

Session report

Eastern region of the Air Convention

– on the way to clean air

Facilitators

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Introduction

While emissions of key air pollutants have been reduced considerably over the past few decades as a result of integrated air pollution management strategies developed under the UNECE Air Convention, progress has been uneven across the UNECE region. In particular in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, due to the increase in energy production, industry growth and urban development, further efforts are needed. To assist countries in the sub-region to improve their air quality management, UNECE has organized a number of activities in the framework of the UNECE Air Convention assistance programme. And partly as response to the call of earlier Saltsjöbaden workshops, several UNECE countries have assisted in bilateral collaborations between experts as well as capacity building.

To avoid damage to the environment, public health and the economy, adopting targets to reduce emissions and introducing measures to enforce them is important. Providing a framework to facilitate these measures, the Convention assists countries in formulating policy responses to the air pollution challenge. Ensuring the implementation and ratification of the Convention and its protocols, most notably the three latest, amended protocols to the Convention — namely: the 1999 Protocol to Abate Acidification, Eutrophication and Ground-level Ozone and its 2012 amended version (Gothenburg Protocol); the 1998 Protocol on Heavy Metals and its 2012 amended version; and the 1998 Protocol on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) and its 2009 amended version — within this region is imperative for the effectiveness of the Convention.

The idea for this session was to have an open discussion about the barriers to ratification and implementation of the Convention and opportunities and benefits in countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia to work on reducing air pollution. The first part of the session focused on identifying the barriers. The second part of the session zoomed in on options to overcome these barriers and benefits of improving air quality in the sub-region. The idea was to get a clear picture of the strengths, the weaknesses, and the opportunities for countries in the sub-region to work on improving air quality and to implement the Convention.

A questionnaire was sent out to countries in the sub-region in preparation of the session. The analysis of this questionnaire helped in identifying the main barriers that pose challenges in the implementation of the Convention. It formed the basis for the discussions at this session.

The session was held under the Chatham House rule. This rule allows people to speak as individuals and to express views that may not be those of their organizations or countries and therefore encourages free discussion. When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed. The key objective of the session was to identify main barriers towards ratification and ways to overcome them.

To lead the discussion, the following presentations were given

- Results of the analysis of the questionnaire regarding barriers (*Ketevan Kordzakhia*)
- Main barriers towards ratification (*all Eastern Region representatives*)
- Results of the analysis of the questionnaire regarding opportunities (*Ketevan Kordzakhia*)
- Examples of management of air pollution in federations (*Katja Kraus, Paul Almodovar, Alexander Romanov*)
- Strategies to encourage the introduction and implementation of ELVs based on BATs in the sub-region (*Jean-Guy Bartaire*)
- EECCA Countries: CLRTAP Reporting and data compilation by CEIP (*Melanie Tista*)
- Increasing awareness and improving understanding of the costs and benefits (*Stefan Åström*)
- Possible ways to overcome barriers (*all Eastern Region representatives*)

All presentations are available at the Saltsjöbaden VI web page, <http://saltsjobaden6.ivl.se/>.

Key conclusions and recommendations

The session concludes that:

The national initiatives and actions have intensified in many parts of the region during the last decade. There are several examples of national initiatives and ongoing efforts to develop and implement legislation (including ELV/BAT standards), and improve emission inventories and air quality assessments.

The support from the international community has helped and is helping national capacity building, enhancing the possibility of ratification of the UNECE Air Convention protocols. Countries in the Eastern Region of the Convention are moving at different speeds, and have different needs; further assistance, tailored to specific needs, would improve the possibility for countries to move forward.

The session recommends that (proposed lead body/stakeholder within brackets):

1. Air pollution awareness needs to be further increased. Real time air quality information and communication tools can deliver relevant and simple messages concerning public health and quality of local environment directly affecting people's quality of life. (*national agencies*)
2. Further efforts are needed to improve emission inventories, including urban and background air quality monitoring. (*UNECE Air Convention, national agencies*)
3. BAT-based regulation should be further developed and promoted for all countries in the region. (*UNECE Air Convention, Parties of the Eastern Region*)
4. The international community should continue to promote action on air pollution in the region through the agenda of international fora at the highest political level. (*international bodies & collaborating governments outside the Eastern Region*)
5. The international community should continue and strengthen support on capacity building and training activities. Guidance are particularly needed on specific requirements in the

annexes to UNECE Air Convention protocols, assistance in developing gridded emission data and emission projections, as well as in decision support analysis (Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA) and Health Impact Assessments (HIA)). (*international bodies & non-Eastern Region governments*)

