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**BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR THE REGIONAL CONSULTATIONS OF
AFFECTED COUNTRY PARTIES OF THE REGIONAL IMPLEMENTATION
ANNEX FOR CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Affected country Parties of the Regional Implementation Annex for Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) are at different stages of the formulation and implementation of their NAPs. The main obstacle to successful implementation of NAPs remains a shortage of financial resources. The regional meeting for strengthening cooperation in the field of land resources management in CEE, held in Minsk, Belarus, in December 2003 invited the implementing and executing agencies of the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) to facilitate access of the Annex V country Parties to the GEF-related resources for sustainable land management. This meeting provided a significant contribution to the identification of the elements of the Regional Action Programme (RAP) to combat land degradation and desertification in CEE, which will be based on four pillars, i.e. scientific cooperation, exchange of technologies and know-how, training and capacity building, and exchange of information and documentation.

Sustainable use and management of rangelands has been recognized as one of the most important priority areas in combating land degradation and desertification. The regional meeting designated soil conservation as a priority area for scientific cooperation. Reforestation/afforestation and soil conservation are considered as crucial measures aimed at combating land degradation and desertification in the affected CEE region.

A technical workshop on drought preparedness in the Balkans, held in Poiana Brasov, Romania, in October 2004, has launched, with the participation of interested neighbouring countries, the first step towards the establishment of a Balkan Subregional Drought Management Centre.

Predictability of partnership and financial support remains a key issue, especially for non-EU members of Annex V. It is recognized that national reports provide indispensable information on the UNCCD process and that their quality should be improved, notably by collecting more substantive information. Involvement of non-governmental organizations in the assessment process was welcomed. The Help Guide should note particular conditions of the CEE countries as they are defined in the Annex V to the Convention.

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I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. This background document has been prepared with the aim of facilitating the participation of the Central and Eastern European (CEE) country Parties in the third session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC 3). While the focus of CRIC 3 will be on the review of the reports on implementation by affected African country Parties, including on the participatory process, and on experience gained and results achieved in the preparation and implementation of action programmes, several other agenda items will be considered, including review of the enhanced implementation of the obligations of the Convention (Bonn Declaration).

2. The document contains information on the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in the affected CEE country Parties in order to assist them during the regional consultations which will be held at the beginning of CRIC 3, and during consideration by CRIC 3 of the agenda items 4, 5, 6 and 7 of the provisional agenda. It compiles relevant information based on existing documentation, that is, national reports of 2000 and 2002 on the implementation of the UNCCD, as well as the synthesis and compilation prepared for the fourth Conference of the Parties (COP 4), the Ad Hoc Working Group (AHWG) and the CRIC 1. It takes into account outcomes of regional and subregional meetings, national action programmes (NAPs) and other documentation available on the UNCCD web site <http://www.unccd.int> and its related links. Results of CRIC 2 and preliminary documents for CRIC 3 have also been considered. The list of all documentation is attached in an annex.

II. AGENDA ITEM 4: CONSIDERATION OF NECESSARY ADJUSTMENTS TO THE ELABORATION PROCESS AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF NAPs, INCLUDING REVIEW OF THE ENHANCED IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OBLIGATIONS OF THE CONVENTION

A. Necessary adjustments to the formulation process and the implementation of NAPs

3. Since CRIC 1 (November 2002) the following countries of the CEE region have acceded to the UNCCD: Latvia (19 January 2003), Russian Federation (29 May 2003), Lithuania (25 July 2003). As at 1 January 2005, out of 22 CEE countries only two countries, Estonia and Serbia and Montenegro, are not Parties to the UNCCD. Four CEE country Parties (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Slovenia) belong to both Annexes IV and V. Four CEE country Parties (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia) are members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and are emerging donor countries. Seven countries who had successfully completed the transitional period (Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia) became members of the European Union (EU) on 1 May 2004. It should be noted that the process of accession to the UNCCD of the countries of the CEE region was rather long and as a result the activities relating to the preparation of NAPs and the development of regional cooperation in the context of the Convention were delayed.

