

**ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE**

**ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY IN TRANSITION:  
TEN YEARS OF UNECE ENVIRONMENTAL  
PERFORMANCE REVIEWS**



**UNITED NATIONS**

# ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY IN TRANSITION: TEN YEARS OF UNECE ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE REVIEWS

## Contents

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| LIST OF TABLES   | iii       |
| LIST OF BOXES  | iii       |
| FOREWORD   | 1         |
| EXECUTIVE SUMMARY  | 3         |
| <b>INTRODUCTION</b>                                      | <b>13</b> |
| Transition   | 13        |
| “Environment for Europe”                                 | 13        |
| Scope of Environmental Performance Reviews (EPR)         | 14        |
| Objectives of this report                                | 15        |
| <b>1 ENVIRONMENTAL LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL REFORM</b>    | <b>19</b> |
| A. Legislation for the environment and natural resources | 19        |
| B. Establishment of environment ministries and agencies  | 22        |
| C. Inspectorates and enforcement                         | 23        |
| D. Decentralization of environmental management          | 24        |
| E. Role of NGOs  | 26        |
| <b>2 RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND TRENDS</b>                  | <b>29</b> |
| A. Air   | 29        |
| B. Water   | 30        |
| C. Waste and contaminated sites                          | 33        |
| D. Biodiversity  | 39        |
| E. Mineral resources                                     | 41        |
| <b>3 DEVELOPMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY TOOLS</b>       | <b>45</b> |
| A. Policy framework                                      | 45        |
| B. Regulatory instruments                                | 48        |
| C. Economic instruments                                  | 51        |
| D. Domestic environmental financing                      | 54        |
| E. Information tools                                     | 57        |
| <b>4 POLICY INTEGRATION</b>                              | <b>61</b> |
| A. Agriculture   | 61        |
| B. Forestry  | 63        |
| C. Energy  | 63        |
| D. Transport   | 65        |
| E. Tourism   | 66        |
| F. Coastal zone management                               | 67        |
| G. Industry  | 68        |
| H. Human health  | 71        |
| I. The challenge   | 72        |

|          |   |           |
|----------|---|-----------|
| <b>5</b> | <b>INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL COOPERATION</b>                                      | <b>75</b> |
| A.       | Global processes and commitments  | 76        |
| B.       | UNECE regional environmental conventions  | 77        |
| C.       | Other regional cooperation  | 77        |
| D.       | EU accession  | 78        |
| <b>6</b> | <b>CONCLUSIONS</b>  | <b>81</b> |
|          | Future of the EPR programme   | 83        |
| <b>7</b> | <b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>  | <b>85</b> |
| Annex I  | The environmental performance review process  | 87        |
| Annex II | Retification by countries in transition of selected global and regional Conventions | 89        |

## **LIST OF TABLES**

### **Introduction**

UNECE member States

Geography of countries in transition

## **LIST OF BOXES**

### **Section I**

Environmental management in Georgia

Legal reform in Ukraine

The legal framework for environment in Kazakhstan

Mineral resources legislation in Uzbekistan

The growth of Slovenia's environmental institutions

Ministry of Environment in Albania

Environmental inspection in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Inspection in Uzbekistan

Decentralization of environmental authority in Serbia and Montenegro

Sustainable development in Estonia

The role of NGOs in environmental legal and institutional reforms in Romania

Environmental NGOs in the Republic of Moldova

### **Section II**

Improved enforcement in Latvia

Positive developments in air management in Slovenia

Action programme for Lake Sevan

Water resource crisis in Central Asia

The new Dnepropetrovsk landfill in Ukraine

State strategy for municipal waste management in Latvia

The Baia Mare and Baia Borsa accidental spills in Romania

Hazardous industrial waste in Albania

Environmental issues in Ukrainian mining regions

Contaminated sites in the Russian Federation

The Semipalatinsk relief and rehabilitation programme in Kazakhstan

Environment and health effects in Serbian hot spots

Biodiversity in Albania

Biodiversity management in the Russian Federation

Nature conservation management in Lithuania

The Madneuli mining and processing complex, Bolnisi region, Georgia

### **Section III**

Environmental policy documents in Estonia

The National Environmental Health Action Plan in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Spatial planning issues in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Examples of licensing in the Republic of Moldova

Permitting, licensing and inspection in Georgia

Environmental standards in Uzbekistan

EIA in Bulgaria

Environmental health assessment in Uzbekistan

Environmental charges in Armenia

Framework for partnerships in Estonia

The municipal environmental protection funds in Bulgaria  
The environmental fund in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia  
Environmental monitoring in Croatia  
Right to environmental information in Armenia  
Environmental education in Latvia

