Towards a Shared Environmental Information Systems in the European Neighbourhood

ENPI-SEIS implementation of priority data flows
Report on the national workshop

2-3 December 2013, Tbilisi, Georgia

The workshop was opened by the ***Deputy Minister of Environment and Natural Resources Protection of Georgia*** expressing gratitude to the European Union Delegation, European Environmental Agency for their significant contribution to the field of environmental protection in Georgia over many years of cooperation. Among the current Ministry's prioroties are the development of the national monitoring system and the preparation of indicator-based national enviornmental reports, both of which fit the ENPI-SEIS project objectives. The implementation of ENPI-SEIS project would provide an opportunity to improve the preparation process of state of the environment (SoE) documents and approximate the report to the European reporting standards. The cooperation of the Environment Monitoring System of Georgia with the National Statistics Office of Georgia (GEOSTAT) for preparation the SoE based on SEIS indicators is an important step for implementation of SEIS. Additionally, the Ministry expressed its readiness for further cooperation to guarantee a safe and healthy environment that eventually would contribute to the successful implementation of the national priorities.

Deputy Executive Director of GEOSTAT welcomed participants and remarked on the importance of cooperation with the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection. It was emphasized that in the framework of SEIS implementation GEOSTAT will improve EuroStat recommendations in the field of data collection and standards. The Memorandum of Understanding, prepared between the Ministry and GEOSTAT, will facilitate achievement of European standards.

On behalf of the EU Delegation to Georgia, the ***Head of Operations Delegation*** expressed willingness to facilitate the implementation of the project in Georgia in the best possible manner. The importance of data availability, especially access of the broad public to the information, was highlighted.

Head of Governance and Networks Programme, European Environment Agency (EEA) welcomed participants and mentioned that the ENPI-SEIS project will help move Georgia closer to Europe in the environmental protection area, especially in the light of recent political developments. It was said that EEA is interested in strengthening cooperation with all national institutions with the aim of ENPI-SEIS project implementation, in particular sharing environmental data to meet the main objective of this phase of the project.

After the introduction of the workshop participants the ***representative of the EEA*** introduced SEIS principles, expectations of the current project phase, and benefits for countries participating in ENPI-SEIS. Shared infrastructures and tools were presented. Eionet as an efficient reporting system already works in European countries according to the SEIS principles, which provide for the collection of information once and for use by multiple recipients. Collecting data via EEA helps to avoid overlap and duplication, and deceases the time for information processing. EEA does not check the quality of the data by itself instead countries are responsible for providing compatible and verified data. Gathered data is easily used for the preparation of the environmental assessments and reports within Europe.

Session 1 focused on moving from SEIS awareness to SEIS implementation at the country level. The representative of EEA noted the progress made on implementing SEIS in the East partner countries, spoke of success cases and challenges in the cooperation so far, and identified capacity development needs.

Among the remaining challenges are missing indicators, a weak monitoring network, data reliability and collection methods, IT infrastructure and an absence of required software.

In the next steps of the ENPI-SEIS project, a lot of attention will be paid to the national workshops in the ENPI East partner countries, pilot indicators production and sharing (jointly with the UNECE Joint Task Force), synthesis document summarizing SEIS developments and the progress made in the 2010-2014 period, and lessons learned as a basis for future activities.

It was concluded that beyond September 2014 the EEA role in the ENPI region – and Georgia in particular – will depend on the interest and commitment shown to continue the cooperation in implementing SEIS, the input to future regional assessment(s) (next by 2016) and national state of environment reporting based on SEIS principles. The ENPI cooperation is among the priorities for the EEA Multi-annual Work Programme for 2014-2018, and availability of EU funding for the next phase of cooperation is currently under discussion.

