

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE
Committee on Environmental Policy

ENVIRONMENTAL
PERFORMANCE REVIEWS

LITHUANIA



UNITED NATIONS
New York and Geneva, 1999

Environmental Performance Reviews Series No. 4

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UNITED NATIONS PUBLICATION
<i>Sales No. E.99.II.E.7</i>
ISBN 92-1-116709-4
ISSN 1020-4563

Preface

The ECE Committee on Environmental Policy included the Environmental Performance Review of Lithuania in its work programme in January 1997. In February of the same year, the preparatory mission for the project was organized, and a team of both national and ECE experts was formed to carry out the review. The Governments of Austria, Estonia, Finland, Moldova, Poland, Portugal and Ukraine made national experts available for the task. The Rome Division of the WHO European Centre for Environment and Health contributed its expertise and resources for the preparation of the review of environmental health issues. Two experts were funded by the Commission of the European Communities. The travel expenses of other experts from countries in transition and from the ECE secretariat were covered by extra-budgetary funds, which had been provided by Finland, Italy, and Norway. The successful conclusion of the project would not have been possible without the generous support from all these sources.

The review team prepared a report on the environmental performance of Lithuania before, during and after the review mission in Vilnius in October 1997. The Lithuanian partners in discussion with the review team did not spare time or effort in responding to the queries and requests made. The report by the review team, including draft recommendations for the solution of existing problems in national environmental policy and management, was updated in a further discussion in Vilnius in May, 1998, before it was submitted for evaluation to the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy at its annual session in Geneva, on 29 September 1998. A high-level delegation from Lithuania attended this session. It was headed by the Vice Minister of the Ministry of Environment and also included representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Health Care. The evaluation by the Committee was based on the in-depth preparation by two reviewing countries, Bulgaria and Finland. At the end of its evaluation, the Committee agreed on a final set of recommendations for inclusion in this publication.

The Peer Review of the EPR report by the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy permitted to address both strengths and weaknesses of environmental management in Lithuania during the transition process. Despite the considerable socio-economic difficulties that are being experienced, the Lithuanian Ministry of Environment has patiently succeeded in becoming an important actor in decisions affecting the development of the country's environment. The time-consuming process towards forthcoming and open partnership with all governmental and non-governmental forces involved or interested in such management has started. It can be hoped that the further evolution of the skills and means required for both the adaptation of environmental management to pan-European practices and the handling of existing management problems will enable the Ministry of Environment to develop successfully its routines for problem solution.

The ECE Committee on Environmental Policy and the ECE review team wish the Lithuanian environmental managers success in implementing and following up the policy recommendations that are included in this review.

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The preparatory mission for the project took place on 19-21 February 1997. The review mission was organized from 1 to 10 October 1997, the update mission was carried out on 18-20 May 1998, and the peer review was held on 29 September 1998 in Geneva. The ECE Committee on Environmental Policy adopted the recommendations set out in this publication.

Information cut-off date: 30 September 1998.

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