



Action funded by
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EU4Environment

Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Ukraine

Summary Record of the First Meeting of the EU4Environment Regional Assembly

27-28 June 2019, Brussels, Belgium

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See also the meeting web site and photos:

<https://www.oecd.org/environment/outreach/inaugural-eu4environment-regional-assembly.htm>

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/182351066@N07/albums/72157709376662407>

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Highlights of the meeting

- ✓ On 27-28 June, the European Union, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine met to define priorities, targets, and specific measures under the “European Union for Environment” (EU4Environment) programme. Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine were represented at the Deputy Minister/State Secretary level. The meeting was also attended by representatives of EU4Environment Implementing Partners, invited international organisations, and the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum;
- ✓ The political imperative to increase the ambition of environmental goals and speed up environmental action was underlined by Katarína Mathernová, Deputy Director-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations at the European Commission, in her video-address to the meeting participants;
- ✓ The participants underlined the importance of connecting the Action results with 20 Deliverables for 2020 and post 2020 commitments, making synergies with other EU funded projects and networks, and meaningfully engaging the civil society;
- ✓ The EaP countries reiterated their commitments to greening their economies, welcomed the support provided by the Action and underlined its relevance;
- ✓ The participants identified possible ways of meeting high demand for work in areas covered by EU4Environment. Re-confirming EU intention to continue supporting environmental and climate goals and upscaling resources if need be, the European Commission underlined the need for countries to prove that high demand for support is matched with necessary government and private sector action on the ground;
- ✓ The event provided the opportunity for all partners to agree on country-specific work plans to improve and implement policies that can spur an environmentally friendly economic growth, and enhance societies’ resilience and citizens’ well-being;
- ✓ The participants also discussed governance arrangements and links to the inter-ministerial coordination on greening the economy;
- ✓ The participants acknowledged the importance of making the Action visible and communicating its results to the general public. They discussed the communication strategies in terms of the audience, products, specific targets and called for using at full the existing communication channels;
- ✓ The EaP countries expressed strong demand for administrative capacity building and focusing on tangible improvements in terms of cooperation among Ministries, separation of policy making from implementation, and better compliance assurance;
- ✓ The participants provided positive feedback on the small working group discussions (“dynamic networking”), bringing EU experiences on specific subjects and participation of EU Delegations;
- ✓ In discussing the next steps it was agreed that:
 - revised work plans (regional and six national) would be sent to the participants by end of July for comments **by 6 September 2019**;
 - progress on the Action implementation would be presented at the next EaP Panel on Environment and Climate Change and, eventually, at the third EaP Ministerial Meeting in 2020;
 - Next Regional Assembly meeting would be held in October 2020. The EaP countries were invited to consider and offer hosting the meeting.

Introduction

The inaugural meeting of the EU4Environment Regional Assembly was held on 27-28 June 2019 in Brussels, Belgium. It was attended by some 70 participants, including the EU4Environment National Focal Points and their alternates appointed by the Ministries of Environment and of Economy of the Eastern Partner (EaP) countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine) and the representatives of the EaP countries missions to the EU. Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine were represented at the Deputy Minister/State Secretary level. The meeting was also attended by representatives of EU Member States (Austria, Italy), European Union institutions (DG NEAR, DG Environment, EU Delegation to Republic of Moldova, European Environment Agency), EU4Environment Implementing Partners (OECD, UN Environment, UNECE, UNIDO and the World Bank) and invited international organisations (UNDP). The representatives of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (CSF) were present. See Annex 1 for the list of participants.

The meeting was chaired by the European Commission (DG NEAR and DG Environment).

The meeting was held back-to-back with the EU4Business General Assembly (29 June 2019, Brussels).

Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine are committed to actively implement the Sustainable Development Goals and other international commitments, including those tackling climate change under the Paris Agreement. In addition, within the framework of the Eastern Partnership, the European Union together with all partners have also agreed to certain targets under the “20 Deliverables for 2020”. In this context, the EU4Environment programme is supporting the countries to transition towards greener, more efficient and sustainable economies, as well as to addressing environmental challenges. Complementary measures will be implemented under EU4Climate programme. EU4Environment builds on the achievements of past EU-funded programmes, which brought important policy changes and enterprise-level measures.

