

Sub-Regional Consultation Meeting

On the Establishment of the South East European Platform to Beat Pollution - SEEPP

24 – 25 June 2019

Vienna International Centre – C0213

Report



1. Background and Objectives

On 4-5 December 2018, sixteen countries from South East and Southern Europe¹ gathered at the Ministerial Conference “Innovative Solutions to Pollution in South East and Southern Europe” to discuss how pollution can be curbed to the benefit of environment, health and economies. The Conference, organised by UN Environment and the Government of the Republic of Serbia, with the support from the Italian Ministry of Environment, Land and Sea, presented practical examples of innovative solutions in the field of pollution monitoring, reduction and prevention.

The Belgrade Conference resulted into the adoption of a *Joint Ministerial Vision on Innovative Solutions to Pollution*², whereby countries of the region highlighted the importance of cooperation to address pollution-related challenges and made specific commitments and recommendations. The Belgrade Conference outcome results were presented at the Fourth Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly in March 2019 in Nairobi, Kenya during a side event. The discussion on the state of pollution in South East Europe was followed by a presentation on the development of a dedicated Sub-Regional Platform to Beat Pollution in South East Europe.

In this context, UN Environment convened the first **technical Sub-Regional Consultation Meeting on the establishment of the South East European Platform to Beat Pollution**³. The meeting took place on 24-25 June 2019 at the Vienna International Centre.

Main objectives of the Sub-Regional Consultation Meeting included:

- Presentation of pollution-related challenges/opportunities and environmental cooperation initiatives in South East Europe;
- Consultation on the draft Terms of Reference for the Platform and plenary discussion on its priority areas, governance and structure;
- Agreement on the role of Civil Society Organisations in the framework of the Platforms activities.

¹ Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Turkey

²https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/27112/20181202_FINAL_Joint%20Regional%20Vision%20on%20Innovative%20Solutions%20to%20Pollution_%20-%20Copy.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

³ The meeting was organised by UN Environment – Vienna Programme Office in the framework of the project “Regional Cooperation in South East Europe to Beat Pollution”. The project is supported by the Directorate for Sustainable Development, Environmental Damage, European Union and International Affairs of the Italian Ministry of Environment, Land and Sea.

2. Participants

The technical Sub-Regional Consultation Meeting was open to all Governments of South East Europe, identified International and Regional Organizations, representatives of the donors' community, specialized national institutions (Ministries of Environment and EPAs) and relevant Civil Society Organizations.

The meeting was attended by representatives of seven South East European countries, including delegates from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Hungary, North Macedonia, Serbia and Slovenia. Representatives from the Italian Ministry of Environment, Land and Sea, the Italian EPA (ISPRA), the Austrian Ministry of Sustainability and Tourism, the Austrian Environment Agency (UBA), the Austrian Central Institute for Meteorology and Geodynamics (ZAMG), also participated in the event. A detailed list of participants is available as Annex II to this report.

3. Summary of the Consultation Meeting

The programme of the Sub-Regional Consultation Meeting was structured around three different sessions focusing on the current state of pollution in South East Europe, the priority areas of the proposed Platform, its governance and structure. An inclusive participatory approach was applied, with the participation of CSOs allowed throughout all different sessions.

3.1. Session Nr. 1 – State of Pollution in South East Europe

Item 1 and 2: Opening of the meeting and introductory remarks - The first session, focusing on the state of pollution in South East Europe, provided a thorough overview of the current state of pollution in the region. Following the adoption of the agenda and *tour-de-table*, the meeting was opened by Mr. Harald Egerer, Head of the UN Environment – Vienna Programme Office and Mr. Paolo Angelini, Coordinator for bilateral cooperation in the Western Balkans of the Italian Ministry of Environment, Land and Sea.

Item 3: State of Pollution in SEE - Mr. Jernej Stritih, Director of Stritih Consulting, presented the main findings of the background paper “Pollution in the Western Balkans – State of the Art and Current Challenges: An overview”⁴ developed for the Belgrade Ministerial Conference:

⁴<https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/27108/Pollution%20in%20the%20Western%20Balkans%20web%20version.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y>

- South East Europe is characterized by high-levels of biodiversity and natural resources. The region is suffering from increasing levels of contamination, making it one of the most polluted areas of Europe.
- Cities of the Western Balkans rank among the worst in Europe in terms of air pollution.
- While safe drinking water is secured for most of the population, only a small share of urban waste water is treated before being discharged into rivers and the sea.
- The Adriatic Sea and its coastline are polluted from plastic waste and other pollution coming from the rivers and from coastal cities (Land Based Pollution sources).
- Uncontrolled dumping of waste is still prevalent, with modern waste collection recycling and sanitary landfills in early stage of development and multiple hotspots of pollution (contaminated soil, chemicals) remain a concern in the region.
- Possible way forwards, including application of the polluter pays principle, economic instruments (i.e. taxes) and moving from transposition of EU acquis to implementation.

