



WECF | Women in Europe for a Common Future
Women International for a Common Future | **WICF**

Korte Elisabethstraat 6, 3511 JG Utrecht, the Netherlands

Press release

UNEP's sub-regional Major Group and Stakeholder Meeting for the EECCA region brought together environmental organisations from 12 countries in Batumi, Georgia

Batumi, 21 November 2014 – The UNEP sub-regional Major Group and Stakeholder (MGS) meeting gathering representatives from environmental NGOs and other civil society organisations from 12 Eastern European, South Eastern European and Caucasus countries, was held in Batumi, Georgia, on 19th of November 2014, back to back with the 6th Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum.

The UNEP regional major group and stakeholder meeting, is an annual event from the UNEP regional office for Europe, and aims to strengthen civil society engagement in the global and regional work of the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), and is one of the main entry points for MGS to involve in the policy development and implementation of a range of environmental governance issues.

“As a result of the decisions taken and adopted at Rio+20 and the UN General Assembly, UNEP has been strengthened and upgraded, as well as the establishment of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) with universal membership of 193 members to serve as an authoritative advocate for the global environment, and the global platform for environmental policy-making and action. To advance this strengthened mandate major groups and stakeholders are key allies for UNEP to better serve the planet and people to meet the ever growing challenges posed by ecosystem degradation, to achieving the necessary transition of our societies to resource efficiency and environmental sustainability”, explained Mr. Wondwosen Asnake, of UNEP's regional office for Europe. The meeting was organised by organising partner “WECF International” and local Georgian partners “Rural Communities Development Agency” and “Black Sea Eco Academy”.

The meeting was briefed on the outcome of the First United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA1) held from 23 – 27 June 2014 and its impact for UNEP's work in the European region. UNEA1 brought together over 1065 participants, 163 Member States, 113 Ministers and had over 40 Events. It had Ministerial Plenary on SDGs/Post-2015 Development Agenda, including SCP, Ministerial dialogue on illegal trade in wildlife, Symposiums on Environmental Rule of law and on Financing a Green Economy. The Ministerial outcome document called on the international community, and reaffirm commitment in a number of areas essential for achieving sustainable development, including the full integration of economic, social and environment dimensions in the Post-2015/SDGs process. It also adopted seventeen resolutions focusing on Science-policy interface; Chemicals and waste; air pollution; the development and implementation of community-based, national and regional ecosystem-based adaptation programmes; implementation of national or regional action plans to reduce marine litter; enhancing access to information in future related policies; etc.

<http://www.unep.org/unea/en/>

Considering the interest expressed by several NGOs on accessing information on Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), Mr Asnake presented an information and Knowledge Management (IKM) Initiative called InforMEA <http://www.informea.org/> (the UN portal on MEAs) and facilitated by UNEP to bring together MEAs to develop harmonized and interoperable information systems for the benefit of Parties and the environment community at large. InforMEA provides COP decisions and resolutions, national focal points, national reports and implementation plans, news, events, MEA memberships, etc. In addition to the portal, participants had the opportunity to learn more about the newly launched InforMEA e-learning platform <http://e-learning.informea.org/> aimed at building knowledge and greater understanding of International Environmental Law (IEL) and provides educational and training materials on IEL concepts and the development and implementation of MEAs. Participants were given a demonstration on how they could complete the online courses at their own pace for no cost. The MEA IKM initiative currently includes 43 international and regional legally binding instruments.

The environmental NGOs and other civil society representatives presented how they are already supporting the development, monitoring and implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements in their country and in the region. Almost all environmental NGOs are engaged in the implementation and monitoring of the UNECE Aarhus Convention on access to environmental information, public participation and justice, as this is the basis for all their activities. UNEP promotes globally the “Rio Principle 10”, which the Aarhus Convention was created to implement. “We need more efforts” commented the Bosnian-Herzegovina NGO representative “even though the Aarhus Convention is fully integrated into our legislation, in practice we still can only get environmental data if we push really hard to get it”. For example, “a great problem in the town of Zenica is the uncontrolled pollution by the steel company, we are not able to get up-to-date measurements”.

The three Chemicals Conventions (Stockholm, Basel and Rotterdam) are very important for many of the environmental NGOs, “toxic chemicals in consumer products, illegal hazardous pesticides and extremely harmful asbestos continue to be imported and used in our countries, and as NGOs we have pushed to fill the legal gaps, using the Chemicals Conventions, SAICM and the EU chemicals and product safety regulation as the main tool” commented NGOs from Albania and Georgia.