Item 1. Opening and adoption of the agenda

“Our cooperation on environment with the Eastern Partner countries is stronger than ever and is already bringing tangible benefits to the daily lives of citizens across the region. Together the EU and its six Eastern Partners are working to increase our joint ambition to tackle environmental protection and climate challenges. There is no time to lose. Today’s meeting has brought all partner together to agree on the next steps forward.” said Katarína Mathernová, Deputy Director-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations at the European Commission, in her opening video-message. During the opening segment, the meeting participants were also addressed by Mr. Davor Percan, Head of Unit, DG Environment and Mr. Jeroen Willems, Deputy Head of Unit, DG NEAR. They welcomed a stronger than ever co-operation on environment with the Eastern Partner countries. They stated that following the recent European elections, environmental issues are becoming even more important on the political agenda and are an integral element of co-operation with the EaP countries. The speakers welcomed the launch of the EU4Environment Action and called for tangible results that tackle environmental protection and climate challenges and bring benefits to the daily lives of citizens across the region. They also called for building on the achievements of the 10 years of the Eastern Partnership, including the 20 Deliverables for 2020. The speakers underlined a need to seek synergies with other programmes, such as EU4Business, EU4Climate, EU4Energy, SEIS II, SIGMA, and with the EU Member states support to the region.

The participants adopted the agenda without amendments.

Item 2. Regional outlook: stocktaking of the baseline situation and brief introduction of initial regional and national implementation plans

In the introductory statement, Mr. Krzysztof Michalak, Senior Programme Manager, OECD, noted the important progress made over the last years in all EaP countries on the policy, regulatory and institutional reform in the field of environment. He also pointed out a rapidly increasing interest in “greening” economic and sectoral policies and actions by the Ministries of Economy. He underlined the importance of the EU4Environment that aims to build on this progress and support the six Eastern partner countries’ actions in a way that they demonstrate and unlock opportunities for greener growth and set mechanisms to better manage environmental risks and impacts. He highlighted very good progress in establishing collaborative links between the five Implementing Partners: OECD, UNECE, UN Environment, UNIDO and the World Bank for the Action implementation, drawing on the successful past co-operation. He recalled that the first Regional Assembly meeting concludes the six-month inception phase (January - June 2019), during which the Implementing Partners mobilised their teams and resources.¹ In this period, national launch events were organised in each Partner country which gathered a wide range of stakeholders. The meetings allowed to present the Action objectives, identify and prioritise country needs, agree on national governance arrangements, and translate them into initial work plans. While presenting preliminary regional and country specific work plans, that were prepared on the basis of inputs from the EaP countries, he underlined strong demand expressed by the EaP countries for all of the EU4Environment’s Results and the over-demand for activities in most of the Action areas. He asked countries to provide comments on the proposed work plans and use the Regional Assembly meeting for further prioritisation and detailing of activities presented in the draft work plans.

Outcomes of the session

Recognising progress made, but also a politically dynamic environment in the region, the participants agreed that the Action is very timely, relevant and critically needed. They also agreed on the need to provide concrete and well-targeted support to policy and regulatory reforms that have been, and are being launched, and that the Action should build sustainable local capacities. They underlined the importance of building on the previous work.

The participants also discussed the solutions that could help to meet the high demand for activities. These solutions included: mobilising additional funding (subject to showing tangible results); cooperation through TAIEX or Twinning Programmes and building synergies with other programmes; focusing on specific priority sectors or activities linked with national, regional or international commitments (ex. national strategies and programmes, NDCs, Association Agreements, Paris Agreement, SDGs); adjusting activities on the basis of cost/resource intensity; as well as combining some activities at the regional or sub-regional level. Some delegations also offered to drop or postpone some activities in order to facilitate the prioritisation process. It was agreed that further solutions would be identified during the meeting and during the finalisation of the work plans.