4. Affected country Parties from the region are at different stages of the formulation and implementation of NAPs. Four of them have adopted NAPs (Republic of Moldova in 2000, Romania in 2000, Armenia in 2002, Georgia in 2003), while the NAPs in other affected CEE country Parties are under preparation due to the very recent accession of these countries to the Convention. The second regional meeting of countries of Annexes IV and V, held in Geneva, Switzerland, in July 2003, emphasized that efforts must be intensified in the remaining affected country Parties to complete all NAPs by 2005, as called for by decision 8/COP.4.

5. Non-affected CEE Parties have included the UNCCD targets in, or are incorporating them into, their national sustainable development strategies and the respective parts of the national environmental and agriculture policies linked in particular to the protection of soils, nature, landscape and biodiversity, and into official development assistance strategies.

6. As can be found from the texts of adopted NAPs and from the national reports, the NAPs are intended to become an integral part of national long-term policies for environmental protection and sustainable development, and socioeconomic strategies; in general, they correspond to the provisions of articles 9 and 10 of the Convention and article 4 of Annex V. Most CEE country Parties consider it crucial to ensure interlinkage between the NAP and relevant sectoral programmes, particularly in such areas as agriculture, forestry, water and irrigation, and energy. Their NAPs contain detailed surveys of the state of the environment in the areas affected by land degradation and desertification, based on research and scientific assessment and allowing the identification of a number of priority areas for further action.

7. Further to provisions of article 5 of Annex V, the UNCCD secretariat, at the request of the country Parties of the region and pursuant to article 23 of the Convention facilitates the convocation of coordination meetings in the region. The workshop on land degradation/desertification in Central and Eastern Europe, held in Brussels, Belgium, in May 2000, had launched the process of developing regional cooperation between CEE countries. At this meeting, their representatives acknowledged that the UNCCD offers concrete opportunities for strengthening international cooperation, particularly in the fields of scientific research, data management and information exchange, transfer of technologies, and training.

8. The consultative meeting to prepare implementation of the UNCCD in the CEE, held in Prague, Czech Republic, in September 2001, welcomed the adoption of Annex V and requested the UNCCD secretariat to prepare a framework document for cooperation under the Annex V. To launch the preparation of a framework document, the UNCCD secretariat took the initiative to explore the potential areas for regional cooperation through a questionnaire that was distributed to CEE country Parties (at that time 18 countries from a total of 22 CEE countries were Parties to the UNCCD). Based on the analysis of answers to the questionnaire, the secretariat developed in 2003 two tools for launching cooperation in the CEE region at bilateral, subregional, transboundary and regional levels. These tools, which are called the "Activity Master" and the "Regional Cooperation Kit" were presented at the Workshop for Central and Eastern European focal points on regional cooperation activities held in Geneva, Switzerland, in July 2003.

9. As was indicated at this workshop, in addition to the general overview as contained in the Activity Master, additional information on the priorities and potential modalities for concrete activities at the regional level was needed. The UNCCD secretariat, in a second phase of the process, prepared and circulated to all 22 CEE countries a request to provide additional information relating to possible development of regional scientific cooperation and networking, technology and know-how exchanges, training and capacity building, as well as cooperation on exchange of information and documentation. The information received from interested countries was collated by the UNCCD secretariat and presented at the regional meeting for strengthening cooperation in the field of land resources management in Central and Eastern Europe, which was held in Minsk, Belarus, in December 2003. Participating CEE country Parties expressed a readiness to develop subregional, regional and interregional cooperation. The UNCCD secretariat was invited to pursue its assistance to the Annex V country Parties in support of regional cooperation, in delivering policy and advocacy services and in following up the forthcoming steps in formulation of a regional action programme (RAP). (See also paragraphs 37 – 46).

10. Participants in the regional meeting in Minsk also expressed their interest in strengthening interregional cooperation with countries of Central Asia and invited the UNCCD secretariat to consider the possibilities of the involvement of Central Asian country Parties in activities planned within the CEE region. They also noted that the possibilities for cooperation with the Annex IV country Parties should also be further explored.

11. The CEE country Parties are also Parties to other environmental conventions, as well as to different regional and interregional agreements, which are linked closely to the objectives pursued by the UNCCD. This allows them to utilize additional mechanisms and instruments in the process of implementation of the UNCCD at multilateral level. In particular, it relates to implementation of the Environmental Strategy for Countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, which was adopted by the Fifth Ministerial Conference, Environment for Europe, organized by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) in Kiev, Ukraine, in May 2003. The Strategy envisages regional and interregional activities relevant to the UNCCD aimed at developing comprehensive land-use planning, implementing projects for rehabilitation of affected land areas associated with programmes for combating desertification, and implementation of soil protection technologies and counter-erosion activities.

