EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD AND PARTNERSHIP INSTRUMENT –

SHARED ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION SYSTEM

REGIONAL OVERVIEW
ENPI EAST

Country needs and ideas for future action

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Background

This note[1] presents concrete observations and conclusions which can be made two years after the ENPI-SEIS project was launched in EU's Eastern neighbourhood. As the project moves from analysis to action, the focus of this paper is on what the countries of the Eastern region expect and need in order to move their environmental information systems towards SEIS compatibility.

In the first two years of the project, SEIS was discussed with the countries of the East in various fora, i.e.:

- ENPI-SEIS consultation meeting in Brussels in November 2010 (including the review of and feedback on country profiles prepared by the UNECE);
- seven country visits and in-depth discussions dedicated to SEIS throughout 2011, and the series of country reports resulting from the visits;
- meetings of the UNECE Joint Task Force on environmental indicators;
- ENPI-SEIS steering committee meeting and regional workshops in Copenhagen in November 2011; and
- the Seventh *Environment for Europe* Ministerial conference in Astana in September 2011, where the Ministers unequivocally supported efforts and plans to introduce SEIS in the Pan-European area[2].

The different discussions brought up a range of issues and ideas. However the 'core' remained the same: the countries are interested in partnership with the EU and support to concrete actions in order to advance specific prioritised aspects of their environmental information systems and make them 'SEIS-compatible'.

Specific needs often differ depending on the particular context of individual countries. However due to a certain degree of commonality within the region, requests from different countries are often inter-related. As a result, cross-country or regional activities are recognised as an effective and a cost-efficient way to deliver support and build capacities.

In addition country requests and expectations are seldom precise and need to be seen vis-à-vis the capacities and agendas of EU, Pan-European and global activities, including international expectations of what actions and types of support would best promote the implementation of SEIS in the European Neighbourhood.

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[1] This overview, commissioned by the European Environment Agency, was prepared by Nickolai Denisov with inputs from Lesya Nikolayeva, Elena Santer and Otto Simonett (Zoï environment network, Geneva) and Johannes Mayer (Umweltbundesamt GmbH, Vienna), and incorporated the EEA's substantive and editorial revisions and feedback (Saila Kumputie, Gordon McInnes, Galina Georgieva). The analysis is based on the direct experience of supporting the implementation of the ENPI-SEIS project to-date, as well as the results of regional consultations and country visits; the continuous consultations with the participating countries' focal points and experts; literature and other materials available in the countries, European and international organisations; and not least the collective knowledge and expertise available in EEA's project implementation network.

[2] "14. <…> To keep the pan-European environment under review, we decide to establish a regular process of environmental assessment and to develop the SEIS across the region. These will serve multiple policy processes, including MEAs, and include capacity-building of countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia and South-Eastern Europe to monitor and assess their environment." Seventh "Environment for Europe" Ministerial Conference. Astana, Kazakhstan 21–23 September 2011. Declaration: *"Save water, grow green!"* by Ministers of the region of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe.

Overview of the outcomes of country visits

SEIS country visits and the resulting country reports produced in close coordination with the national focal points and the EEA have provided a good insight into inter-institutional cooperation, monitoring and information system infrastructure and environmental data flows, availability and quality, as well as what the countries see as their needs in those areas and, consequently, what should be done next.

Country demands cover all 'pillars' of SEIS (cooperation, infrastructure and content) as well as all the thematic priorities which were agreed in 2010 (air, water and waste for the Eastern region).

Information about waste is where most of the countries face difficulties and can benefit from extensive support, training and exchange of expertise and good practice. For water and air, many countries have advanced capacities and are ready to start 'populating' their information systems in a way that would make them move closer to SEIS principles, in particular with respect to harmonisation and making information accessible. The focus of concrete requests for direct support ranges from thematic information systems on the national level (inventory of water and air pollution sources, GHGs etc.) to smaller but integrated environmental information systems of the sub-national or even the local scale (in particular sub-national and local PRTRs were mentioned on several occasions).

The need to develop environmental indicators featured prominently. Moreover there is interest in taking this work further, from simply compiling indicators to communicating them to the national and international audiences including the public and decision makers: understandable integrated indicator-based assessments are the common future.

Across the board there is a consistent interest in approximating to EU standards: from legislation related to environmental information, to technologies, the methodologies of inventories and statistical classifications. There is also a universal demand for making environmental information available through digitising the data currently stored on paper, developing SEIS portals and synthesising knowledge in indicator-based assessments.

Feedback through project meetings

The annual ENPI-SEIS project steering committee meetings in Brussels (2010) and Copenhagen (2011) provided opportunities to directly discuss and confirm the individual and common issues. In particular at the Copenhagen meeting the countries confirmed strong interest in SEIS training programmes now reflected in the operational work-plan of ENPI-SEIS implementation for 2012.