ENPI-SEIS National Focal Point (NFP) in Georgia from the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection of Georgia reviewed the ENPI-SEIS project and national priorities, as well as the country-specific summary of the priority datasets. It was stressed that the national priorities matched the regional thematic priorities of the ENPI-SEIS project, and synergy between SEIS project and other projects of UNECE, Twinning and USAID on environmental information is very important. Existing challenges and needs were mentioned such as the importance of development of an environmental monitoring network, development of contemporary standards and methodologies, better coordination among the different institutions, availability of financial resources, etc. Among possible outcomes of the ENPI-SEIS project were emphasized the opportunity to strengthen coordination between governmental bodies, improve reporting system, introduce data collection software, analyse and systematize environmental data using modern technology, and improve access to environmental information.

ENPI-SEIS NFP from GEOSTAT reviewed producing environmental statistics and interaction between two main providers of environmental information – the Ministry and GEOSTAT. It was highlighted the importance of MoU and benefits from it: receiving statistical information on a regular basis, opportunity of instantly renewing environmental statistics data on the website of GEOSTAT and creation of the bilateral working group which will prepare recommendations and proposals about producing statistical products, determining future needs and tasks.

The representative of Zoï Environment Network briefly introduced the state of 11 priority datasets in the main areas – air, climate, water, waste and biodiversity. Nine priority datasets from 11 are available in Georgia and can be shared internationally, including with EEA. Monitoring-based data (air and water quality) have very broad temporal and geographic resolution and different sources of origin, and require expert discussions about main data sources, locations and technicalities of data reporting. As an initial step, the existing selected data could be shared while specific reporting systems are being studied and implemented. Municipal waste data generation needs to be streamlined at a domestic level

and decisions need to be taken on which datasets should be prioritized for international reporting and sharing. Synergies between Twinning projects and ENPI-SEIS activities are useful and should to be encouraged for data generation, not only for waste but also for air and water.

ICZM NFP in Georgia**,** enviroGRIDS Task Manager for GeoGraphic GIS and RS Consulting Center GeoGraphic introduced SEIS and Earth observation capacity-building in INSPIRE and GEO/GEOSS context for Georgia – following up on outcomes of enviroGRIDS and other EU project initiatives. The presentation included the brief description of FP7 enviroGRIDS project (enviroGRIDS.net) activities, one of the outcomes of which is the recent support to the Georgian environmental decision-makers to join ongoing European and global initiatives contributing into the implementation of SEIS, such as GEO/GEOSS and INSPIRE.

Session 2 discussed in depth the main project clusters – air, climate change, water, waste and biodiversity. It described the legislative framework and regulations for the protection of ambient ***air*** and for the assessment and collection of data on emissions of harmful substances, and presented data on the main polluting industries and regions and cities of Georgia. The data on emissions stationary sources are collected from polluter companies by filling the forms. Air emissions from mobile sources are collected by GEOSTAT. Problems include an absence of a new system of submitting forms, reliability of data, lack of relevant knowledge, incomplete control on accuracy of data and an outdated database. Data on monitoring of ambient air quality that are being collected by the National Environmental Agency (NEA) in five Georgian cities at eight measurement locations are recorded in an electronic database. The raw data are not available for download from the NEA website, but are accessible to the general public free of charge. NEA has a modern automated air monitoring station installed in Tbilisi, but the data from the new automated station are not published on the web.

Georgia, as a Party to UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol actively deals with ***climate change*** issues; in particular, it regularly prepares GHG inventories and National Communications, despite such problems as an absence of a national system for data collection and processing, the lack of a national GHG inventory team that would mean continuous flow of information from different organizations, no timelines for preparation of National Communications, etc. Among other existing problems the lack of staff and technology, an insufficient number and poor quality of hydro-meteorological monitoring stations, reliability of data and difficulties in data collection were listed. The implementation of ENPI-SEIS project is expected to assist in partly resolving the problems.