6. Stakeholders and their rationales should be identified, and the results from air quality analysis should be communicated to them in a tailored way. (*national agencies, industry, institutes, academia, NGO:s*)
7. The calls for revising the provisions – which limit access to flexibility mechanisms – in the latest protocols, and the calls for possibilities for step-wise ratification of the protocols, need to be considered. (*UNECE Air Convention & national agencies*)

Condensed notes from the session

Barriers for ratification

There are many similarities in the identified barriers for ratification to the barriers previously identified in the 2009 Saltsjöbaden IV report: Long-term uncertainty in financing, lack of capacity and expertise, lack in awareness. The long-term uncertainty in financing is in some cases driven by institutional instability, sometimes due to lack of priorities. The lack of expertise exists on many levels of air pollution research and policy. Some regions face challenges financing labs, other face challenges financing modern monitoring technique. Still others face challenges in finding financing opportunities for investment in clean technologies. The lack of awareness exists in many levels of society. Politicians, industrial stake holders, and the general public, are all – to varying extent – not sufficiently aware of the benefits of improved air quality. There is in some cases a rather strong resistance from industrial stakeholders, and counterarguments (or alternative perspectives) are needed. But this resistance might also be driven by the multitude of different legislations that needs to be considered for corporations.

Possible solutions encouraging future ratifications

There are a number of existing (and potential) drivers that could be utilized to strengthen motivation for ratification of the protocols:

- The European Energy community,
- The EU transition agreements,
- The China Belt and Road initiative,
- International industrial trade agreements,
- International/National competitiveness (ongoing modernization of industrial facilities),
- Action-oriented initiatives, such as the Batumi Action on Cleaner Air (BACA) and the Batumi Initiative on Green Economy (BIG-E),
- Co-benefits between climate and air pollution under the Paris Agreement Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) and the UNECE Air Convention.
- International financing institutions such as the European Investment Bank

There are also a number of opportunities.

- In contrast to 2009 (Saltsjöbaden IV), there are now ample examples of ongoing efforts in the Eastern region.
- Academic and research institutions in the region are stable,
- Real time monitoring would enable increased awareness,
- Increased knowledge on public health impacts of air pollution can help awareness,
- The communication from air quality experts to stakeholders can be tailor made and better acknowledge the different priorities of the different stakeholders,
- The industry's competitiveness can (at least in some cases) be improved through modernization, improved resource effectiveness, recycling, and reduced waste, leading to emissions reduction. In fact, already today there are examples of some industrial actors taking action, and initiatives are in some cases already in place.
- The fact that several countries in the region focus on reducing odour can potentially reduce NMVOC emissions (one of the pollutants in the Gothenburg protocol).
- The past and existing international collaboration has been appreciated and successful, and potential continued and enhanced international collaboration is expected to further improve capacity building etc.

There are also a number of international conventions that interact with the UNECE Air Convention protocols. It should therefore be possible to explore co-benefits between: The Stockholm Convention and the UNECE Air Convention's POP protocol; The Minamata Convention and the UNECE Air Convention's HM protocol; as well as the PRTR Protocol and the Gothenburg protocol.

With respect to more specific opportunities, many countries in the Eastern region already have implemented 'polluter-pays' legislation. This legislation could, if strengthened, promote cost effective emission reduction. Encouraging use of cleaner cars, which are already on the market in the Eastern region countries, could also have a large impact on air quality. Finally, increased networking and exchange between countries and experts within the Eastern region is yet an opportunity.

Summary of the session

As a summary, the honest and open discussion during the session *Eastern region of the Air Convention – on the way to clean air* clarified some key barriers and opportunities for ratification of the latest Air Convention protocols. Some of the barriers should be easy to solve, such as problems in interpretation of technical annexes. Other barriers would require a more intertwined chain of events to be removed, such as long term uncertainty in financing. There are however many opportunities that could help motivate further action to clean the air and ratification of protocols, where awareness raising, increased focus on industrial competitiveness and increased international collaboration are overarching themes.