Item 3. Greener decision-making (Result 1)

Ms. Rie Tsutsumi, UN Environment and Mr. Leonid Kalashnyk, UNECE, briefly introduced the activities and the status of the draft work plans under Result 1. Ms. Tsutsumi underlined the importance of building upon the Green Economy strategies/action plans and the inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms that had already been set up. Mr. Kalashnyk noted Output 1.3 aims to ensure that national legislation on SEA and transboundary EIA in all the six partner countries is fully aligned with the EU Directives on Strategic

¹ The World Bank follows slightly different schedule in programme preparations and will conclude its inception phase later.

Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), the UNECE Protocol on SEA and the Convention on EIA in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention). He underlined the importance of a solid legal basis for implementation of activities and outlined the progress made by the partner countries.

Outcomes of the session

The Regional Assembly members:

- Reconfirmed a close alignment between the draft country-specific work plans and EaP countries national priorities and government activities for the near future.
- Stressed the importance of working at sectoral level when it comes to sharing good practices, planning documents and/or transboundary procedures – thus ensuring for unified project outcomes/application within and across countries, as well as concrete changes in the operations of specific sectors (e.g. development of waste management policies that drive technological advances for waste collection/sorting/recycling). The importance of cross-sectoral collaboration in the context of SEA was also underlined.
- Took note that a regional component would be included under this Result, ensuring that experiences are shared internationally and that each country receives training/capacity building in the highest number of EU4Environment thematic areas possible (thus helping to address some of the over-demand for project activities at national levels). Supported the Partners proposal of engaging, as appropriate, more Ministries (ex. Ministries of finance, energy, agriculture, regional development, forestry, etc.) to raise the overall profile and impact of the Action at the central government level.
- Highlighted the importance of making training documents available in national languages as this ensures for easier upscaling and sustainability of the work beyond the project's duration.
- Signalled national priority areas related to the SEA and transboundary EIA component of EU4Environment and pointed out the need for continued assistance in line with the scope defined in EU4Environment Description of Action.
- The representatives of the EaP Civil Society Forum underlined the importance of SEA and transboundary EIA in the context of the partner countries' hydropower sectors and noted the capacities available within the civil society to facilitate SEA related efforts.

Item 4. Circular economy and new growth opportunities (Result 2)

Ms. Carolina Gonzalez, UNIDO and Mr. Alex Leshchynskyy, UN Environment briefly introduced the activities and the status of work plans under Result 2.

Outcomes of the session

The Regional Assembly members:

- Expressed strong demand for waste-related work and took note that activities under EU4Environment will start with countries where there was already progress made on specific waste management policies and regulations.
- Highlighted interest in the industrial waste mapping activities. Based on the discussions and within the limits of available resources, efforts will be made to include more countries.
- Stressed the need for awareness raising as an important cross cutting activity to inform industries and stakeholders of the benefits offered by greening of business practices and adopting principles of circular economy.

- Called to link future work with countries' commitments under their respective Association Agreements or other agreements with the European Union.
- Signalled that many relevant programmes/support mechanisms are on-going and will need to be up scaled.
- Took note that additional funding for activities is to be explored to increase impact and scale up results. UN Environment already explores additional funding for work on Sustainable Public Procurement (SPP).
- Acknowledged synergies between UN Environment's and UNIDO's work under this Result.

Item 5. An environmental level playing field (Result 3)

Mr. Krzysztof Michalak, OECD, briefly introduced the status of work plans related to the Result 3 (except 3.4 that was subject of discussion under Agenda Item 11). He noted an over demand for most of the activities proposed in the Description of the Action but indicated that comments and suggestions submitted by countries in advance of the meeting provide a good basis for refining the work plans and making them realistic and practical.

Outcomes of the session

The Regional Assembly members:

- Provided detailed comments on the proposed activities. Belarus and Ukraine suggested specific activities that they would like the Action to focus in their countries, while other countries confirmed the need for further internal prioritisation.
- Reiterated their interest in working on the implementation of the EU Industrial Emissions Directive and developing specific tools to support the environmental performance of SMEs.
- Pointed out the importance of working on environmental liability as well as green finance, which should involve the Ministries of Finance and the banking sector.
- Referred to the role of national environmental funds and requested work on assessing their effectiveness, in countries where they existed, and analysis in countries that such funds may be established.
- Pointed out the need for capacity building activities on all element of the Result 3 at the regional and national level.
- Called for building on other programmes/initiatives, including relevant multi donors funds.
- The representatives of the EaP Civil Society Forum pointed out a still inadequate level of implementation of environmental legislation and called for reinforcing efforts to promote environment compliance and provide adequate non-compliance response, where required. They called for keeping as many countries working on liability projects as possible and build capacity of environmental administration. They also called for an engagement of the banking sector in work on green finance. Reference was made to their policy paper "[Advancing Eastern Partnership: 23 Civil Society Ideas for the Policy Beyond 2020](#)" which offers civil society assessment of the EaP country policies and provide recommendations for their better implementation and reflections on beyond 2020 agenda.

Item 6. Ecosystem services and livelihoods (Result 4)

Mr. Tuukka Castrén, World Bank, briefly introduced the Result area and work planning priorities related to the Result 4. He pointed out that the World Bank was not able to present detailed work plans at this stage but rather would give general points for further discussion with the countries. He noted that the current approach is that during Year 1 the Programme would focus on Outputs 4.1 and 4.2 and in parallel prepare more detailed plans for activities under Output 4.3 and 4.4. Activities under Output 4.1 in Year 1 will focus on information exchange between the countries and defining the key issues. This will also build on cooperation with the Council of Europe (CoE).

Activities under Output 4.2 will consist of three stages and include: baseline mapping for community engagement in forest and other natural resource management (NRM); support to community action to facilitate improved knowledge on NRM; and, during later years, impact assessment and lessons learnt. On Output 4.3 the World Bank plans to focus, among other things, on how new technology can be used to prevent illegality and promote legal trade. On Output 4.4 the plan is to work with priorities and policy objectives of the participating countries' governments, identify implementation costs and potential sources of funding. This will build also on the lessons and findings from the other three components.

Outcomes of the session

The Regional Assembly members:

- Confirmed the importance of activities under Result Area 4 although the situation in each country varies in terms of current achievements and country specifics. This will need to be addressed when developing work plans so that the right interventions are selected.
- Stressed the need for regional collaboration and learning from each other, as well as building synergies with other activities and donor supported projects as the forest sector is important for greening the economy.
- The representative from the European Environment Agency (EEA) briefed the participants on the EEA and CoE cooperation with the Eastern Partnership countries on biodiversity and called for continued interaction with the WB in this field, especially in terms of building the countries' reporting and monitoring capacity. Cooperation could be broadened by bringing in civil society.

Item 7. Monitoring progress at environment-economy nexus (Result 5)

Mr. Krzysztof Michalak, OECD, briefly introduced the status of work plans related to Outputs 5.3 of the Result 5. He underlined a high demand expressed by countries to work on this subject, including work on green growth measurement at the country level. He also highlighted an interest from countries to provide comparable data which can be incorporated and presented in international databases. In this context, he referred to the need to co-ordinate work with the SEIS II project implemented by the European Environment Agency. Furthermore, he pointed out a need to develop a baseline report that would show the current status of policy and institutional development and allow future evaluation of progress. OECD offered to prepare such a report on the basis of country inputs provided during the meeting of the EaP Panel on Environment and Climate (27 May, Vienna) and other materials.

Outcomes of the session

The Regional Assembly members:

- Underlined the importance of building effective environmental monitoring systems which are in a way that are adapted to country-specific needs can provide policy-relevant data and analysis.
- Called for actions that can show progress on policy reform. Some countries called for support in a specific area, such a developing possible approaches to the assessment of progress with the implementation of the Association Agreements and developing guidance for conducting such assessments.
- The representatives of the European Union called for making connections with the measurement of progress under 20 Deliverables for 2020 and new post 2020 commitments.
- The representatives of the European Environment Agency called for close co-operation between the Ministries of Environment and statistical agencies and synergies with the EU-funded Shared Environmental Information System (ENI SEIS II East) Project and other networks, such as UNECE work on environment on environment monitoring and assessments.
- Representatives of the EaP Civil Society Forum expressed the readiness to be actively engaged in this work by contributing with positive examples of progress and good practices but also carrying independent assessments to identify challenges and areas for further efforts.