B. Implementation of the Bonn Declaration on the commitments to enhance implementation of the obligations of the Convention

1. Sustainable use and management of rangelands

12. Dry and semi-dry rangelands occupy considerable parts of the territory of the CEE country Parties. Sustainable use and management of rangelands has been recognized by affected CEE country Parties as one of the most important priority areas in combating land degradation and desertification. Overgrazing has become a more urgent problem since the early 1990s as a result of an increase in the number of livestock in the private sector and a lack of land management.

13. A number of strategic actions relating to combating the degradation of rangelands are mentioned in NAPs and considerable institutional and financial resources are planned for implementation of these actions in the future. Nevertheless, in spite of the stated importance of this priority area, the concrete actions to be implemented are not specified, nor are sources of funding designated. There is also a lack of information on the results of implementation of previously planned actions.

2. Launching reforestation/afforestation programmes and intensification of soil conservation

14. National reports and NAPs consider the programmes which focus on reforestation/afforestation and on soil conservation to be crucial measures aimed at combating land degradation and desertification in the affected CEE regions. In particular, some NAPs envisage tree planting to protect agricultural lands and planting of fast-growing tree species in desert areas, conservation and afforestation of floodplain and arid areas, afforestation of lands affected by landslide processes and reforestation of former forest-covered lands.

15. The CEE country Parties have experience in the implementation of projects aiming to mitigate deforestation, and they are interested in facilitating the exchange of information in these fields. The regional meeting in Minsk identified reforestation/afforestation/tree plantation in affected areas and sustainable forest strategies as the priority areas for regional scientific cooperation. The Forest Research and Management Institute in Romania will be a host institution for a regional thematic network (RTN) to promote regional cooperation in the area of reforestation/afforestation/tree planting in affected areas. The Forest Research and Experimental Centre (FREC) of the Ministry of Nature Protection of Armenia will be a regional training centre (RTC) in this area. Armenia has also proposed use of the RTC as a RTN for promoting regional cooperation on sustainable forest strategies.

16. National reports envisage that activities within the area of soil conservation will be implemented through different programmes aimed at combating erosion and improving soil fertility, conservation and protection, in particular by using economic and financial mechanisms to stimulate rational use of land resources. The regional meeting in Minsk designated soil conservation strategies/planning as a priority area for scientific cooperation. Bulgaria proposed to use its Institute of Soil Science N. Poushkarov as a training centre in the areas of soil conservation strategies/planning.

17. The EC thematic strategy for soil protection, which is in a final stage of preparation, will be of importance for the country Parties from the CEE region since it will have an impact on environmental, agricultural and regional policies, as well as on the development of international cooperation. Other strategies under preparation (such as Strategy on the Sustainable Use of Natural Resources and Strategy on the Sustainable Use of Pesticides) will also have an impact on topics covered by the Regional Implementation Annex to the UNCCD for the CEE.

3. Desertification monitoring and assessment

18. The affected CEE country Parties recognize in their national reports the importance of monitoring and assessment of land degradation due to soil erosion, for which financial and institutional resources are being allocated. Comprehensive monitoring programmes are identified and formulated in two NAPs, while only some aspects of desertification monitoring are present in the actions proposed for implementation in the other NAPs.

19. As reported, all CEE country Parties are in the process of formulation and improvement of techniques and indicators for desertification monitoring and assessment. They are moving towards the most advanced environmental standards relating to environment monitoring in order to adopt additional standards of monitoring and assessing land degradation.

20. Recognizing the importance of the exchange of information in this priority area, the CEE country Parties identified at the regional meeting in Minsk the Institute of Geography, Moscow, Russian Federation, as a host institution for RTNs to develop regional cooperation in the areas of definition of benchmarks and indicators for soil degradation/soil type mapping and monitoring and/or of developing methodologies for the assessment of land degradation.

