



# CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

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## CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE REGIONAL MEETING ON THE BIOSAFETY CLEARING- HOUSE

Nitra, Slovakia, 5-9 February 2002

### REPORT OF THE CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE REGIONAL MEETING ON THE BIOSAFETY CLEARING-HOUSE

#### INTRODUCTION

##### A. *Background*

1. At its first meeting, held in Montpellier from 11 to 15 December 2000, the Intergovernmental Committee for the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (ICCP), recommended the development and implementation of the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House and urged Governments to submit to the Executive Secretary their priority needs regarding capacities to participate in the pilot phase. ICCP requested the Executive Secretary to analyse the identified capacity-building and financial requirements of the developing countries, in particular the least developed and small island developing States among them, and countries with economies in transition, as well as countries that are centres of origin and centres of genetic diversity, to enable their active participation in the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House.

2. In response to above request, the Executive Secretary initially organized regional meetings on the Biosafety Clearing-House for Africa and for Latin America and the Caribbean from 26 to 28 February 2001 in Nairobi and from 4 to 7 September 2001 in Lima, respectively. At its second meeting, held in Nairobi from 1 to 5 October 2001, the ICCP noted with appreciation the outcomes of those meetings and encouraged Governments to support the implementation of the recommendations made at those meetings. The Intergovernmental Committee further noted the regional meetings planned for Asia and the Pacific and Central and Eastern Europe and recommended that such regional capacity-building meetings be made an ongoing activity, subject to availability of the necessary financial resources.

3. The Central and Eastern Europe Regional Meeting on the Biosafety Clearing-House was held in Nitra, Slovakia, from 5 to 9 February 2002 to provide countries of the region with an opportunity to articulate their needs and expectations with regard to the implementation of the pilot phase.

4. This meeting also provided hands-on training on the operation of the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House to familiarize participants with its operation.

## **B. Attendance**

5. The meeting was held in conjunction with two other meetings namely: the UNEP/GEF regional workshop on the national biosafety frameworks, and the CEE Steering Committee on Biosafety.
6. Each country Party to the Convention in Central and Eastern Europe was invited to nominate one participant, preferably qualified in the fields of management of biosafety-related issues (such as notifications for decision-making); information-sharing systems and database-management; and/or experience with the clearing-house mechanism of the Convention, to be supported by the Secretariat. In addition, Governments were also invited to nominate one participant, preferably the National project coordinator of the UNEP-GEF project on the development of national biosafety frameworks to be supported by UNEP-GEF.
7. In response to that invitation, participants from the following countries were nominated by their respective focal points and attended the meeting: Armenia, Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Yugoslavia.
8. A representative from the Latin America and Caribbean region (Peru) attended to present the outcomes from the GRULAC regional meeting.
9. Representatives of the following bilateral donors, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and industry participated in the meeting as observers and/or resource persons:
  - (a) *Bilateral donors:* Germany and the Netherlands;
  - (b) *Intergovernmental organizations active in biosafety and/or information-exchange issues:* CEE Steering Committee for Biosafety, United Nations Environment Programme-Global Environment Facility (UNEP/GEF Geneva) and International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (ICGEB);
  - (c) *Industry:* Global Industry Coalition and Monsanto Europe S.A.
10. The full list of participants is contained in annex II to the present report.

### **ITEM 1. OPENING OF THE MEETING**

11. The meeting began at 9.30 a.m. on 5 February 2002. An opening statement was made by Ms. Kirsty Galloway McLean, Scientific and Technical Information Officer in the Biosafety Programme of the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, and also by Dr. Tamas Doemeny, Head of the Office of the Ministry of Environment, Slovakia.
12. On behalf of the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity, Ms. Galloway McLean welcomed the participants and gave a brief introduction to the Protocol, then focused particularly on information-sharing and the progress of the Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH). She noted that the meeting was being held to enable the region to identify its priority needs regarding capacities to participate in the BCH.
13. In conclusion, Ms. Galloway-McLean thanked Dr. Tamas Doemeny for coming to open the meeting and the participants for attending. She also thanked the Government of Slovakia for hosting the meeting and the Government of the United States for providing financial support for the meeting.

14. In his opening speech, on behalf of Prof. Laszlo Miklos, Minister of the Environment, Dr. Doemeny welcomed participants to the three meetings. He noted that the meetings would complement the CEE regional biosafety events that have been organized annually since 1995.

