

**Regional meeting on Open Data and e-government for the environment –
countries of the Eastern Partnership**

Bringing together relevant information for regular environmental assessments – building on results from the ENI SEIS II East project to increase their availability, dissemination and multiple use

5-6 March 2019

President Hotel

Kyiv, Ukraine

MEETING MINUTES

Introduction

ENI SEIS II East Project 2016-2020 is set in the context of the Eastern Partnership (Eastern Partnership Countries) Initiative. The main objective of the project is to continue to implement the principles and practices of the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS). The project builds on previous cooperative activities in the six Eastern Partnership countries.

In the context of this project, the regional seminar “Bringing together relevant information for regular environmental assessments – building on results from the ENI SEIS II East project to increase their availability, dissemination and multiple use” was held on 5-6 March 2019 in Kiev. The goal of the seminar was to discuss the key findings from country draft maturity reports on Open Data, e-governance and environmental information and share best practice experience among countries.

Key objectives of the meeting were as follow:

- Identify feasible and practical means for modernising environmental information systems and raising the profile of environmental information through its accessibility, sharing and harvesting additional environmental, social and economic benefits;
- Connect relevant people involved in environment and Open Data/e-government activities and facilitate their work together through sharing of information and knowledge;
- Present activities and results from the ENI SEIS II East project in various thematic areas in the context of Open Data/e-government and good practices related to the Aarhus Convention and the Protocol on PRTRs. Identify key challenges and future actions;
- Inform on current activities and initiatives related to Open Data happening in the EU and their potential relevance for ENI East countries;
- Present and discuss the findings of the draft Open Data maturity reports for the ENI East countries and the way forward to address the gaps identified (for each SEIS pillar) – plenary and group discussions;
- Discuss a draft road map to achieve a step-wise implementation of the Open Data for environment with cross-sectorial inputs and benefits.



Key findings from sessions

Session 1: Opening and introduction

The first session started with greeting words from Mykola Kuzio (Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Ukraine), Galina Georgieva (European Environment Agency) and Angela Bularga (European Commission, DG NEAR). The scene was set up with a short introduction over the regional meeting, the project, and the context in which Eastern Partnership countries and the European Union evolve regarding sharing and dissemination of environmental information.

In particular, the speakers presented the general state of access to environmental information and regular environmental assessments in the context of e-government, Open Data, and data and knowledge management for the state of the environment in Europe. It provided an overview of the latest activities related to the implementation of the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention), its Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTR), and their relation to ENI SEIS II East project activities. In particular, Maryna Yanush from the UNECE presented the reporting principles and priorities of the Aarhus Convention and the Protocol on PRTR. The first session was closed by a tour de table of the participants to present themselves.

Session 2: Environmental data readiness – what can be achieved in the project framework

The second session was focused on common content and environmental data readiness in Eastern Partnership countries (EaP).

The presentation by the European Environment Agency “*Streamlining reporting and data sharing: Streamlining reporting and data sharing: some examples from the ENI SEIS II East project*” showed how the “*State of the Environment online*” should look like, pointing to the importance of providing 1) a story/assessment of environmental indicators, 2) interactive graphs, 3) an indicator management system, and 4) an open access to data. The presentation also summarised the objectives of the project ENI SEIS II East, highlighting the importance of environmental indicators for water, biodiversity, land and air quality.

The UNECE presented an overview of processes related to production and sharing of environmental indicators and assessments. PwC presented the objective of the project “*Sharing and dissemination of Environmental information*”, the methodology used to compile the draft country Open Data maturity reports, and key findings in terms of “*content*”, in accordance with the three SEIS pillar (Institutional cooperation, common content, infrastructure).

The Eastern Partnership countries draft country analysis showed that Belarus is leading in the field of e-government, based on the UN E-government Development Index (EGDI)¹, while Moldova is performing well in the field of Open Data based on the Open Data Inventory score (ODIN)². In order to strengthen environmental information sharing, PwC presented best practices, highlighting the

¹ <https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/en-us/About/Overview/-E-Government-Development-Index>

² <http://odin.opendatawatch.com>



necessity to have a clear strategy, to update the existing legislation to remove restrictions for environmental information sharing, to encourage institutional cooperation, to make environment data available and to use metadata standards to describe datasets, to update the existing information systems, and to encourage user participation and the creation of communities.

It was noted that environmental data are in high demand, but difficult to manage. In this context, Open Data can provide the potential to unlock the benefits of data sharing and improve the access to data. Moreover, it was highlighted that environmental indicators are often presented without assessment nor analysis, while interactive data and graphs are also lacking.