Item 4: Emission Inventories in South East Europe - Ms. Sabine Schindlbacher, from the Centre on Emission Inventories and Projection (CEIP) of the Austrian Environment Protection Agency (UBA), presented the main findings concerning emission in South East Europe:

- The UNECE Convention on Long Range Transboundary Air Pollution is assisting Member States in the identification of specific measures to curb emissions of main air pollutants (NO_x, NMVOC, SO_x, NH₃, PM_{2.5}, PM₁₀, TSP, BC, CO).
- The Centre on Emission Inventories and Projections (CEIP) is responsible for coordinating the work related to the European Monitoring and Evaluation Programme (EMEP), by compiling emission data reported by Parties and support the review of compliance with reporting obligations.
- An overview of the submission status for 2019 for South East European countries was provided, based on the timeliness, completeness and projections of data. The presentation provided an overview on reported emissions in terms of (NO_x, NH₃, PM_{2.5}, Pb, SO_x) including emission differences between 2000 and 2017.

Item 5: Air Pollution and Health in South Eastern Europe - Ms. Sonja Gebert, GEF Coordinator at UN Environment - Vienna Programme Office, presented the results of the recently launched UN Environment/WHO joint assessment report on Air Pollution and Human Health:

- Air pollution recognized as single greatest environmental threat to health, as highlighted by the UNEA 3 resolution⁵.
- UN Environment and WHO partnered-up to provide a legal and institutional analysis of air pollution for each country of the Western Balkans and organised technical workshop and social media campaign.
- Following the collection of relevant information, it was decided to focus on specific cities where data on air pollutants were available. Overview of PM2.5 in the cities of Western Balkans was provided.
- Overview of the energy situation in the region, energy poverty with high household expenditures on heating and electricity.
- Way forward was presented, including the assistance that UN Environment could provide in terms of policy development and advocacy support to Western Balkans / South East European region.

Item 6 and 7: Country statements – Representatives from participating countries delivered national statements on national priorities in the field of pollution monitoring, reduction and prevention. The statements highlighted the importance of the Belgrade Ministerial Joint Vision and the need for an integrated and multi-level regional cooperative approach to pollution-related challenges. National policy responses and initiatives were presented, while air pollution, waste management and application of the rule of law were identified as key priorities by most participating countries.

3.2 Session Nr. 2 – South East European Platform to Beat Pollution Priority Areas

Item 8: Stocktaking of past and current regional environmental cooperation activities - Mr. Alexander Juras, Chief of the Civil Society Unit at UN Environment, delivered a presentation on past and current initiatives dealing with environmental cooperation in South East Europe:

- Regional environmental cooperation still represents an important topic in South East Europe. In this context, the transboundary nature of pollution should be considered as entry point for enhanced cooperation among countries.
- Over the last twenty years several joint initiatives were developed, including the establishment of the Regional Environmental Reconstruction Programme for South East Europe (REReP), the creation of the Regional Environmental Centre and other regionally-owned initiatives. Regional and sub-regional multilateral agreements and joint bodies were established (i.e. Carpathian

⁵ UNEP/EA.3/Res.8, Resolution on Preventing and Reducing Air Pollution to Improve Air Quality Globally

Convention, Danube Commission, etc.) and membership of global MEAs was extended to SEE countries.

- Lessons learned were briefly presented, including the need for enhancing the regional ownership of initiatives, the opportunities deriving from EU accession process of Western Balkan economies, the need for a multi-stakeholder approach and the importance of innovation.