15. Dr. Doemeny further noted the growing level of coordination and collaboration in the field of biosafety among CEE countries, partly due to the excellent input made by experts from the region and also the support provided by international organizations and other countries outside the region. He expressed the hope that the Biosafety Clearing-House and the UNEP-GEF biosafety project would contribute significantly to promoting biosafety in the region.

## **ITEM 2. ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS**

### ***2.1. Election of officers***

16. At the second session of the meeting, on 8 February, Mr. Igor Ferencik (Slovakia) was elected to serve as Chair, and Mrs. Liina Eek (Estonia) to serve as Rapporteur.

### ***2.2. Adoption of agenda***

17. The Regional Meeting adopted the following agenda on the basis of the provisional agenda proposed in document UNEP/CBD/BCH/CEE.Reg/1/1:

1. Opening of the meeting.
2. Organizational matters:
  - 2.1. Election of officers;
  - 2.2. Adoption of the agenda;
  - 2.3. Organization of work.
3. Issues for in-depth consideration:
  - 3.1. Information exchange under the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and the progress of the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House;
  - 3.2. Evaluation of existing biodiversity and biosafety information-exchange mechanisms in Central and Eastern Europe, and opportunities for building capacity for information exchange under the Protocol;
  - 3.3. The pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House: overview and training session.
4. Preparation of regional needs assessments and priorities for action.
5. Other matters.
6. Conclusions and recommendations.
7. Adoption of the report.
8. Closure of the meeting.

### **2.3. Organization of work**

18. At its second session, on 8 February, the Regional Meeting approved the revised programme of work as contained in annex II to the annotations to the provisional agenda (UNEP/CBD/BCH/CEE.Reg/1/1/Add.1/Corr.1).

## **ITEM 3. ISSUES FOR IN-DEPTH CONSIDERATION**

### **3.1. Information exchange under the Biosafety Protocol**

19. Agenda item 3.1 was considered at the first and second sessions of the meeting, on 5 and 8 February. Introducing the item, Ms. Galloway-McLean highlighted the key relevant issues to be discussed under the item, and proposed that the meeting should consider the following elements:

(a) Information exchange requirements under the Biosafety Protocol, outcomes of the first and second meetings of the ICCP, and the progress with the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House;

(b) Outcomes of the African and GRULAC regional meetings on the Biosafety Clearing-House, and possible implications for Central and Eastern Europe.

20. Mr. Erie Tamale, Environmental Affairs Officer, Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, gave a presentation on the outcomes of the African regional meeting which was held from 26 to 28 February 2001 in Nairobi, Kenya. Similarly, Dr. Antonietta Gutierrez-Rosati, a representative of the GRULAC region, outlined the main outcomes of the GRULAC regional meeting.

#### *Discussion*

21. In the ensuing discussion, comments were made by the participants from Estonia, Slovenia, Ukraine and UNEP-GEF.

### **3.2. Biodiversity and biosafety information-exchange mechanisms in Central and Eastern Europe**

22. Agenda item 3.2 was considered at the first and second sessions of the meeting on 5 and 8 February. At the first session on 5 February, presentations were made by Dr. Nevena Alexandrova of the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (ICGEB) and Ms. Alice Muller of the Germany Technical Cooperation (GTZ). At the second session, on 8 February, Mr. Marcos Silva, Programme Officer, Clearing-House Mechanism of the Secretariat, gave a presentation on the synergies and differences between the Biosafety Clearing-House and the clearing-house mechanism of the Convention. Presentations were also made by Mr. Townsend Peterson, a consultant undertaking the independent review of the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House, Ms. Laura Reifschneider of the Global Industry Coalition and Mr. Piet van der Meer of the Netherlands on the CEE regional biosafety website, and Ms. Kristina Georgieva from Bulgaria on the Bulgarian national biosafety clearing-house.

#### *Discussion*

23. In the ensuing discussion, comments were made by the participants from Hungary, the Russian Federation, the Netherlands and the representative from GRULAC.

24. There was general agreement regarding the importance of establishing regional and national websites and databases interoperable with the Biosafety Clearing-House. One participant asked how the Secretariat could assist countries and regions to establish such systems. In response, a representative of the Secretariat informed participants that the Secretariat has prepared common formats and controlled

vocabularies to facilitate the use of common terminologies and that these are being further developed. The issue of confidentiality was also raised, and there was general agreement on the need to make all non-confidential information public and develop separate systems to protect confidential information.