#### **Section IV**

Sustainable development as a tool of integration in Estonia  
Lithuania's agricultural strategy  
Cotton and wheat in Uzbekistan  
Good agricultural practices in Latvia  
Forests in Kyrgyzstan  
National energy strategy in Lithuania  
Energy and environment in Serbia and Montenegro  
Transport policy in Slovenia  
Transport trends in Romania  
Environmental issues in Croatian tourism  
Sustainable tourism development in Montenegro  
Albania's new coastal zone management plan  
Environmental management in a Croatian enterprise  
Privatization in Bulgaria  
Environmental concerns in privatization in Slovenia  
Waste water, solid wastes and the impact on health in Kyrgyzstan  
Environment and health in Kazakhstan  
Health effects of the Chernobyl accident

#### **Section V**

Regional cooperation and the Russian Federation  
The Project Preparation Committee

#### **Section VI**

EPR implementation in Romania  
EPR implementation in the Republic of Moldova

## FOREWORD

The Environmental Performance Reviews analyse the integration of environment into all sectors of the economy. By focusing on a range of issues, from governance and public participation, to management of pollution and natural resources to social and economic sectors, the Reviews have given strong support to sustainable development. They have brought national attention to the need for capacity-building at both national and local levels, and for strengthening compliance and enforcement mechanisms, particularly in the context of the decentralization process underway in many transition countries.

Ten years have passed since UNECE received its mandate to undertake Environmental Performance Reviews. To mark the decade, assess progress and propose the Programme's future direction, UNECE undertook the analysis contained in this publication.

Among its main findings, the analysis found that a number of significant challenges remain. Air quality from stationary sources has improved for a variety of reasons, but air pollution from mobile sources has increased disproportionately as a result of the rapid increase in transport volume. Water quality suffers primarily from contamination by both untreated wastewater and leaching of poorly stored hazardous wastes and chemicals. Waste management has deteriorated, posing a particularly severe environmental and health hazard, and mine tailings that have accumulated in some areas threaten accidents of catastrophic proportions.

The region is rich in biodiversity, but much of this is endangered by economic activities. Biodiversity, as well as many sectors, such as tourism, agriculture, industry and transport, would benefit from more integrative policy-making and planning.

The good news is that great strides have been made in almost all of the transition countries to establish the legislative and institutional framework necessary to meet these challenges. This has been the real success story of the past ten years. Countries have taken up a number of important initiatives to build capacity. They have developed legislation, strengthened and restructured institutions, introduced innovative policy tools and supported public participation.

Overall, transition has put in motion a fundamental structural change in environmental policymaking and implementation in the countries in transition. What started as a movement to clean up polluted air, water and land in the region, turned into a process contributing to the reform of institutions, the economy and civil society. The result is a wealth of experience and know-how related to the management of the environment in the context of transition, captured in the Environmental Performance Reviews.

The first cycle of Environmental Performance Reviews is coming to an end. The Fifth Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe" (21-23 May 2003) reaffirmed its support for the EPR Programme and requested that the second round of reviews proceed, with more focus on issues of implementation of national policy targets, national legislation, best practices and international commitments.

It is my hope that this report will be useful to all UNECE countries, to intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, to national stakeholders, and especially to the people of the region.



Brigita Schmögnerova  
Executive Secretary



## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Introduction**

In the early 1990s, the eastern parts of Europe were in the middle of a political, economic and social transition process following the collapse of communism. The transition to a market economy had just begun. In the absence of effective pricing mechanisms, the former economic policy had created certain distortions that led, in some instances, both to a waste of natural resources, such as energy and water, in industry and in public utilities, and to the development of energy- and raw material-intensive production.

Many areas and cities of the countries-in-transition were left with a crumbling and inefficient infrastructure. Heavily polluted sites and areas were widespread. Industries caused severe air and water pollution, and risks related to hazardous waste also left areas with severe environmental problems. At the same time, a long tradition of nature conservation, combined with vast areas of untouched military zones, had left a rich biodiversity in the region.

Taking into account the situation in countries in transition, Ministers at the second Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe”, which took place in Lucerne, Switzerland, in April 1993, decided that the Performance Review Programme, initiated by OECD for its own member States, should be gradually extended to the whole region of Europe. They mandated the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) to carry out this extended programme for the countries-in-transition.

At the fifth Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe” (21-23 May 2003, Kiev), Ministers reaffirmed their support for the EPR Programme of UNECE and noted that it had been an important instrument for countries with economies in transition.

At the outset, pilot reviews of Belarus, Bulgaria and Poland were carried out jointly by OECD and UNECE. Subsequently, UNECE has carried out Environmental Performance Reviews in Albania, Armenia, Croatia, Estonia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovenia, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. UNECE also cooperated with OECD in its review of the Russian Federation. UNECE has undertaken second reviews in Bulgaria and Estonia and follow-up reviews in Latvia, Lithuania, the Republic of Moldova, Slovenia and Ukraine.

### **Progress in transition**

#### **Institutional and legal framework**

In the first years of transition, the focus was on drafting new constitutions and establishing new

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