The issue which may need further (or indeed continuous) clarification is how to provide technology to the countries as opposed to 'soft' assistance through expertise - as provided by the ENPI-SEIS project with software tools and capacity-building through training, exchange visits and technical advice. This has been openly discussed from the very beginning of the project, yet some of the participating countries may still be under impression that the provision of technical equipment may be possible. In case investments in infrastructure are needed (for example, in some cases in the Caucasus, Moldova, Belarus), a systematic dialogue with bilateral assistance programmes may offer solutions[3].

[3] Indeed many proposals for activities raised by the beneficiary countries require larger project resources. It is therefore suggested to systematically encourage the beneficiary countries to propose

Added value and the way forward

Despite the fact that there are already numerous processes of support to EU's eastern neighbours in the field of environmental information, a common denominator is still missing. Both donors and recipients (Governmental agencies in particular) need guidance on where and how to invest in order to make environmental information better manageable, transparent and accessible beyond the current practice which is often difficult to break. In this respect SEIS with its simple, refreshing and almost common-sense principles is a valuable and much thought-after tool, whose consistent introduction in the region will benefit many.

This is confirmed by the level of interest and attendance during country visits (some bringing together up to 100 individuals, in Moldova probably the entire environmental information community of the country), preliminary feedback from various donors (Sweden to Belarus and Ukraine to name one), and international organisations. The direct evidence is the recognition given to SEIS by pan-Europe's environmental Ministers at the 7th Environment for Europe conference in Astana (September 2011).

The next stage of the ENPI-SEIS work programme should integrate the needs for tangible country-specific support: 2012 should see the first 'SEIS-compatible' products and systems spring up in flesh.

Specifically, a range of common (regional, multilateral, bilateral) and individual country actions are being planned based on the feedback received during the visits in 2011 and the regional discussions (Brussels in 2010, Copenhagen in 2011), as listed below.

1. Support to the development of SEIS-compatible environmental information systems

The ENPI-SEIS project can support the 'renovation' of national environmental information systems by directly providing European and international expertise, advice and quality control to the interested countries. Such support can address both the cross-cutting elements of national information systems (i.a. Armenia, Belarus, Russia, Ukraine), including their legal basis, data management and communication, and the specific sub-systems related to ENPI-SEIS priority themes (Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova). A strong complimentary effect can be achieved by supporting and show-casing local environmental information systems in selected administrative entities (e.g. cities or provinces in Georgia, Russia, Ukraine)[4] or in ecosystems including those shared across the border (Armenia and Belarus explicitly mentioned such in their country meetings and reports, and there are numerous opportunities with other countries too[5]). Such support can be provided by EEA and/or its partner organisations through a series of targeted technical activities implemented under the ENPI-SEIS project directly with the interested countries[6]. The project can also promote the use, visualisation, and communication of SEIS-related environmental information from the countries both internationally (reporting to conventions), regionally (e.g. ENPI East indicator snapshots) and

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such activities to the EU and other donors as separate / additional projects for technical support and capacity-building (including 'twinning' with individual EU countries and their institutions).

[4] Including the local / regional Pollution Release and Transport Registers (PRTRs).

[5] For a recent overview of transboundary waters see e.g. the respective chapters of the Second Assessment of Transboundary Rivers, Lakes and Groundwaters in the UNECE region, 2011

[6] Practically all the participating countries expressed interest in some form of such support – please see Annex for details. The actual implementation of the proposed measures will i.a. have to depend on the availability of resources (funds and institutional capacities) and the sustained / confirmed interest of the beneficiaries (the indications in parentheses are preliminary).

by facilitating integrated indicator-based assessments and modern environmental information portals in the countries.

2. Promote the development and the use of common environmental indicators

This activity was requested by virtually all the countries and in particular by their statistical offices, and can continue through the already established cooperation within the UNECE Joint Task Force on environmental indicators. Efforts should also be put in building up the underlying data flows, to ensure that the respective data are being collected in the countries and made available to their own audience as well as internationally. This action will require direct methodological support to the countries for (re-)designing their data flows and improving data quality, and specific assistance in bringing their statistical classification systems and reporting forms for some of the priority themes in line with EU formats and practices (request has been put forward for all main themes, but in particular for waste). As some of this work will also support the development of thematic information systems (see 1. above), the two components need to be coordinated.

Of special importance is to continue promoting inter-sectoral cooperation between the countries' environmental and statistical authorities. The culture, practice and experience of such cooperation with the ENPI countries varies, but room for improvement was seen in virtually every discussion. The project remains a unique vehicle which can see environmental information in its entirety, and motivate and support tangible activities across the agencies' borders.

3. Facilitate overall access to EU expertise and technologies

Cross-cutting training workshops and exchange visits should support all ENPI-SEIS components (i.a. assisting with the legal issues of information management[7] and modern information technologies), whereas longer-term visits both from EEA member and cooperating countries and institutions to the ENPI East region and vice versa should be linked to the specific support to individual countries under the project (see 1. and 2.). The project should also strive to ensure access and provide necessary training for the participating countries as regards to relevant methodology, networks and tools (Reportnet, SENSE, INSPIRE community and tools to name a few). Finally the SEIS Cookbook will be an important vehicle to promote and explain the SEIS principles as well as to provide practical guidance, advice, experience and expertise.