Session 3: Legal framework, institutional cooperation and networking

E-government, Open data and legal/institutional arrangements for sharing and disseminating environmental and related information

The third session was for presenting the existing legal framework and institutional cooperation within Eastern Partnership countries, followed by the presentation of best practices from EU countries (Slovakia, Austria and Serbia).

The following points were presented by the Eastern Partnership countries:

- *Armenia*: the country presented the central e-government portal, the existing information systems, and the current initiatives for fostering sharing and dissemination of environmental information. In addition, the country presented the mechanisms in place for sharing environmental information between institutions.
- *Azerbaijan*: the country presented the main responsibilities of the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources, the main bilateral agreements and coordination mechanisms at national international level, and the role of national statistics in environmental indicators. In addition, the country briefly presented the national strategy for the future of Azerbaijan and the sustainable development plan.
- *Belarus*: the country presented how environmental data are distributed among different ministries and compiled in the national monitoring system. The country also presented the coordination mechanism in place at national level and key issues related to environmental data sharing and Open Data.
- *Georgia*: the country presented the newly established Environmental Information and Education Centre and air quality portal. In addition, Georgia provided insights regarding the current initiatives regarding environmental information and the existing legal framework.
- *Republic of Moldova*: the country presented the national mechanisms and the organisational structure in place for managing environmental data and information.
- *Ukraine*: the country presented the concept of Open Environment, and the mechanisms in place for regular dissemination of environmental information.

Overall, EaP countries have established Laws on Open Data and access to environmental information and most of them are currently in the process of updating them. Countries are promoting the exchange of data among institutions by forming inter-institutional agreements, e.g. between the Ministry responsible for the environment, its subordinate agencies and the statistical office. It is



common that there is a large variety of agreements, while there is no standard framework for these agreements that would allow simplicity and common requirements for all parties involved in environmental data exchange.

After the presentations from EaP countries, Austria, Serbia and Slovakia presented their experience in gathering, sharing and disseminating environmental information. In particular:

- *Johannes Bauer, from the Umweltbundes of Austria and also National Focal Point of the European Environment Agency*, presented the means of collection, exchange and dissemination environmental data in the country and how the country implemented mechanisms to follow EU rules. In addition, it presented the systems in place for air quality monitoring, nature monitoring and lands, and how the Electronic Data Management system supports the exchange of public information at national and international level.
- *Filip Radovic, from the Serbian Environmental Protection Agency*, presented how it implemented the first pillar of the Aarhus Convention. In particular, it explained the overall legal framework, institutional framework, data flows, information systems and portals which were implemented for sharing and disseminating environmental information.
- *Petra Horvathova, from the Slovak Environment Agency*, presented the legal framework for sharing and disseminating environmental information. The presentation also included an overview of the main information systems, portals used for gathering, sharing and disseminating environmental data and information. Presentation available at: https://youtu.be/q_q_sfEx-3E and <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1HluRSq9az9hPNy2lhgawYcf5YSn2yYcu>
- *Martin Tuchyňa from Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic* presented the e-government, Open Data and INSPIRE arrangements for EnviroICT sharing and dissemination in Slovakia. Presentation available at: <https://youtu.be/eDUkZjRYImI> and <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1uVnf-dd8eV-wnfYllpCir1rPVQr6Zn8>

The European Union countries examples showed the importance of setting legal obligations and developing information systems for monitoring, sharing and disseminating environmental data and information. The session ended with the presentation of key findings from the UNECE/SEIS assessment framework by the European Environment Agency.

Session 4: Infrastructure

The fourth session focused on Open Data portals and environmental portals from a technological perspective. Capgemini presented the EU Open Data maturity reports³, the European Environment Agency presented the EU policy developments around streamlining reporting and SEIS, and PwC presented the key findings from the draft environment Open Data maturity reports for the EaP countries.

The presentation by the European Environment Agency “*EU policy developments around streamlining reporting and SEIS*” provided insights regarding the European Commission Digital (Data) Strategy, the Digital Agenda for Europe, key European policies related to data, the European Commission DG ENV Fitness check 2016-2017, and the action plan to streamline environmental reporting. The actions

³ <https://www.europeandataportal.eu/en/news/open-data-maturity-europe-2018>



presented were 1) amend legislation, 2) change reporting obligations, 3) modernise e-reporting, 4) develop test tools for harvesting, 5) guidance for national information system, 6) promote inspire, 7) better use of Copernicus data, 8) promote citizen science data, 9) cooperate with other thematic areas, and 10) foster a wider international streamlining.