Item 9: Presentation of SEEPP concept - Mr. Filippo Montalbetti, Environmental Affairs Specialist at UN Environment - Vienna Programme Office, presented the concept of the Platform, including its priority areas and governance structure together with the proposed next steps:

- Initiative builds on the Belgrade Ministerial Conference results and the recommendations included in the Joint Ministerial Vision on Innovative Solutions to Pollution. Countries highlighted a strong need for enhanced cooperation in the field of pollution monitoring, reduction and prevention at the regional level.
- There does not appear to be an impact oriented, regionally-owned and multi stakeholder process dealing with the increasing levels of pollution.
- SEEPP is a regionally-owned multi-stakeholder initiative, with the priority to support South East Europe in coordinating efforts addressing all dimensions of pollution (air, water, soil and cross cutting issues).
- Draft Terms of Reference for the SEEPP were distributed among participating countries and observers to receive feedback. Comments in writing were submitted by Hungary, Montenegro and Serbia.
- Funding is available for the first 12 months of activities through support from the Italian Ministry of Environment, Land and Sea. Additional interested donors are welcomed to support this initiative.

Item 10: Plenary discussion - The subsequent discussion was moderated by Mr. Otto Simonett, Director of Zoi Environment Network, and mainly focused on the identified priority areas of the Platform:

- SEEPP will need to complement ongoing regional initiatives and focus on a few priorities. Pollution has severe impacts on public health, is considered as a regional topic, with relevant transboundary impacts. It has a substantial negative impact on national and regional economies.
- SEEPP initiatives should focus on areas where pollution has severe health and environmental impact.
- SEEPP initiatives should be action and impact oriented.

- Air pollution and waste management were identified as the main priorities for the inception phase of the SEEPP.
- Application of the rule of law was identified as another possible priority.
- Considering the number of ongoing regional initiatives and the limited capacities of national authorities in terms of human resources, participating countries expressed their wish to have a flexible and dynamic instrument.
- Discussion also focus on the added value of having a multi stakeholder process.

3.3 Session Nr. 3 – South East European Platform to Beat Pollution Governance and Structure

Item 12: The role of Civil Society Organizations in the SEEPP – Mr. Alexander Juras, Chief of the Civil Society Unit at UN Environment, delivered a presentation on the role that CSOs could play in the development of the SEEPP:

- CSOs are partners for Governments in achieving the objectives of the SEEPP. CSOs play a crucial role in the early identification of environmental challenges and concerns, including by providing “citizens science” that can help pollution monitoring and prevention.
- The engagement of CSOs ensures a transparent, inclusive, legitimate process and facilitates the creation of partnerships and awareness raising initiatives.
- CSO could be partners in the SEEPP Task Force, contribute to the thematic clusters, and support the outreach activities of the Platform through their already established networks.
- Discussions underlined the added value of engaging CSOs, the cooperation with Governments, and the coordination of efforts at the regional scale

The European Environment Bureau⁶ delivered a short presentation on the support that could be provided to the SEEPP:

- Set-up and maintenance of mailing list and contacts with interested NGOs.
- Identification of suitable NGOs in countries.
- Dissemination of information about Platforms work and inclusion of inputs to SEEPP meetings.
- Co-organisation of webinars and capacity building activities on pollution.
- Links to other regional initiatives.

⁶ Mr. Bernhard Zlanabitnig, Director EU Umweltbuero (Austria); Ms. Aleksandra Mladenovic, President of Environmental Ambassadors for Sustainable Development (Serbia); Ms. Elise Mazaud, Assistant EU Neighbourhood Policy EEB (Belgium).

Item 13 and 14: Plenary discussion - The plenary discussion on the governance and structure of the SEEPP was moderated by Mr. Harald Egerer, Head of the UN Environment – Vienna Programme Office:

- SEEPP is not part of the EU accession negotiations but should support the process and contribute to the development a regional credibility.
- Need to include the Regional Cooperation Council in the initiative.
- Rules of procedure should be established. Agreement on the consensus approach to be applied.
- Need for a coordinated approach in reaching out to EU Commission (DG Near and DG Environment). Governments from the region are encouraged to reach out to the EU Delegations in their respective countries and highlight the importance of the initiative
- Albania and Serbia offered to host the interim Secretariat of the Platform and the Ministerial Conference that should take place in 2020 for the launch of the Platform.
- UN Environment – Vienna Programme Office will further coordinate the activity and provide secretariat services on an interim basis.

