

MEETING REPORT

Regional Meeting of the

ENVSEC Initiative in the South Caucasus

5-6 October 2010

**Radisson Blu Iveria Hotel,
Rose Revolution Square 1,
Tbilisi 108, Georgia**



Objective and outline of the meeting

The main purposes of the meeting were to

- update participants on the progress in implementing the ENVSEC Work Programme in South Caucasus
- discuss future activities under the auspices of the ENVSEC Initiative.

Representatives of the ENVSEC partner organizations, national focal points, civil society organizations from the region, and representatives of other regional and international organizations participated in the meeting's presentations and discussions.

Opening session

In his opening statement, **Mr. George Khachidze**, *Minister of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources, Georgia*, noted that the environmental challenges the countries of the South Caucasus are facing are similar. Environmental problems are not contained within the borders of a particular state; most of the problems occurring at the national level will have an impact on the whole region. The Minister thanked the ENVSEC partners for their efforts in the South Caucasus region. He emphasized the importance of environmental co-operation and expressed the readiness of the Government of Georgia to co-operate in addressing environmental challenges including in the areas of conflict in the region.

Mr. Jamie McGoldrick, *UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in Georgia*, welcomed participants and called for a consolidated effort among partner organizations and between countries in the region to advance the ENVSEC Initiative. Mr. McGoldrick emphasized that environmental problems can easily develop into security problems, and hence environmental issues need to be discussed openly between countries. Mr. McGoldrick expressed his hope that the meeting would serve to improve collaboration among ENVSEC partners and beyond.

Mr. Marc Baltes, *Deputy Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities*, joined the speakers in welcoming participants, thanking the Minister as well as the UN Resident Coordinator for their words. After welcoming Ms. Laura Rio as the Senior Programme Manager for ENVSEC, Mr. Baltes expressed his gratitude to the National Focal Points, representatives from line ministries, non-governmental organizations and academia, as well as ENVSEC donor countries. He emphasized that the environmental challenges in the South Caucasus region require collective action by all stakeholders involved and call for effective coordination among ENVSEC partners. Mr. Baltes also underlined the importance of national ownership of the ENVSEC activities in the region. He invited all participants to take an active part in the discussions and deliberations.

Session I – Work Programme Review

Mr. Revaz Sakvarelidze, *ENVSEC National Focal Point, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Georgia*, opened and moderated the Session.

Ms. Laura Rio, *ENVSEC Senior Programme Manager*, provided an overview of the ENVSEC Initiative, briefed participants on latest developments and on new ideas generated. She outlined the ENVSEC priorities for the region: a) Shared natural resources and ecosystems; b) hazardous substances and pollution; c) climate change; and d) public participation. Ms Rio introduced participants to the role of the ENVSEC Secretariat as a managing, coordinating and supporting body, explaining its role and procedures in project programming and monitoring.

Ms. Esra Buttanri, *Environmental Affairs Adviser, OSCE OCEEA and regional desk officer of the ENVSEC Initiative in the South Caucasus*, presented the ENVSEC work programme for the region. After a short overview of past activities, she briefed participants on the ENVSEC activities in the South Caucasus, as well as major developments that shaped the programme since the last ENVSEC regional meeting in March 2009. Concluding, she outlined the next steps for ENVSEC in the region: a) development of the future work programme; b) enhanced communication and co-ordination; c) active co-operation at each stage of the ENVSEC project cycle; d) new partnerships in the region; and e) increased awareness on the linkages of environment and security.