The UNECE ESPOO convention is also a key instrument for the work of environmental NGOs, explained the Ukrainian NGO representative working on energy security issues: “we have achieved a historic victory with our NGO under ESPOO, which now makes it an obligation that the lifetime of old nuclear power-plants cannot just be extended at the whim of some energy utility, but that they need to include in the decision the results of the Environmental Impact Assessment”.

Numerous NGOs are helping to implement the Transboundary Water Convention, the Caspian Sea Convention <http://www.tehranconvention.org/> and the Black Sea Convention, helping to develop legislation and practical solutions for reducing effluents from municipalities, households and industry. NGOs are involved as partners, demonstrating new technologies such as ecological grey-water treatment plants for households, and working with municipalities, fishermen and farmers on reducing pollution, also from pesticides and fertilizers. In addition to UNECE, also UNEP’s global wastewater initiative and UNDP are active in this area.

Other key MEAs which NGOs are supporting to implement is the Climate Convention, the Biodiversity Convention, the Ramsar convention (wetlands) and the convention to halt desertification, but “we would be much more successful if UNEP and its civil society partners could inform and build capacity on these environmental agreements” said the representative of “WECF International” one of the organisers of the meeting in Batumi. “There are many opportunities for environmental organisations to propose projects to UNEP for joint implementation; we need civil society as a partner” was the response from Mr. Asnake of UNEP.

The participants of the meeting also learned about other programs of UNEP in which civil society should be more strongly involved, such as the 10 Year Framework Programme (10-YFP) on

Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) <http://www.unep.org/10yfp/> aimed at bringing actors together for collective impact, delivering capacity building, primarily at national and regional levels to accelerate the shift towards SCP in all countries. Currently the 10YFP focuses on 6 areas including sustainable public procurement, eco building, sustainable tourism including ecotourism, sustainable buildings and infrastructure, sustainable lifestyles and education, consumer information, and a new one on sustainable food systems. Mr Asnake stated “UNEP works through regional civil society focal points, and also engaged at the national level to promote concrete pilot projects as well as helping to set national indicators and strategies, especially now that Sustainable Consumption and Production will be one of the Post-2015 “Sustainable Development Goals” (<http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org>) to achieve within the coming 15 years.

Furthermore, the participants looked at opportunities for civil society engagement in the development of the “**Global Environment Outlook**” (GEO-6). The GEO <http://www.unep.org/geo/> is the most complete global reporting on the state, trends and outlooks of environment in the world, and is published by UNEP every few years, with input through consultative and participatory processes involving governments, network of Collaborating Centres, scientists and other stakeholders including civil society. **NGOs can join the online “communities of practice”** which are helping to write the GEO, see UNEP’s website UNEP-LIVE <http://www.uneplive.org/community/>.

Furthermore, a special “**Gender GEO**” called the Global Gender and Environment Outlook (GGEO) report is being prepared by UNEP. The GGEO is UNEP’s commitment in response to the call of the Network of Women Ministers and Leaders for the Environment (NWMLE) and environmental women’s organisations to lead a global assessment on gender and environment. The GGEO will ensure that all thematic areas addressed by GEO will be based on a gender analysis, looking at how environmental change and policies impact men and women differently and the specific role and tools for ensuring equitable solutions. The women’s organisation at UNEP are organised in the “**Women’s Major Group**”, who are alongside “NGOs” and other groups such as “farmers” and “children and youth” tasked with coordinating effective input of all civil society sectors. Those NGOs interested in being more engaged with UNEP, can do so by contacting their civil society “**Major Group**”. The ‘organising partners’ of the Major Groups rotate on a regular basis.

More information on MGS engagement is the work of UNEP is available at <http://www.unep.org/civil-society/> and the modalities for accreditation at <http://www.unep.org/civil-society/UNEAUNEPAccreditation/tabid/52182/Default.aspx>

In addition to the sub-regional MGS meeting, participants took part in the 6th annual meeting of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) that took place from 20-21 November <http://eapcsf-assembly.org/> and attended the EaP CSF Working Group on Environment, climate change and energy security <http://eap-csf.eu/en/working-groups/wg3-environment-energy/>

For more information:

Wondwosen.asnake@unep.org

sascha.gabizon@wecf.eu

kateryna.poberezhna@cenn.org