[7] Related i.a. to the experience of implementing the relevant EU directives such as the Water Framework Directive, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, the INSPIRE Directive etc., and the 'transferability' of such experience to the ENPI context.

Country priorities under enpi-seis EAST

ukraine	elements	themes
Development and improvement of statutory acts on env. monitoring	institutions	n/s
Expert support on GHG, air and waste inventories and classifications	content	air waste
Use of remote sensing for monitoring air and surface water objects	IT	air water bio, land
Support to streamlining development of web-services including GIS	IT	n/s
Improvement and automation of reporting to international conventions	institutions IT	n/s
Improvement of the quality and quantity of environmental data	content IT	n/s
Support in preparing indicator-based environmental assessment reports	content	n/s
Development and integration of regional automated monitoring	institutions IT	air water

belarus	elements	themes
Guidelines for introducing SEIS and using information for decision-making	institutions content IT	n/s
Support to further development of environmental indicators	content	n/s
Support to data processing, analysis and visualisation (i.a. modelling, GIS)	content IT	n/s
Training and capacity-building for data collection, storage, reporting	content IT	n/s
SEIS pilot in a transboundary protected area or river basin	institutions content	n/s

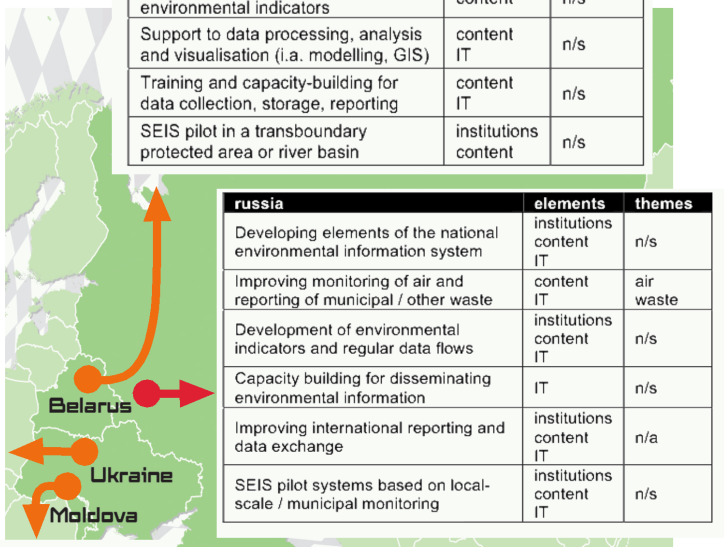
russia	elements	themes
Developing elements of the national environmental information system	institutions content IT	n/s
Improving monitoring of air and reporting of municipal / other waste	content IT	air waste
Development of environmental indicators and regular data flows	institutions content IT	n/s
Capacity building for disseminating environmental information	IT	n/s
Improving international reporting and data exchange	institutions content IT	n/a
SEIS pilot systems based on local-scale / municipal monitoring	institutions content IT	n/s

moldova	elements	themes
EU approximation of national legal framework for the priority sectors	institutions	n/s
Methodologies / training for data management, sharing and indicators	content IT	n/s
Establishment of national limits and inventories for air pollution and GHG	institutions content IT	air
Training / expert exchange and tools to align with EU requirements	institutions content IT	water air waste

azerbaijan	elements	themes
Standards' and legislation reform	institutions	water air waste
Complete GHG and air emissions inventory / electronic reporting	content IT	air
Integrated environmental database on surface and coastal waters	content IT	water
Expert visits on waste and water classification and reporting (i.a. WFD)	content	waste water
Training and capacity building in data management, assessment, reporting	content IT	n/s

georgia	elements	themes
[industrial] waste inventory / indicators / PRTR / GIS	content IT	waste
Strengthening capacities in using information for waste management	institutions IT	waste
Inventory / database of water use and pollution / GIS	content IT	water
Database / inventory of point and mobile pollution (PRTR, GIS)	content IT	air
Environmental information portal for inter-institutional and public use and	IT	n/s
Developing electronic statistical forms / reporting for enterprises	content IT	air water waste
Support in preparing indicator-based environmental assessment reports	content	n/s
Training and capacity building in data management in SEIS priority areas	IT	n/s

armenia	elements	themes
Introduction of integrated monitoring and information exchange	institutions IT	n/s
Improvement of electronic reporting and databases for SEIS components	content IT	water energy land forests
Training and capacity building in data management, assessment, reporting	content IT	n/s
SEIS pilot on Lake Sevan ecosystem and the Debed river	content IT	n/s



NB: shown on the chart are generalised priorities derived from feedback during ENPI-SEIS country visits in 2011, and the breakout sessions for the Eastern region at the ENPI-SEIS consultations in November 2010 in Brussels and the steering committee meeting in November 2011 in Copenhagen.