Ms. Nouneh Zastoukhova, *ENVSEC National Focal Point, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Armenia*, presented the progress of Armenia in implementation of ENVSEC activities. She informed participants on the establishment of the ENVSEC National Advisory Group (NAG) in Armenia and its terms of reference and procedures of work. The NAG had convened two times since its establishment. Ms Zastoukhova called on ENVSEC to provide project proposals well in advance of implementation to allow for consultation process within the NAG to be conducted properly. Ms. Zastoukhova provided a brief overview of ongoing ENVSEC projects in Armenia. She requested an update on the status of the project on Cooperation for the Protection and Sustainable Development of Mountain Regions in the Southern Caucasus and reiterated the support of the Government of Armenia to regional cooperation in this area. Ms. Zastoukhova underlined the need to avoid duplication with other ongoing projects and programmes including those of UNDP GEF. She emphasized that, ENVSEC activities in Armenia should be complementary to other environmental initiatives in the sub-region, including activities within the European Neighborhood policy

Mr. Imran Abdulov, *ENVSEC National Focal Point, Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, Azerbaijan*, underlined that the priorities which were identified in the first ENVSEC meetings in 2004 are still relevant, and there are opportunities for ENVSEC to extend its portfolio of activities. He expressed his satisfaction with the involvement of line ministries such as the Ministry of Emergency Situations in ENVSEC activities and in the delivering of concrete results. Mr. Abdulov highlighted the role of ENVSEC in enhancing national capacities in the field of climate change as well as in strengthening civil society in the country, particularly through the CASE Initiative. He emphasized the need for additional capacity-building in the field of fire management. With regard to the project on Cooperation for the Protection and Sustainable Development of Mountain Regions in the Southern Caucasus he expressed the opinion that the existing political situation in the region hindered the development of fully-fledged solutions to the existing problems. The activities addressing environment and security in the areas of conflict could indeed be facilitated but objectives needed to be viable and realistic.

Mr. Rovshan Kazimov, *ENVSEC National Focal Point, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Azerbaijan*, emphasized that ENVSEC activities should be purely demand-driven and allow for more national ownership. He also underlined the importance of continuing dialogue and consultations of ENVSEC partners regarding possible areas for cooperation, capacity building and technical assistance with national governments. He expressed the need of providing periodic updates to the National Focal Points on progress achieved in implementation of projects. With regard to the project on Cooperation for the Protection and Sustainable Development of Mountain Regions in the Southern Caucasus, the position of the Government of Azerbaijan was that as long as the conflict situation remains, it would not be possible to develop legal and institutional frameworks for cooperation.

Ms. Nino Gokhelasvili, *ENVSEC National Focal Point, Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of Georgia*, provided an overview of ENVSEC activities in Georgia and underlined the need for enhanced co-operation. She underlined the support of the Government of Georgia to the cooperation between the countries of the region, which could contribute to the overall improvement of situation on the whole territory of Georgia and enhance peacemaking in the region. She emphasized the important role of international organizations, particularly the ENVSEC partners in this respect. Ms Gokhelasvili underlined that the Government of Georgia was ready to proceed with the mountains project. She emphasized that ENVSEC should pay particular attention to environmental challenges in the areas of conflict.

Mr. Revaz Sakvarelidze, *ENVSEC National Focal Point, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Georgia*, joined his colleagues in thanking for the organization of the conference. Despite differences in the socio-economic sphere, the good cooperation in a number of ENVSEC projects proves that environmental protection links countries across borders. Efficiency of projects is linked to and can be further raised through strong national ownership.

Discussion:

The following discussion mainly addressed the question of how ENVSEC could assist in environmental protection activities in the areas of conflict. **Mr. Michal Nekvasil**, *Delegation of the European Union to Georgia*, contributed to the discussion by highlighting the dual role of ENVSEC: In fostering “political security”, the ENVSEC initiative is a successful tool for confidence-building. However, the complicated political issues in the region cannot be solved only by ENVSEC; regarding “environmental security”, ENVSEC can respond to the need for more information on the status of the environment in the region. Institutions such as the Aarhus Centres are able to provide essential input for discussions and opportunities for stakeholders to get involved in processes such as Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) both nationally and across borders. He emphasized the support of the European Commission for the ENVSEC work in the field of climate change and for Aarhus Centres. He also underlined the role of the REC Caucasus in offering the platform for the three countries to work together. **Mr. Marc Baltes** recalled the underlying philosophy of ENVSEC. The initiative should be seen as a tool for cooperation and confidence-building. Since its creation, ENVSEC has been demand-driven. Close cooperation with national governments through the National Focal Points is a cornerstone of its activities. There are important political issues in the region and the OSCE has been addressing these challenges through various means. ENVSEC alone cannot tackle all these problems, but it can provide contributions.