21. Further to the request from the regional meeting in Minsk, the UNCCD secretariat organized in Poiana Brasov, Romania, in October 2004, a technical workshop on drought preparedness in the Balkans, where a process relating to drought preparedness in this subregion was launched with the participation of interested neighbouring countries. The technical workshop succeeded in launching the first step towards the establishment of a Balkan Subregional Drought Management Centre. The information exchange, data transfer and building of a common system of early warning systems is an approach that enhances the preparation of the RAP. (See also paragraph 46).

III. AGENDA ITEM 5: REVIEW OF AVAILABLE INFORMATION REGARDING THE MOBILIZATION AND USE OF FINANCIAL RESOURCES AND OTHER SUPPORT BY MULTILATERAL AGENCIES AND INSTITUTIONS, WITH A VIEW TO ENHANCING THEIR EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY TOWARDS THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE OBJECTIVES OF THE CONVENTION, INCLUDING INFORMATION ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FACILITY (GEF) AND THE GLOBAL MECHANISM (GM) AND ITS FACILITATION COMMITTEE

A. Status of mobilization and use of financial resources as these relate to the CEE country Parties according to the documentation relating to the reporting and review processes

22. As was noted in national reports of 2002, the main obstacle to successful implementation of adopted NAPs is a shortage of financial resources, both at national level and on the part of foreign development partners. Some of the NAPs contain a comprehensive record of well-grounded local projects, mentioning the budgetary requirements needed to implement these projects. But at the same time, the sources of financing, financial mechanisms and the terms and conditions of financing (timetable, structure, cost and benefit analysis) of the planned actions are not fully detailed. Most of the NAPs cannot specify

financial requirements for a long-term perspective. They are mainly short and mid-term oriented due to a lack of mid- and long-term predictability and the unreliability of financial resources.

23. The documentation indicates that in 2002, owing to severe budgetary difficulties, the country Parties have had to allocate limited resources to meeting their populations' immediate basic needs at the expense of some less urgent priorities, including combating land degradation and desertification. In some cases, budget financing was inadequate even for small items, such as improving communication systems, translation, or the acquisition of technical literature. The national reports confirmed that external financing had been, and would continue to be, a crucial factor for progress in implementing the UNCCD. The role of bilateral, transboundary and multilateral projects is appreciated in terms of their possible funding from external and multilateral sources.

24. The documentation and reporting process highlighted the willingness of the CEE country Parties to enter into cooperation with the GM and other financial instruments in the context of the UNCCD but question the ways and means of the process. The second regional meeting for countries of Annexes IV and V drew the attention of the GM to the need to mobilize financial resources for relevant affected countries in Europe to support the implementation of their NAPs, and requested the GM to launch preparatory processes leading to the establishing of partnership agreements. European development partners were encouraged to back such efforts in creating a platform of cooperation to implement the UNCCD in Europe.

25. The national reporting process provided information on developed country Parties including a newly emerging donor country (Czech Republic) which provided financial, technical and scientific assistance to the implementation of projects/actions relevant to the UNCCD in the country Parties of the CEE region on a bilateral basis.

B. New and additional information relating to financial resources received from the GEF, the GM and other sources

26. Some CEE country Parties have started activities relating to the preparation of projects under the GEF operational programme on land degradation (OP 15). Official information on the success/failure of the project preparation process is not yet available. The regional meeting in Minsk invited the implementing and executing agencies of the GEF to take a proactive role in facilitating access of the Annex V country Parties to the GEF-related resources for sustainable land management in the light of their ongoing and new initiatives. The workshop on development of GEF projects on land degradation, organized by the UNCCD secretariat in cooperation with the Ministry of Environment of the Czech Republic in Lednice, Czech Republic in 2003, addressed the issue of utilizing these new potentials in several CEE country Parties. New impetus towards the development of cooperation with the GEF is expected from the training workshop for European countries organized by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in Geneva, Switzerland, in January 2005.

27. The CEE country Parties are involved in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)/GEF project on National capacity self-assessment for global environmental management which, besides other goals, envisages an assessment of existing national capacities for the implementation of the UNCCD, as well as improvement of major elements of national capacities. A joint action programme to be developed within the framework of this project will target activities for cooperative implementation of the UNCCD, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

28. The developed country Parties contribute significant financial resources to the GEF, which may be used to support implementation of the UNCCD in the CEE region. Even the country Parties from the CEE region (such as the Czech Republic, Slovenia) are becoming regular and reliable contributors to the GEF. Several donor countries are providing technical assistance to some of affected countries of the CEE region to assist them in the implementation of the UNCCD. The positive trends prevail in the CEE region when a development partner country identifies certain affected country Parties of this region as priority partners for bilateral cooperation.