The data on ***water*** use were collected based on statistical forms – state accounting of water use, which had been updated after 1990 though the existing updated form was also outdated and needed further improvement. The new form would give the possibility to use different tools such as GIS in a more user-friendly format. The statistical forms had to be completed by any enterprise-water user despite the sector they represented, and submitted annually to the regional body of the Ministry that was approving the form and sending to the Service. At present the described system of collection of statistical forms does not work, as in 2011 the regional bodies of the Ministry were abolished. Before 2011 the summarized data in the forms of tables were available at the websites of former Aarhus Centre Georgia and GEOSTAT. Accordingly the proposed solutions addressing the stated problems included: development of an electronic system of submission of statistic forms; improvement of self-monitoring of wastewater quality; development of an effective mechanism for verification of information; strengthening legal requirements related to reporting by enterprises; revision,

development and adoption of indicators on water use and wastewater discharge on the national level; improvement of the system of statistical data analysis and harmonization of the system with international classifications and EU-wide reporting; application of GIS in the field of water use and capacity-building of staff.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, ***hydrometeorological monitoring*** in the country significantly decreased the standard observational network, totally stopped specialized hydrometeorological observations (upper air, radar, actinometric, glaciological, etc.), totally stopped digitized processing of regime hydrometeorological data, etc. In this regard the representative of the hydrometeorological department stressed the role of donor organizations and countries in supporting the department to expand the observational network and improve both observation and data processing.

The establishment of a ***waste*** management information system in Georgia was represented by the Twinning project. Waste data is a really big issue in Georgia, but it is not accurate to say that waste data do not exist at all. These data are not collected in one place. Many different projects are working on this issue, some municipalities have collected waste data, but still there is not one unit for collecting. In this regard the Twinning project representative introduced the main objectives of the project, such as reviewing the legislative framework and developing both National Waste Classification System and List of Waste. The representative also stressed the importance of identifying the responsible body for waste classification. Among main challenges in this area were listed as follows: sampling and testing of waste; synchronization of waste classification procedure and permitting; and registration of waste management activities, etc. The Waste Management Data Base is aimed at standardized reporting formats, establishment of electronic reporting, web-based services for data exchange, inter-institutional cooperation for environmental information and statistics issues.

In the final cluster, on ***biodiversity***, the representative of the Service of Biodiversity Protection presented the National Biodiversity Monitoring System, and reported on the challenges and responses to the weaknesses of methodologies, to problems of incomplete mismatched and unreliable data and to limited financial and human resources, among others. Georgia signed several international agreements and has reporting obligations in the field of biodiversity protection. The interactive map of the protected areas was introduced to the participants.

Session 3 was completed with information about the ***Environmental Information and Education Centre***, which aims to collect and share environmental information, among other goals. The Centre facilitates access to environmental information, public participation in environmental decision-making and access to justice, as well as promotes environmental awareness-raising of the general public and supports the training and improvement of skills of professionals. The environmental data-gathering centre is to be established within the Environmental Information and Education Centre.

In ***Sessions 3*** SEIS NFPs led the discussion of indicator-specific next steps and milestones, including the legal, institutional and technical areas and needs to be addressed for implementing SEIS, initiating data sharing, as well capacity-building needs and learning from EEA/EU experience and country-specific issues. It was mentioned that it was important to improve the collection of information on waste and outlined that implementation of the ENPI-SEIS project was very timely. SEIS NFPs asked for the assistance in relation to EU directives under the EU-Georgia Association Agreement, especially in the field of air and

water.

Participants were then invited to read through the statement of the meeting and to provide any remaining observations. The final edition of the statement will be discussed with GEOSTAT and distributed to EEA in January 2014.

With ***Session 4*** the meeting was concluded by summarizing the main results of the SEIS national workshop including the following priority themes for Georgia:

- Revising and updating of SEIS country background paper
- Finalizing the statement document in cooperation with GEOSTAT
- Initiating data sharing in the framework of recent phase of the ENPI-SEIS project

In concluding remarks, the representatives of EEA, the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resource Protection and GEOSTAT thanked the participants for their active participation and valuable inputs.