Session II – Work Programme Review

Mr. Ajiniyaz Reimov, *Programme Manager, UNDP Bratislava Regional Centre*, opened and moderated the session.

Ms. Nino Malashkhia, *ENVSEC National Co-ordinator in Georgia*, presented the project: “Enhancing National Capacity on Fire Management and Wildfire Disaster Risk Reduction in the South Caucasus”. The project is based on the outcomes of the ENVSEC support for the environmental assessment that was conducted following the wildfires that occurred in Nagorno-Karabakh zone of conflict in 2006 and the assessment mission that was conducted in Georgia following the August 2008 conflict between Georgia and Russia. The project aims to build capacities, develop policies and enhance cooperation on forest fire management in the region. After an introduction into the completed first and currently ongoing second project phases, Ms. Malashkhia elaborated on future capacity-building activities for South Caucasus countries and activities that aim at supporting policy development in the field of regional fire management.

Mr. Malkhaz Adeishvili, *National Consultant for UNDP Georgia*, explained the context and background of the project “Fostering Dialogue between Riparian States for Development and Establishment of Initial Legal and Institutional Frameworks for Increased Cooperation and Joint Management of the Kura-Aras River Basin” The project aims at facilitating the dialogue between Armenian and Georgian experts on cooperation frameworks for transboundary water management and also supports a comparative analysis of the EU Water Framework Directive approaches and water sector legislation in the Republic of Armenia.

Ms. Brinda Wachs, *ENVSEC Liaison, UNECE*, together with **Ms. Nino Malashkhia** briefed participants on the project “Implementation of the UNECE Water Convention and Development of an Agreement on the Management of Transboundary Water Courses shared by Georgia and Azerbaijan”. After some general remarks about the UNECE multilateral environmental agreements, Ms Wachs explained that the project receives major impetus from the UNECE Water Convention and its provisions related to surface and ground waters in a transboundary context. The project aims for facilitating the Convention’s ratification by Georgia and for the drafting of a bilateral transboundary water co-operation agreement between Georgia and Azerbaijan. Two bilateral consultations took place between Azerbaijan and Georgia in 2010 to discuss the scope of the bilateral agreement and first draft of the agreement. The draft agreement was officially submitted in October 2010 to the MFAs of Azerbaijan and Georgia for comment.

Mr. Frits Schlingemann, *Senior Advisor, UNEP*, spoke about the progress in implementing the project “Co-operation for the Protection and Sustainable Development of Mountain Regions in the Southern Caucasus” which aims at stimulating dialogue among countries of the greater South Caucasus region (including Turkey, Russia, Iran) in the area of mountain protection and development. There has not been much progress in the negotiations between target countries since the Bolzano meeting. Mr. Schlingemann emphasized that the next step should be to organize a high-level meeting bringing together all countries to revive discussions among them.

Ms. Ayten Poladova, *National Project Manager, Azerbaijan*, briefed participants on the project “Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in Azerbaijan”. The project aims at building stakeholders’ understanding of SEA concepts and benefits, and at developing capacity for the application of SEA in Azerbaijan. Its main objective is the integration of environmental and health issues and key international agreements into the country’s framework of regulation governing strategic

decision-making in areas with environmental implications. The project started in 2008 with the identification of major stakeholders and their priorities. The capacity-building component of the project comprises a country analysis, comprehensive trainings and a study tour to the Czech Republic. Priority activities for the coming two years include the development of a SEA manual, modification and harmonization of the national environmental legislation on EIA and SEE (State Ecological Expertise), the conducting of pilot SEAs, establishment of an SEA advisory group, development of an SEA training scheme and cooperation and exchange at the international level.

