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In 2007, the United Nations continued to co-operate with the OSCE secretariat concerning economic and environmental issues that often underlie violent conflicts. In this area, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) works closely with the Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities. The co-operative work is successfully underpinned by the UNECE – OSCE Memorandum of Understanding and is largely undertaken in the framework of the 2003 OSCE “Maastricht” Strategy Document ([http://www.unece.org/trans/ead\\_sec.htm](http://www.unece.org/trans/ead_sec.htm)). UNECE member States welcome co-operation with the OSCE secretariat in the economic and environmental dimension ([http://www.unece.org/press/pr2007/07gen\\_p07e.htm](http://www.unece.org/press/pr2007/07gen_p07e.htm)) as it represents an excellent example of a complementary partnership - a partnership that highlights the link between security and economic/environmental factors.

For its part, the UNECE offers a multilateral forum. Specifically, the UNECE platform facilitates co-operation and greater economic integration through negotiation of international legal instruments and development of regulations and norms. This was particularly so in 2007 in the area of the environment as "Key challenges to ensure environmental security and sustainable development in the OSCE area: Land degradation, soil contamination and water management" was the theme of the OSCE Economic and Environmental Dimension.

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In the area of the environment, the UNECE secretariat manages five international conventions and twelve related protocols. Four of the five UNECE conventions focus on regional or transboundary co-operation. **Not only do they provide frameworks to address cross-border environmental issues, but they are also practical and indispensable instruments to prevent conflict.** The UNECE Aarhus Convention, the fifth convention, promotes dialogue between countries at the level of civil society. In doing so, it also contributes to increased regional security.

- With the help of its Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes the UNECE is tackling a wide range of water problems: overexploitation, droughts, floods and contamination. The water challenges are complicated by the transboundary nature of water resources in the UNECE region. More than 150 major rivers and 50 large lakes run along or straddle borders. Twenty countries depend on neighbouring countries for over 10 per cent of their water resources and five countries draw 75 per cent of their resources from upstream countries.
- The Espoo (Environmental Impact Assessment) Convention requires countries to assess the environmental impact at early stages of planning. It also obliges countries to notify and consult each other on all major projects that are likely to have a significant adverse transboundary environmental impact.

- The Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents helps countries to prevent industrial accidents that can have transboundary effects, to prepare for accidents and to respond to them. The convention also encourages countries to help each other in the event of such an accident; to co-operate on research and development; and to share information and technology.
- The Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution deals with problems of air pollution. Air pollutants can travel several thousands of kilometres. The convention sets up an institutional framework to address these issues and brings together policy and research.
- The “UNECE Aarhus Convention” is not only an environmental agreement, but it is also a convention about government accountability, transparency and responsiveness. It does not focus on regional or transboundary issues *per se*, but on interactions between the citizens and their public authorities.

These international legal instruments together with the UNECE secretariat represent effective institutional structures. They have been in place for years and behind them, there are hundreds of national experts linked in professional networks.

In 2007, the UNECE continued to partner successfully with the OSCE, in particular in the context of security, transboundary co-operation on shared water and other natural resources.

- The UNECE is a partner in the Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC) and is working co-operatively with all ENVSEC partners, including the OSCE ([http://www.unece.org/trans/ead\\_sec.htm#Environment](http://www.unece.org/trans/ead_sec.htm#Environment)).
- Transboundary water co-operation in the rivers Chu and Talas, shared by Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and Dniester, shared by the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine have developed significantly due to continued joint UNECE - OSCE efforts.
- The UNECE also works well with individual countries. In 2007, the UNECE continued to work with the incoming OSCE Chair-in-Office. “Dam safety in Central Asia: Capacity building for regional co-operation” is a major and successful joint undertaking of the UNECE and the Finnish government.

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In May 2007, at the OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum, as it is a well-established, the UNECE presented its review of the implementation of OSCE commitments in the area of the environment ([http://www.unece.org/trans/osce/osceunece/15th\\_OSCE\\_2007\\_Final.pdf](http://www.unece.org/trans/osce/osceunece/15th_OSCE_2007_Final.pdf)).

The UNECE review emphasized developments in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) and South-Eastern Europe (SEE). The OSCE participating States in these two regions have made considerable progress in implementing their environmental commitments. However, implementation has been uneven and there remains much work to be done.

The UNECE report made the following recommendations:

- Governments of EECCA and SEE countries should urgently turn their attention towards their environmental institutions. The institutions should be strengthened in order to make them more proficient and effective
- National environmental priorities should be re-assessed and more realistic programs should be developed if they are to attract financing
- Greater effort should be devoted to more effective implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements. Their ratification should be sped up, where necessary
- Monitoring, reporting and assessment should be made more prominent instruments in environmental policy-making
- Finally, more attention should be paid to “education for sustainable development”.

The report stressed that there remained much room for improvement in the elementary – but indispensable – areas of data collection and dissemination, target setting, indicator-based assessment, compliance monitoring and education.

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The environment did not only prevail at the OSCE in 2007. It was also present on the UN agenda. One of the Millennium Development Goals seeks to “ensure environmental sustainability”. The goal’s targets to “integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programs and reverse the loss of environmental resources” as well as to “halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation”, are very much desired.

The UNECE is actively contributing to meeting these targets. For example,

- The UNECE’s forest area has continued to expand by roughly one million hectares per year since 1990 due in part to effective promotion of sustainable forest management by the UNECE Timber Committee (in co-operation with the FAO). By comparison, the world as a whole loses about 13 million hectares of forest per year. The UNECE Timber Committee monitors every

aspect of forests - environmental, social and economic. This information is used to ensure greater environmental security.

- Energy use per unit of GDP is decreasing in the UNECE region contributing, in turn, to a lower rate of CO2 emissions. The UNECE's Energy Efficiency 21 Project (EE-21) is actively promoting the formation of an energy efficiency market in Eastern Europe.
- The Protocol on Water and Health - developed under the auspices of the UNECE and WHO - is helping reduce the number of people who do not have access to safe water and adequate sanitation. In the UNECE region, about 140 million people live in such conditions making them vulnerable to water-related diseases. Every year in the UNECE region, over 13 thousand children die due to poor water conditions.