### ***3.3. The pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House: overview and training session***

25. Agenda item 3.3 was considered at the second and third sessions of the meeting, on 8 February. The item was introduced by the Chair. Ms Galloway-McLean from the Secretariat gave an interactive demonstration on the elements of the central portal of the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House, describing the search and information retrieval mechanisms. Participants were invited to use the system and familiarize themselves with its operation.

26. Ms Galloway-McLean then described the operation of the management centre of pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House, the mechanism that allows for remote registration of information. Special attention was paid to the authentication and validation of registered information. Participants were invited to register information on a demonstration database that had been created for training purposes.

#### *Discussion*

27. During the training session, comments were made by participants from Bulgaria, Slovak Republic and Ukraine.

28. One participant recommended that a tracking menu should be added to the central portal of the Biosafety Clearing-House to enable users to know where they are during the searching and information retrieval process. It was recommended that countries should be provided with the template of the common format for decisions on living modified organisms (LMOs) and living modified organisms intended for direct use for food or feed, or for processing (LMO-FFPs) currently on the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House to be incorporated in their national Biosafety Clearing-Houses.

## **ITEM 4. PREPARATION OF REGIONAL NEEDS ASSESSMENTS AND PRIORITIES FOR ACTION**

29. Agenda item 4 was considered at the third session of the meeting, on 8 February. The item was introduced by the Chair, who invited participants to consider issues relevant to building capacity for information-exchange under the Cartagena Protocol.

30. Comments were made by participants from Armenia, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, the Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, Turkey, Ukraine and Yugoslavia. A representative from the GRULAC region also made comments.

31. Following the short discussion, an open-ended contact group, chaired by Mr. Vehbi Eser of Turkey, was established to further develop the comments made from the floor.

32. At the fourth session of the meeting, Mr. Vehbi Eser presented the results of the work completed to further develop the needs and priorities identified by the Central and Eastern European region, and the draft action plan prepared to implement them. The Chair opened the floor for discussion on finalizing the action plan.

33. In the ensuing discussion, comments were made by the participants from Armenia, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Ukraine, Turkey and a representative from ICGEB.

#### **ITEM 5. OTHER MATTERS**

34. Agenda item 5 was considered at the third session of the meeting, on 9 February. The distinguished delegate from Bulgaria, Professor Atanas Atanassov was nominated to represent the region at the Asia/Pacific Regional Meeting on the Biosafety Clearing-House, to be held in Beijing from 4 to 8 March 2002.

#### **ITEM 6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

35. Agenda item 6 was considered at the third session of the meeting, on 9 February. The item was introduced by the Chair, who invited the Rapporteur to present the revised draft of the action plan.

36. Following a short discussion, the Meeting adopted the action plan, which is attached to the present report as annex I.

#### **ITEM 7. ADOPTION OF THE REPORT**

37. The present report was adopted at the third session of the meeting, on 9 February, on the basis of the draft report of the Meeting (UNEP/CBD/BCH/CEE.Reg/1/L.1).

#### **ITEM 8. CLOSURE OF THE MEETING**

38. The Chair declared the Central and Eastern Europe Regional Meeting on the Biosafety Clearing-House closed at 12:30 p.m. on Saturday, 9 February 2002.

*Annex 1*

**CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN CAPACITY NEEDS FOR THE BIOSAFETY  
CLEARING-HOUSE: LIST OF PRIORITIES**

**A. *Capacity-building***

***Human resources***

1. Training of personnel
  - (a) Data management and information technology
  - (b) Data analysis
2. Training of national focal points and other responsible people in tasks and responsibilities

***Infrastructure***

1. Equipment to establish interoperable national biosafety clearing-house and use global system of biosafety clearing-houses
2. Maintenance of national biosafety clearing-houses

***Development of institutional synergies***

1. Promoting synergies between national institutions and also local authorities (legislative and administrative system)
2. Promoting synergies between countries in the region
3. Networking between competent national authorities and the national biosafety clearing-house

**B. *Information and communication***

1. Harmonization of information reporting
2. Translation of information into a United Nations language
3. To promote the use of the Biosafety Clearing-House by the decision makers and risk assessors

**C. *Financing***

1. Funding – cross-cutting issue

**D. *Mobilize political support***

1. Increase political awareness of the international importance of the Biosafety Clearing-House
2. Increase public awareness of Biosafety Clearing-House

*Note:* All activities should be implemented prior to the entry into force of the Protocol.