29. It should be noted that since the accession of the CEE countries to the Convention no projects have been implemented under the GM in the CEE region. Also, a lack of consultative, logistic and instrumental assistance from the GM has been noted. A number of requests to provide financial assistance for NAP preparation were received from affected CEE country Parties and these requests were included in the joint work programme (JWP) between the GM and the UNCCD secretariat for 2004–2005. The JWP also envisages the organization of national forums in three CEE countries for partnership building but substantial preparation has not yet begun.

30. The European Commission (EC) web site demonstrates that there are many tools for financing development of rural areas, the EU programmes and funds that ensure predictable amounts of funds on a long term basis for activities also relevant for drought, land degradation and desertification. The EC could support in Europe the preparation and implementation of action programmes under the UNCCD through different instruments. Partnership and cooperation agreements concluded between Newly Independent States (NIS) and the EC create the basis for EC-NIS cooperation on protection of the environment and the sustainable use of natural resources. Environmental cooperation is one of the priority areas for the Technical Assistance to the Community of Independent States (TACIS) regional programmes and for the Cooperation with the Third Countries and International Organizations (INCO) research programmes within Fifth and Sixth Framework Research Programmes.

31. The EC Programme TACIS for 2000-2006 for the partner states in Eastern Europe and Central Asia gives the opportunity for affected CEE country Parties (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation and Ukraine) to apply for assistance to solve problems in the implementation of the UNCCD. The EU/World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) partnership initiatives (e.g. water or energy related) are offering another channels for contributing to meet the UNCCD targets in this region. In addition, the EC programme Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Democratization and Stabilization (CARDS) could assist, in particular, in environmental rehabilitation and poverty reduction in the region of south-eastern Europe where the affected CEE country Parties

(Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) could apply for additional assistance towards national efforts to implement the UNCCD goals. CEE country Parties which are EU members, or candidates for EU membership, could use other instruments of the EU funds and programmes (such as the Special Accession Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development (SAPARD), PHARE, the Instrument for Structural Policies for Pre-Accession (ISPA), Cohesion Fund, Structural Funds, Interreg III, Life III) for the promotion of sustainable development. On the whole, the UNCCD national focal points need some level of support to access such funding sources.

**IV. AGENDA ITEM 6: CONSIDERATION OF WAYS AND MEANS OF
PROMOTING KNOW-HOW AND TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER FOR
COMBATING DESERTIFICATION AND/OR MITIGATING THE EFFECTS
OF DROUGHT, AS WELL AS OF PROMOTING EXPERIENCE SHARING
AND INFORMATION EXCHANGE AMONG PARTIES AND
INTERESTED INSTITUTIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS**

A. Relevant information according to the documentation related
to the reporting and review processes

32. According to documentation, the CEE country Parties designated various national institutions with many years experience to assessing and monitoring land degradation, such as academies of sciences, universities, and scientific and research centres, to be responsible for scientific, technical and informational support to the implementation of the UNCCD. Some country Parties stress the value of traditional knowledge and methods successfully used by local communities in preventing land degradation in the affected areas.

33. CEE country Parties report insufficient national financial resources to support institutions responsible for know-how, technology and experience transfer and sharing under the implementation of the UNCCD. Additional training of specialists and modern equipment for laboratories are needed for monitoring and assessment of collected information (e.g. Geographical Information System (GIS)) for research activities; this can be done only if external financing is available.

34. The second regional meeting of the Annex IV and V country Parties noted that accumulated knowledge on drought and desertification in Europe is considerable but the results of research often fail to be meaningfully passed on and absorbed by planners and decision-makers. Better integration of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) recommendations into UNCCD programmes was called for.

B. Relevant information relating to subregional and regional activities

35. More information on promoting know-how and technology transfer for combating desertification and/or mitigating the effects of drought, as well as on promoting experience sharing and information exchange among Parties and interested institutions and organizations can be found in the report of the regional meeting in Minsk (see the UNCCD web site).

