource Centre was established on 16 September 2008 within the Yerevan State University, Faculty of Law. Public hearings on draft environmental legislation, meetings, workshops and trainings on environmental security issues as well as several topical and cross-sectoral environmental challenges are among the activities that are conducted by the Centre.

Most recently, the Centre, in cooperation with the Ministry of Nature Protection and the OSCE Office in Yerevan, organized Training on Environmental Law for the 14 Aarhus Centre Coordinators in Armenia.





In Azerbaijan:



The Aarhus Centres conducted several awareness-raising activities targeting various local stakeholders, including meetings and workshops on several environmental issues such as management of industrial and household wastes, training for youth NGOs on Aarhus Convention, as well as several awareness-raising activities targeting mainly teachers and school children. Furthermore, the Aarhus Centre in Baku has become operational after a recent renovation and started its activities again in May 2009.

In Georgia:

Parallel to the regular activities of the Aarhus Centre in Georgia, a training of judges was organized on 7-8 March 2009 in cooperation with the High School of Justice of Georgia and with the assistance of an international expert. 12 judges from several regions of Georgia participated in the training.



Furthermore, the Aarhus Centre Georgia has been acknowledged by the UNECE as the Best National Node (2008) of the Aarhus Clearinghouse Mechanism.

Recent ENVSEC meetings and other news

ENVSEC National Advisory Group in Armenia

The first meeting of a newly formed National Advisory Group in Armenia was held on 17 June 2009 in Yerevan. The purpose of the National Advisory Group will be to provide recommendations on proposed ENVSEC projects and to create a platform for discussions on the ENVSEC Initiative activities in Armenia, its outcomes and solicit new ideas for ENVSEC projects. The first meeting of the National Advisory Group included representatives from a broad range of government ministries as well as civil society organizations active in environment and security issues in Armenia. The next meeting of the National Advisory Group is scheduled for September in Yerevan.



Upcoming Meetings

ENVSEC South Caucasus Regional Meeting: ENVSEC partners are proposing to organize the next Regional Meeting for the South Caucasus in the second half of October 2009. More details will be provided in September.

ENVSEC National Meetings in Georgia and Armenia: National advisory group meetings are planned to be held in Georgia and Armenia in September 2009 to discuss ideas for future ENVSEC projects. More details will be provided in August.

Regional workshop on the Aarhus Convention Pillars: A regional South Caucasus workshop will be held in the late autumn of 2009 that will address one of the three pillars of the Aarhus Convention. The National ENVSEC and Aarhus Convention focal points, Aarhus Centre Managers and other stakeholders will be invited to this meeting. More details will be provided in September.



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