Item 8. Action governance, communications and visibility

Mr. Krzysztof Michalak, OECD, and Ms. Rie Tsutsumi, UN Environment briefly introduced the regional (Regional Assembly and Partners Coordination Board) and national level arrangements (National Implementation Committees, National Focal Points, National Action Coordinators and Technical Topic Managers) and key elements of the Action Visibility and Communication Plan.

Outcomes of the session

The Regional Assembly members:

- Highlighted the need to link governance arrangements supporting to the Result 1 related to the inter-ministerial coordination on greening the economy. They also agreed that some arrangements may differ between the Implementing Partners, especially under Result 4 in which the important role would be played by the World Bank EaP country offices.
- Highlighted the importance of the official in-country registration of the Action and offered support in this regard. The participants asked the OECD to work further with individual countries to collect information about the registration process and also to disseminate contacts of team members in each of the Implementing Partners;
- Called for identification of key audience for visibility and communication efforts and of relevant and appropriately differentiated products, as well as for further discussion on specific targets to reach various audiences and dedicated campaigns to reach them.
- Called for using at full the existing channels for communication and visibility efforts. The EaP countries offered to use their Ministries web sites while the European Commission to use such channels, such as an EU OPEN Neighbours site and the communication channels of the EU Delegations in the EaP countries.
- UN Environment offered to share a study on types of media to use. Additionally, the representatives of the NGOs offered their networks and channels in the region to disseminate information about the Action and receive feedback.

Item 9. Feedback and closure of Day 1

Ms. Angela Bularga, DG NEAR, European Commission, briefly summarised the discussions during the day and highlighted the political imperative of combining work on environment and economy and focusing on implementation and achieving concrete results. She also recognised high demand for activities under the Action and asked for further clarification of priorities in the work plans with the objective to start the Action's implementation in September 2019.

Item 10. Brief introduction to Day 2 agenda

- The Chair welcomed the participants and introduced the agenda of the day.

Item 11. Strengthening Capacities of the EaP Country Government for Greening the Economy

Introduction

Mr. Krzysztof Michalak, OECD, underlined that stronger institutional capacity for greening the economy, an area covered by Result 3.4 of the EU4Environment Description of the Action, is an important factor of effective policy implementation. He highlighted progress in institutional strengthening that has been happening in the region, as for example in: i) Armenia where the Ministry of Natural Resources became the Ministry of Environment with an enlarged portfolio of responsibilities, ii) Belarus and Georgia where Green Economy Departments were created in the Ministries of Economy, iii) Moldova where a separate Environmental Agency was established or iv) Ukraine where a strong Reform Support Unit was created in the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources. In several countries inter-ministerial working groups have been established on green economy-related topics, which today allow for closer co-operation among the Ministries and better co-ordination of efforts.

However, he also signalled several challenges that the environmental agencies face, especially in the context of recent and ongoing structural reforms of the public administration (e.g. a merger of Ministries of Environment and of Agriculture in Georgia, or a merger of the three Ministries of Environment, of Agriculture and of Regional Development into one in Moldova). Such structural changes often result in substantial losses of posts or increased responsibilities without the provision of adequate resources.

He pointed out that there was no single model for environmental institutional set up and the government structures were usually subject to internal political determination. However, he pointed out several key elements, such as organisation and planning procedures, recruitment and performance evaluation, that should be in place to make the institutions more effective and efficient.

Presentations

Representatives of Armenia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine shared their experiences from recent initiatives that build capacities of their governments for green economy.

Armenia

To fulfil the provisions of Article 12 of the Armenia's Constitution which calls for the promotion of environmental protection and the sustainable development principle, a new draft law on environment protection was submitted to the Parliament, aiming to integrate environment protection into economic and social policy. In this context, and as a result of the ongoing government structural reform that aims to reorganise and decrease the number of the Ministries (from 17 to 12), the Ministry of Natural Recourses was renamed the Ministry of Environment, with new and wider competencies added and its budget

increased. A new structure of the Ministry is currently under development and the creation of an environment agency is planned. The reform also envisages the creation of a unified monitoring system (previously split among different Ministries – of Environment, of Emergency Situations).