Item 15: Project presentation – Mr. Stefano Cocchi, RTA expert, presented the recently launched project “Assistance to Western Balkans in Pollution Prevention, Monitoring and Reduction, including risks deriving from industrial accidents”:

- The project, implemented by UN Environment – Vienna Programme Office with the support from the Italian Ministry of Environment, Land and Sea, aims at upgrading the environmental information systems of target Western Balkan countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia) based on the results achieved in the framework of EU twinning projects. This project will provide capacity-building and institutional strengthening for target public institutions through training of trainers.
- The project results will be included in the activities of the SEEPP as best practices and outcome results will be shared among participating countries. The results should feed into the establishment of the thematic groups.

4. Conclusions

Participants to the Sub-Regional Consultation meeting welcomed the organisation of the meeting and the draft Terms of Reference. Comments received during the sessions will be included by UN Environment in a revised version and circulated to target participant for a second round of comments.

Annex 1 – Programme

Sub-Regional Consultation Meeting

On the Establishment of the South East European Platform to Beat Pollution - SEEPP

24 – 25 June 2019

Vienna International Centre – C0213

Programme

State of Pollution in South East Europe 24 June 2019, 10:30 - 12:30		
Time	Item	Background documents
10:00 – 10:30	<i>Registration and welcome coffee</i>	
10:30 – 10:45	1) Opening of the Sub-Regional Consultation Meeting, <i>tour de table</i> and adoption of Agenda – <i>Filippo Montalbetti, UN Environment</i>	
10:45 – 11:00	2) Introductory remarks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Mr. Harald Egerer, UN Environment</i> • <i>Mr. Paolo Angelini, Italian Ministry of Environment, Land and Sea</i> 	
11:00 – 11:20	3) State of Pollution in South East Europe – <i>Mr. Jernej Stritih, Stritih Consulting</i>	- <i>Pollution in the Western Balkans: State of the Art and Current Challenges</i>
11:20 – 11:40	4) Emission Inventories in the Western Balkans – <i>Ms. Sabine Schindlbacher, Centre on Emission Inventories and Projections, Austrian Environment Agency</i>	
11:40 – 12:00	5) Air Pollution and Health in South Eastern Europe - <i>Ms. Sonja Gebert, UN Environment</i>	- <i>Assessment on Air Pollution and Human Health: The Case of the Western Balkans</i>
12:00 – 13:00	6) Country statements on national priorities in addressing pollution (1/2) – Moderation: <i>Harald Egerer, UN Environment</i>	
13:00 – 14:00	<i>Lunch at VIC Restaurant</i>	

SEEPP Priority Areas 24 June 2019, 14:00 – 17:30		
Time	Item	Background documents
14:00 – 14:30	7) Country statements on national priorities in addressing pollution (2/2) – Moderation: <i>Harald Egerer, UN Environment</i>	
14:30 – 15:00	8) Stocktaking of past and current regional environmental cooperation initiatives – <i>Mr. Alexander Juras, UN Environment</i>	
15:00 – 15:30	9) Presentation of SEEPP concept and introduction to the proposed Terms of Reference – <i>Mr. Filippo Montalbetti, UN Environment</i>	- Joint Ministerial Regional Vision on Innovative Solutions to Pollution - Proposed Terms of Reference for the SEEPP
15:30 – 16:00	<i>Coffee break</i>	
16:00 – 17:00	10) Plenary discussion on SEEPP, proposed items: - Added value of the Platform; - Priority areas; - Core activities; Moderation: <i>Otto Simonett, ZOI Environment Network</i>	- Proposed Terms of Reference for the SEEPP
17:00 – 17:30	Closing of Day 1	
19:00	<i>Dinner at Salzamt (Ruprechtspaltz 1, 1010 Vienna)</i>	

SEEPP Governance and Structure 25 June 2019, 09:30 – 13:00		
Time	Item	Background documents
09:30 – 09:45	11) Introductory remarks - <i>UN Environment</i>	
09:45 – 10:45	12) The role of Civil Society Organizations in the development of the SEEPP – <i>Mr. Alexander Juras, UN Environment</i>	- Civil Society Statement, Belgrade Ministerial Conference