The session highlighted the necessity for developing/upgrading environmental data monitoring and sharing information systems, in order to provide automatic data exchange, and APIs for data retrieval and publication. In this context, existing environmental and Open Data portals should be updated taking into consideration the latest technologies and e-government breakthrough. In particular, the publication of environmental data on various portal (e.g. Open data portal and multiple environmental portals) may lead to difficulties to ensure data consistency across platforms, and thus the primary source for environmental data publication should also be established.

Improving sharing and dissemination of environmental information in Eastern Partnership countries also require 1) the adoption and/or development of metadata standards and licencing norms, 2) the provision of APIs for re-using data, 3) the publication of environmental data on geoportals, 4) the provision of tools for comparing across time and space environmental indicators, and 5) the provision of mechanisms to ensure the quality of the data published.

The session ended with the presentation of experiences in designing and building portals that bridge Open Data initiatives with environmental data and information (presentations made by the Republic of Moldova and Austria).

Session 5: A road map for environment Open Data – bringing the pieces together

The fifth session was dedicated to group discussions regarding potential national initiatives for improving the environmental information dissemination and sharing within the country and the region.

PwC presented the key findings of the event, the next steps of the project and a generic roadmap for EaP countries. Key findings included:

- Governance: set up the right governance model and embed stakeholders for Open Data.
- Necessity to increase awareness about Open Data.
- Numerous and various agreements between institutions for sharing environmental information, which are often not made available online.
- Necessity for licensing norms for Open Data and dissemination of environmental information.
- Necessity to develop/adopt metadata standards for environmental information.
- Difficulty to manage consistency of data published on various platforms.
- Necessity to defined mechanisms to manage confidentiality and data privacy.
- Necessity to defined the granularity of environmental data published according to clear rules.
- User feedback is usually considered at national level.
- Publication of environmental information does not always go through a central environmental information system.
- Lack of "story" to support environmental indicators (assessments).
- Necessity to manage a range of open data and environmental data portals.
- Necessity to define environmental data quality from a monitoring and publication perspective.



On this basis, countries listed the most important initiatives for them and presented them to other countries. The main initiatives presented by countries' representatives are:

- Reviewing legislative framework and establish the governance structure of environmental information exchange.
- Conducting a data inventory to identify which data is available, where it is not duplicated and what is the effective way to publish it.
- Develop a central open data portal (one-stop-shop).
- Improve the links to the data sources. Establish a regular process of data harvesting.
- Have a focal point who will be responsible for providing environmental data or a responsible for data providing.
- Defining metadata standards and applying it to all data published, in order to 1) improve the searchability and usability of data, and 2) Increase the quality of metadata.
- Extend the number of environmental indicators to be published. Define a core list of environmental indicators.
- Improve the multi-lingual aspects.
- Engage with the stakeholders/ civil society/other users to discuss and establish the next steps to be taken at the national level.
- Increasing the awareness of environmental data among the public institutions and citizens to increase the amount of data published and the data re-use.
- Developing the existing information systems to improve their functionalities for sharing and dissemination of environmental information.
- Improve the collaboration between organisations/institutions.
- Leveraging on the regional, EU and global best practices in order to adapt available solutions.

Next steps

The regional meeting was closed with an announcement regarding the next steps of the project. In particular, next steps will be:

- Review of draft reports to integrate the results from the regional meeting, and to integrate/discuss the comments from the EaP countries.
- Draft of best practices for key issues raised in the field of e-government, Open Data and environmental information sharing and dissemination taking into consideration the output of the event.
- Organisation of national round-tables in each EaP country.
- Second regional meeting (provisional date during September 2019).

For the smooth execution of the next steps, it is requested to EaP countries to:

- Nominate a person of contact in each EaP country, with who to communicate for enhancing the draft country maturity report and discuss the roadmap in more details (by 28th March 2019).
- Provide any remaining comments on the "Draft maturity report" in Word by end of March 2019 (in one document) and to provide contact points for its update (by 4th April 2019).
- Further discuss potential actions internally, and prepare with PwC and the EEA the national roundtables.



All presentations are available for download on the project page: <https://eni-seis.eionet.europa.eu/east/areas-of-work/communication/events/project-related-events/regional-event-on-open-data-and-e-government-for-environment-in-the-eni-east-countries>