Republic of Moldova

The current administrative capacity in the environmental sector of the Republic of Moldova is facing the challenges and consequences of the 2016 governmental reform, when three ministries (Agriculture, Regional Development and Environment) were merged into one. On the one hand, this move allowed uniting former conflicting domains raising a potential for more co-ordinated work, e.g. on promoting sustainable and organic agriculture or efficient environmental infrastructure for regional and rural development. On the other hand, the merger resulted in staff reduction to only 29 posts in the environment part of the Ministry and loss of experienced staff.

In 2018, to close the implementation gap, a decision was taken to create an Environmental Agency to which some divisions of the former Ministry of Environment were moved together. The Agency also received parts of administrative functions (e.g. authorisation, monitoring and information management in the field of environment) from the State Ecological Inspectorate. The Agency, which has now 136 posts (including 21 at the local level), has two regional branches and covers such activities as EIA, SEA, ecological expertise, permitting, integrated environmental information system, monitoring of environmental quality, biodiversity conservation, reduction of air pollution and waste management. Within the Agency, the National Environmental Reference Laboratory was also established. The Government plans to make the new Agency visible at the national and regional level, providing the public with reliable and timely data on environment. Though mainly completed by staff, the Agency still needs to develop capacity, knowledge and practical experience to fulfil its functions (42 posts still vacant).

As part of the development of policies for greening economic growth, cooperation between the Ministries of Environment and of Economy was improved over the past 5 years. A dialogue across the Ministries was established under a Working Group on Green Economy and Sustainable Development. Despite progress, adequate financing for green investment is still a challenge due to cuts in the budget. There is also a need for better management of funds, increased efficiency of spending, as well as proper monitoring.

Ukraine

The Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Ukraine, with the staff of about 250, plays an important role in environmental management. However, its capacities are still being developed. To accelerate the process, a Reform Support Team, funded by external donors was set up in the Ministry (similar teams were created in other Ministries). The team consists of independent experts that develop reform agendas, draft policies, laws and regulations for submission to the government. In the Ministry of Ecology, the team works on nine specific areas and ensures links between donors, civil society and business.

Reform is based on three pillars: people, time and resources. Reforms focus on identifying the core policy and regulatory making functions for the Ministry and separating them from implementing functions. Emphasis is also being placed on strengthening environmental awareness and action by the Ministry of Economy, developing sustainable sources of green finance (including plans to establish an environmental fund with two tiers at central and regional level, based on the Polish model), and clarifying and strengthening the roles of authorities at the sub-national level (i.e. making them less reliant on the central government). A good communication strategy to explain to the public why the government is implementing reforms is an important part, with such elements as annual monitoring of reform (with help from academia) and communication of the results.

European Commission's Centre for Thematic Studies

Ms. Ritva Heikkinen, European Commission, shared experiences from the European Union on strengthening governance systems (EC/OECD cooperation through SIGMA programme on public administration reforms). She underlined the importance of departing from institutional silos (which lead to poor coordination among work streams of both governments and donors) and moving towards a unified administration with common rules, quality control, procedures to prepare laws, set of institutions and investment planning. She also highlighted the need for separation of policy-making and implementation, delegating decision making to the most appropriate bodies at sub-national level. This requires changes in administrative culture, establishing a proper management culture (i.e. middle management working towards common goals), de-politisation of civil servants, as well as improved capacity to collect evidence/data that can be used for impact assessment. Ms. Heikkinen also pointed out the need to create an incentive framework for the trained people not to leave administration for the private sector.

Discussion

The representative of the European Commission referred to the need to establish links with the EC/OECD [SIGMA](#) programme on public administration reforms that already prepared baseline assessments in several countries. It was also suggested that some examples from the OECD's earlier work on "[Assessing Environmental Management Capacity: Towards a Common Reference Framework](#)" could be used.

The representative of Austria highlighted that reforms are a continuous process, which requires constant adjustments. It requires assigning the right functions to institutions and building their implementation capacity. She referred to the importance of institutional building around five pillars that drive environmental policy: 1) environment impact assessment (also regulatory and financial); 2) permitting; 3) enforcement; 4) reliable information; 5) proper monitoring. She suggested to use the EU support, e.g. TAIEX, Twinning Programmes and the EU member states knowledge, in building capacities in the region.