Discussion

The discussion focused mainly on the two projects on transboundary water and on the regional project on protection of mountain regions. Among the major issues raised were the role of ENVSEC in introducing mechanisms for resolving issues related to transboundary water management, and the lack of methodologies for making cost estimates for implementation of the Transboundary Water Convention at the country level. Regarding the project on protection of mountain regions, the role and involvement of REC Caucasus was brought to the attention of participants and possible next steps for the project were discussed in detail. In this context, the possibility of having an international agreement on sustainable management of mountain regions among the countries was raised. It was also underlined that .intergovernmental negotiations may require more time than foreseen in specific projects

Session III – Work Programme Review

Mr. Jan Olsson, *Head of the Economic and Environmental Unit, OSCE Office in Baku*, opened and moderated the session.

Mr. Otto Simonett, *Director of ZOI Environment Network*, presented the project “GEO-Cities: Urban Environmental Management in Armenia”. The objectives of the project are a) to build capacity for “Integrated Environmental Assessment” in an urban context; b) to establish consensus on the most critical environmental problems at the city level; and c) to promote better understanding of the interaction between urban development and the environment. The implementation of the project was to a great extent facilitated by the Aarhus Centres in several cities of Armenia, where stakeholders organized consultations in advance of project implementation. The project resulted in detailed reports and recommendations for the cities of Yerevan, Gumri, Hrazdan and Alaverdi.

Ms. Nora Mzavanadze, *UNEP international consultant*, presented the project “Environmental Assessment and Capacity Building in Tbilisi”. In Tbilisi, unmanaged population growth, lack of technical capacity and pressure on the infrastructure are reasons for growing urban problems. The last assessment of the state of the environment had been carried out in 2000. Ms. Mzavanadze introduced participants to upcoming project activities, the methodology applied and expected outcomes of the project. The “Tbilisi report” will discuss the state of environment and present recommendations for action in the identified priority environmental issues of air pollution, solid waste, surface water pollution, noise and vibration, and the decrease in the number of green areas. The report will present guidelines and serve as a basis of the work of the newly established Municipal Department of Ecology and Planting of Greenery of Tbilisi City Hall.

Ms. Marina Shvangiradze, *UNDP Project Team Leader, Georgia*, presented the project “Regional Climate Change Impacts Study for the South Caucasus Region”. She elaborated the approach for and scope of the regional climate change scenarios as agreed by participating countries, methods applied in the assessment of climate change vulnerability and the possibilities for data exchange. The project will

mainly focus on three areas of vulnerability, a) water resources, b) agriculture, and c) health care. The project will result in the preparation of draft recommendations on potential joint adaptation measures such as land degradation management, transboundary rivers management and early warning systems at the regional level.

Discussion

The discussion mainly focused on the Geo-cities Tbilisi project. In response to the questions raised, **Nino Malashkia** informed participants that the results of the Geo-cities Tbilisi project will be incorporated as a chapter into the city development strategy that is being prepared by Tbilisi City Hall. There were also discussions on how climate change is being addressed in the Tbilisi assessment process and on the need for establishing linkages between this assessment and the ENVSEC climate change project. REC Caucasus offered its help and expertise in the area of climate change areas, derived from implementing several projects related to sustainable land management in Georgia and Armenia. REC emphasized that it was now in the position to provide valuable data for further activities.

Session IV – Work Programme Review

Mr. William Hanlon, *Economic and Environmental Officer, OSCE Office in Yerevan*, opened and moderated the session.

Ms. Esra Buttanri gave an introduction to the Aarhus Centres Initiative. After a brief description of the principles of the Aarhus Convention, she presented Aarhus Centres in the region, their mandate and management structure. She continued with sharing highlights of Aarhus Centres' activities in the field of providing environmental information and raising environmental awareness, public participation and capacity-building, and access to justice and environmental law.