10:45 – 11:15	<p>13) Plenary discussion, proposed items (1/2):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Governance and structure of SEEPP; - National ownership; <p>Moderation: <i>Harald Egerer, UN Environment</i></p>	- <u>Proposed Terms of Reference for the SEEPP</u>
11:15 – 11:45	<i>Coffee break</i>	
11:45 – 12:15	<p>14) Plenary discussion, proposed items (2/2):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Governance and structure of SEEPP; - National ownership; <p>Moderation: <i>Harald Egerer, UN Environment</i></p>	- <u>Proposed Terms of Reference for the SEEPP</u>
12:15 – 12:45	<p>15) Project presentation – “Assistance to Western Balkans in Pollution Prevention, Monitoring and Reduction, including risks deriving from industrial accidents” – Mr. Stefano Cocchi, RTA expert</p>	
12:45 – 13:00	<p>16) Agreement on the next steps and closing of the Sub-Regional Consultation Meeting</p>	

Annex 2 – List of Participants

Name	Institution	Country	E-mail address
Sabina Cenameri	Ministry of Tourism and Environment	Albania	Sabina.Cenameri@turizmi.gov.al
Senad Oprašič	Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Senad.Oprasic@mvteo.gov.ba
Martina Zupan Urek	Ministry of Environment and Energy	Croatia	Martina.zupan.urek@mzoe.hr
András Guti	Ministry of Agriculture	Hungary	Andras.guti@am.gov.hu
Jasmina Petkovska	Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning	North Macedonia	Jasminapett@gmail.com
Vladimir Džamić	Serbia	Ministry of Environmental Protection	Vladimir.Dzamic@ekologija.gov.rs
Biljana Filipović	Serbia	Ministry of Environmental Protection	Biljana.Filipovic@ekologija.gov.rs
Marija Raičević	Serbia	Ministry of Environmental Protection	Marija.Raicevic@ekologija.gov.rs
Matevž Gotovnik	Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning	Slovenia	Matevz.Gotovnik@gov.si
Paolo Angelini	Ministry of Environment, Land and Sea	Italy	Angelini.paolo@minambiente.it
Stefano Cocchi	Minoprio Foundation	Italy	Stefanokoki@gmail.com
Andrea Nouak	Federal Ministry for Sustainability and Tourism	Austria	Andrea.Nouak@bmnt.gv.at
Otto Simonett	Zoi Environment Network	Switzerland	Otto.simonett@zoinet.org

Jernej Stritih	Stritih Sustainable Development	Slovenia	Jernej@stritih.com
Aleksandra Mladenović	Environmental Ambassadors	Serbia	Aleksandra.mladenovic@feeserbia.com
Sandor Fülöp	Guta Association of Environmental Law of Central and Eastern Europe	Hungary	Sandor@emla.hu
Giordano Giorgi	Italian National Institute for Environment Protection and Research / INFO RAC	Italy	Giordano.giorgi@isprambiente.it
Saule Ospanova	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe	Austria	Saule.ospanova@osce.org
Christian Melis	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe	Austria	Christian.melis@osce.org
Johannes Mayer	Environment Agency Austria	Austria	Johannes.mayer@umweltbundesamt.at
Mihallaq Qirjo	Resource Environmental Centre	Albania	Miha.qirjo@gmail.com
Kathrin Baumann Stanzer	ZAMG	Austria	Kathrin.baumann-stanzer@zamg.ac.at
Marcus Hirtl	ZAMG	Austria	Marcus.hirtl@zamg.ac.at
Bernhard Zlanabitnig	EU Umweltbüro	Austria	Bernhard.zlanabitnig@eu-umweltbuero.at
Richard Filcak	European Environmental Bureau	Austria	Filcak.richard@gmail.com
Elise Mazaud	European Environmental Bureau	Belgium	Elise.mazaud@eeb.org
Sabine Schindlbacher	Environment Agency Austria	Austria	Sabine.schindlbacher@umweltbundesamt.at
Xhesika Hoxha	Co-Plan	Albania	Xhesika_hoxha@co-plan.org
Christos Vlachokostas	Ecocity	Greece	Vlahoco@auth.gr

Harald Egerer	UN Environment – Vienna Programme Office	Austria	Harald.egerer@un.org
Alexander Juras	UN Environment – Governance Affairs Office	Kenya	Alexander.juras@un.org
Filippo Montalbetti	UN Environment – Vienna Programme Office	Austria	Filippo.montalbetti@un.org
Sonja Gebert	UN Environment – Vienna Programme Office	Austria	Sonja.gebert@un.org
Ana Vukoje	UN Environment – Vienna Programme Office	Austria	Ana.vukoje@un.org