Representatives of EaP CSF referred to this discussion as a historical moment of an open and transparent discussion about problems affecting environmental reforms and administrative capacity. They underlined the need for a better dialogue between Ministries to enhance the environmental political agenda. They also encouraged to bring more stakeholders into the environmental dialogue. They referred to the EaP Civil Society Forum [Policy Paper](#) which recommended to design institutional reforms in a strategic way, having a short- and long-term vision, supporting dialogue with the civil society and open discussion which contribute to reform.

The representative of Georgia highlighted that the number of Ministries decreased as a result of 2017 reforms when Ministries of Environment and of Agriculture were merged. She underlined the existing challenges, such as adequate distribution of responsibilities across departments and Ministries; lack of human resources and lack of communication among different departments; as well as the time needed to get used to a new system, new tools and rules. All these processes require resources.

Key outcomes of the session

The session showed several positive examples of institutional strengthening for green economy in all countries of the region. However, the participants also agreed that several challenges remain, especially as concerns:

- reduced resources (human and financial, as a result of budgetary cuts and merged portfolios),

- conflicting priorities within and among Ministries (as a result of the merging of competing domains into one Ministry),
- lack of clearly defined functions at the national and subnational level,
- high staff turnover (loss of knowledge and continuity), as well as the need for continuous capacity building.

The discussion showed a strong demand for Activity 3.4 of Result 3 on Administrative Capacity for Environmental Management across the EaP region that will allow environmental institutions to carry out their respective functions more effectively and promote integration of environmental requirements into social and economic policies. The participants highlighted a need for adaptation to country-specific needs and focusing on achieving tangible improvements.

The participants highlighted the need for more effective separation of policy from implementation, and compliance monitoring functions at the national, regional and municipal levels. They called for analysis and recommendations on the optimal environmental institutional set up and building capacities in other sectors. They called for links with work on other results, such as on green economy policies, enforcement system and green finance.

Several participants called for improving cooperation between Ministries of Environment and of Economy. They also called for involving other sectoral Ministries into dialogue (building capacity beyond Ministries of Environment) which would help to raise environmental issues on the political agenda. Finally, they underlined the importance of communication and explanation to the public on reforms. Several agreed on the important role of civil society in keeping governments accountable for the results of their reforms.

Item 12. “Small group” session to discuss and complete the work plans

This session provided an opportunity for informal discussions on the completion of the work plans, and specific short-term priorities. There were six country tables in the meeting room to which the Partner organisations came for a limited discussion time of 30 minutes. After each round, the Partners moved for a discussion with the next country.

The outcomes of this session will be incorporated into the revised regional and national work plans.

Item 13. Summary and closure

During the summary session the participants reiterated their commitments to the EU4Environment Action. They recalled the political imperative of working on environment and economy together, focussing on implementation and long-term capacity building. They recognised high demand for activities but welcomed the clarification of plans and prioritisation of activities. They agreed on reviewing their priorities and providing additional guidance to the work plans. They also reiterated the importance of ensuring the Action’s high visibility (press release was published on [EU Neighbours East web site](#)).

The participants provided also a positive feedback on the structure of the meeting, especially on the small working group discussion (“dynamic networking”) and bringing the Partners, EU member states and EC to share their experiences on specific subjects. They welcomed the participation of the representatives of the EU Delegations and encouraged their participation in future events.

The participants also agreed on the practical follow up that will include:

- Pictures from the meeting and the press release will be sent around within a few days after the meeting;

- Summary record and the revised work plans (regional and six national) would be sent to the participants by end of July for comments **by 6 September 2019.**

It was agreed also that several activities will be implemented in July-August 2019 while a large-scale implementation will start in September 2019.

Progress on the Action implementation will be presented at the next Eastern Partnership Panel on Environment and Climate Change expected in early 2020 and at the EaP Ministerial Meeting on Environment and Climate Change that is tentatively planned for the second half of 2020.

The second Regional Assembly meeting will be held at the end of October 2020. Countries and Partners were invited to consider hosting the event.

Annex A. List of participants

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