Ms. Khatuna Gogaladze, *Aarhus Centre Manager, Georgia*, followed up on this presentation, providing insight into the functioning and major achievements of the Aarhus Centre in Georgia. She emphasized the challenges associated with implementation of Aarhus Centre activities and provided concrete examples of the assistance the Aarhus Centre provides to the government and other stakeholders, including compiling detailed reports on the state of the environment, maintaining an EIA database, drafting EIA monitoring reports, drafting guidelines and information on draft laws related to the environment, court cases, etc. New initiatives have been launched for the strengthening of the EIA system and the promotion of environmental education. Concluding, Ms. Gogaladze presented two new Aarhus Centre promotion videos.

Ms. Gohar Ghazinyan, *National Programme Officer, OSCE Office in Yerevan*, presented the Civic Action for Security and Environment (CASE) Initiative in Armenia. After a description of the management structure, thematic priorities and cross-cutting themes, Ms. Ghazinyan explained the CASE selection process in Armenia and gave an overview of the 17 NGO projects that have been supported with small grants under CASE Armenia.

Mr. Edgar Yengibaryan, *Co-ordinator of Hrazdan Aarhus Centre*, presented the CASE project "Improvement of the Environment in the Hrazdan Region". He highlighted the major environmental problems in the region including air pollution, waste and water pollution. The project aims for collecting and analyzing environmental data on these issues and building local capacities to effectively address these environmental challenges. The project is expected to encourage the municipality to take steps towards improving the state of environment.

Ms. Zahra Ahmadova, *Senior Project Assistant, OSCE Office in Baku*, presented the CASE in Azerbaijan. Supported by Statoil and the Austrian government, CASE Azerbaijan has been able to provide small grants to 7 NGO projects. In project selection, significant attention was given to the

feasibility and the sustainability of the projects. All projects are closely monitored by the OSCE Office in Baku and provided with support as needed.

Ms. Aytakin Askarova, *Project Coordinator, Economic Research Centre, Azerbaijan*, and CASE grantee in Azerbaijan, presented the CASE project “Socio-economic threats of climate change and risk management“ Under the project, the Economic Research Centre conducts research on the expected impact of climate change on agriculture and agro-industry, evaluating its adverse impacts, including in terms of cost, and to raising awareness, stimulating public participation and increasing the efficiency of decision making in this area. The three cornerstones of the project are a) capacity building and awareness raising, b) support to environmental governance, and c) development of a network of civil society organizations active in the sphere of climate change. Roundtables facilitate discussions of civil society organizations with governmental bodies, and path the way for the establishment of a project alliance.

Ms. Esra Buttanri delivered a conclusion to these presentations, stressing the strengths of CASE and its decentralized management structure, and the recent expansion of the initiative to Tajikistan. CASE also demonstrates good partnership between the two ENVSEC partners, namely UNDP and OSCE and displays synergies with the Aarhus Centres Initiative.

Discussion

The discussions mainly focused on the challenges associated with the legal status of Aarhus Centres. The Aarhus Centres have different statuses in different countries. In Armenia, Aarhus Centres operate mainly through municipalities, whereas in Azerbaijan they work under the Ministry of Environment, and in Georgia the Aarhus Centre is an OSCE project. Representatives of Armenia and Georgia also shared information on the activities conducted by the Aarhus Centres in the access to justice pillar of the Convention, including trainings for legal professionals, review of draft legislation, and collection of data on environmental court cases. Many participants expressed their satisfaction with the Aarhus Centres Initiative in the region. It was also indicated that the Aarhus Centres are instrumental not only for the implementation of the Aarhus Convention but also for other multilateral environmental agreements, particularly those serviced by the UNECE. The role of CASE in strengthening the capacities of civil society organizations was highlighted .