**ACTION PLAN TO IMPLEMENT NEEDS AND PRIORITIES IDENTIFIED BY THE CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE REGION TO IMPLEMENT THE BIOSAFETY CLEARING-HOUSE**

**1. Capacity Building**

(i) *Human resources*

<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Capacity Needs</i>	<i>Activities/actions/ Recommendations</i>	<i>Indicators</i>	<i>Responsible agency (national/regional level)</i>	<i>Outputs</i>
Create the human resources needed to operate national Biosafety Clearing-Houses	(i) Training in data management and information technology (ii) Training in data analysis	Identify key people  Organize training  Prepare a manual	Required number of people with training (number determined at national level)	National level, with assistance at international level	Trained personnel able to effectively manage information-exchange for biosafety issues
	Training of BCH national focal points and other responsible people in tasks and responsibilities	Identify key people  Organize training	Establish BCH-NFPs	National level	Trained personnel able to effectively implement the information-exchange requirements of the Protocol

(ii) *Infrastructure*

<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Capacity needs</i>	<i>Activities/actions and recommendations</i>	<i>Indicators</i>	<i>Responsible agency</i>	<i>Outputs</i>
Establish the technical infrastructure required for national BCHs	Equipment to establish interoperable national BCH and use global system of BCH	Acquire new hardware and software Develop databases	Infrastructure is in place and interoperable with global BCH	National level, with international support	Interoperable national BCHs established
Develop sustainable system	Maintenance of national BCH	Upgrade system and training as required	Stable and up-to-date infrastructure	National level, with international support	Fully functional and sustainable national BCHs

(iii) *Development of institutional synergies*

<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Capacity needs</i>	<i>Activities/actions and recommendations</i>	<i>Indicators</i>	<i>Responsible agency</i>	<i>Outputs</i>
To provide a suitable environment for effective exchange of information at a national level	Promoting synergies between national institutions, central and local authorities	Meetings and document dissemination Clear division of responsibilities among institutions and authorities Networking between competent national authorities and the national BCHs	Meeting reports Inter-institutional joint activities	National level	Effective cooperation among agencies Effective information-exchange

<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Capacity needs</i>	<i>Activities/actions and recommendations</i>	<i>Indicators</i>	<i>Responsible agency</i>	<i>Outputs</i>
Harmonized regional information systems	Promoting synergies between countries in the region	Workshops	Regional joint activities	Regional level	Effective information-exchange within the region

**2. Information and communication**

<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Capacity needs</i>	<i>Activities/actions and recommendations</i>	<i>Indicators</i>	<i>Responsible agency</i>	<i>Outputs</i>
Facilitation of information-exchange	Harmonization of information reporting	Develop standard templates for national databases  Development of controlled vocabularies	Adherence to formats for each type of information	Global level	Harmonized formats for reporting information
	To promote the use of the BCH by the decision makers and risk assessors	Workshops and training programs  Providing access to papers and data related to risk assessment	Number of persons trained  Access to relevant papers and databases	National level with international support  National level with international support	Common understanding of risk evaluation and harmonization of risk assessment methodology
Make information available globally	Translation of information into a UN language	Provide translation services	Documents in United Nations languages	National level, with international support	Information available globally

**3. Financing**

<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Capacity needs</i>	<i>Activities/actions and recommendations</i>	<i>Indicators</i>	<i>Responsible agency</i>	<i>Outputs</i>
Adequate financial resources to implement the BCH	Funding – cross-cutting issue	Fund-raising	Successful funding proposals	National level, with international support (donor agencies)	Sufficient funds to implement the BCH

**4. Mobilize political support**

<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Capacity needs</i>	<i>Activities/actions and recommendations</i>	<i>Indicators</i>	<i>Responsible agency</i>	<i>Outputs</i>
Raise national profile of biosafety	Increase political awareness of the international importance of the BCH	Demonstrate international importance of implementing the BCH	Political support and/or budget for all of the above mentioned activities	National level, with regional and international support	Smoothly-running system
Public support for the BCH	Increase public awareness of BCH	Work with the media and NGOs	Number of public accessing BCH	National level with regional and international support	Increased public support

Annex

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