Session V – ENVSEC in the South Caucasus – the way forward

Mr. Marc Baltes, *Deputy Co-ordinator ,OCEEA*, moderated the session that was structured into four parts:

a) Implementation of multilateral environmental agreements

Ms. Aida Iskoyan, *Aarhus Convention Focal Point of Armenia*, pointed out challenges related to genetically modified organisms (GMO) and their regulation. She highlighted the environmental security implications of GMOs and called for ENVSEC involvement in this field. In addition, Ms. Iskoyan emphasized the need for learning from the European experience on court cases dealing with the violation of the collective interest. She also stressed the challenges associated with implementation of the access to justice pillar of the Aarhus Convention, in particular its cost implications.

Ms. Brinda Wachs highlighted that ENVSEC could play a significant role in the implementation of the UNECE Convention on the Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution.

Mr. Jan Olsson communicated the willingness of the OSCE Office in Baku to continue activities related to the Espoo Convention, as well as the continuation of consultations with Georgia on the transboundary water convention.

Mr. Marc Baltes informed participants of the ENVSEC Management Board meeting on 11 October 2010 in Geneva and emphasized ENVSEC's readiness to help countries in the region to transpose international conventions into national law and to subsequently help building national capacities for their further implementation.

b) Disaster preparedness, risk prevention and management

Mr. Karen Hovhannisyan, *Deputy Head, Management of Protection of the Population and Territory, Ministry of Emergency Situations, Armenia*, emphasized the fact that climate change has already increased the risk of natural disasters, in particular related to landslides, floods and forest fires. It is necessary to gather regional information and to analyze vulnerabilities. He highlighted the importance of adaptation to climate change and the lack of financial means for this purpose.

Ms. Marina Shvangiradze also underlined the importance of climate change adaptation and the need for technology transfer and capacity-building for regional centres of excellence. Assistance of ENVSEC must be sought for this process.

REC Caucasus informed the meeting about its submission of an ENVSEC project proposal on disaster preparedness in the South Caucasus region with the objectives to prepare a disaster atlas and establish a clearinghouse mechanism at the regional level. REC Caucasus stressed the need for international coordination in order to avoid overlapping and duplication with other existing projects (such as those implemented by UNDP and EC).

Ms. Laura Rio confirmed the receipt of this proposal and provided information on the ENVSEC approval procedures.

Mr. Fikret Javarov, *Chairman of the Sustainable Development Society, Azerbaijan*, called for attention to be given to several issues, including the need for risk assessment for natural disasters particularly in vulnerable agricultural areas that are mostly situated in the ceasefire zone, the importance of addressing flooding risks especially for downstream populations, and the need for applying Geo-city approach of urban environmental management to Azerbaijani cities.

c) Local environmental governance in urban areas

Mr. Imran Abdulov called for ENVSEC assistance in preparing Azerbaijan for the ratification of international environmental agreements. He also referred to the environmental implications of rapid urbanization and called on ENVSEC to address these issues in Azerbaijan. He expressed his country's interest in the development of a project dealing with the secondary use of water under the framework of the ENVSEC initiative. Mr Abdulov also emphasized the importance of disaster preparedness for Azerbaijan. He expressed his support to the CASE Initiative in Azerbaijan. Concluding, he suggested to number the regional ENVSEC meetings for easier reference in the future.

d) Other

Ms. Esra Buttanri presented two new ENVSEC project proposals awaiting final approval: a) "Regional Capacity-building Workshop on the Espoo Convention"; and b) "Strengthening the implementation in Azerbaijan of the UNECE Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a transboundary context." She informed participants about ongoing preparations for an additional new project on disaster risk mitigation and preparedness.

REC Caucasus informed about their organization of civil society workshops on Strategic Environmental Assessments during the summer of 2010. Participating countries included Kazakhstan,

Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan. Negotiations about the expansion of the project to Georgia are underway.

Ms. Nouneh Zastoukhova expressed Armenia's support to the CASE Initiative, and congratulated CASE on the effectiveness of its tools in fostering civil society participation on issues related to environment and security.

Conclusion

Mr. Marc Baltes thanked participants for the constructive work, the insight and valuable contributions to the discussions. He assured participants that the OSCE will further ensure political support for ENVSEC projects in the South Caucasus, in particular during its ENVSEC Chairmanship in 2011.