36. As mentioned in paragraph 8 above, the UNCCD secretariat prepared an Activity Master which can be used for developing regional cooperation, in particular for promoting know-how and technology transfer for combating desertification and/or mitigating the effects of drought, as well as for promoting experience sharing and information exchange among Parties. This document contains information received from CEE country Parties in a compiled format, which gives an easy and quick overview of the individual countries' potential "offers" and "needs" in the four pillars (see paragraph 37). This tool provides valuable information regarding the specific needs expressed by each country and encourages exchange between focal points, experts, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and so on, of CEE countries. It fosters discussion and exchange at national and bilateral levels and it facilitates regional cooperation in land degradation and land resources management between interested countries. At a regional level, moreover, this tool may serve as a basis for discussion of concrete ideas at future regional meetings.

37. The regional meeting in Minsk, having considered the countries' proposals for regional, subregional and transboundary cooperation in the CEE region, provided a significant contribution to the identification of the elements of the RAP and agreed to start initial programme development based on four pillars:

- Scientific cooperation
- Exchange of technologies and know-how
- Training and capacity building, and
- Exchange of information and documentation.

38. With regard to developing regional scientific cooperation (first pillar), the regional meeting in Minsk identified fourteen priority areas:

- Reforestation/afforestation/tree plantation in affected areas
- Improvement of irrigation/ drainage water management/modernization of irrigation practices
- Water erosion control/preventive measures
- Catchment management/basin versant
- Soil conservation strategies/planning
- Sustainable traditional techniques of soil fertility/ top soil conservation
- Definition of benchmarks and indicators for soil degradation/soil type mapping and monitoring
- Development of methodologies for the assessment of land degradation
- Development of new sustainable techniques in agriculture
- Sustainable traditional techniques/methods in water conservation
- Preparation of cadastral surveys of land
- Sustainable forest strategies
- Re-use of treated wastewater
- Sustainable water management policies.

39. At the meeting, three host institutions were designated for development of regional scientific cooperation through the establishment of RTN. The Forest Research and Management Institute from Romania will play the role of host institution for RTN in the area of reforestation, afforestation and tree planting in affected areas; the Institute for Land Reclamation and Grassland Management of the National Academy of Science of Belarus will

play the role of host institution for RTN in the area of improvement of irrigation, drainage water management and modernization of irrigation practices; the participants welcomed the proposal of the Russian Federation for the Institute of Geography, Moscow to be a host institution for RTN in the areas of definition of benchmarks and indicators for soil degradation/soil type mapping and monitoring and/or of development of methodologies for the assessment of land degradation. Later, Armenia proposed the utilization of the Forest Research and Experimental Centre of the Ministry of Nature Protection as a host institution for RTN in the area of sustainable forest strategies. A process of development of relevant activities is being launched in close cooperation with, and with the assistance of, the UNCCD secretariat.

40. With regard to developing regional cooperation in the field of exchange of technology and know-how (second pillar), the following eight priority areas were identified by the regional meeting in Minsk:

- Improvement of irrigation/drainage water management/modernization of irrigation practice
- Cultivation of crops resistant to drought or salt or acid soils
- Implementation of local pilot agricultural projects with proven success
- Preparation of cadastral surveys of land; sustainable forest strategies
- Monitoring of deforestation/destruction of vegetation cover
- Reforestation/afforestation/tree plantation in effected areas
- Integral control of forests pests and diseases
- Re-use of treated waste water.

Armenia expressed an interest in organizing a workshop on the involvement of NGOs and the local population in the forest management process.

41. With regard to the training and capacity building (third pillar), the following sixteen priority areas were also agreed upon by participants in the regional meeting in Minsk:

- Development of good practice codes for farming
- Support for biological farming and certification of biological products
- Implementation of local agricultural pilot projects with proven success
- Soil conservation strategies/planning
- Forest fire monitoring and control
- Sustainable water management policies
- River management in affected areas
- Harmonization of sector and environmental legislation by integration of the UNCCD provisions into it
- Development of national clearing house/observatory/environmental information systems
- Involvement of NGOs and local populations/participatory process
- Management of interface city/rural areas
- Formulation of pilot projects for integrated/sustainable rural development
- Development of a strategy for awareness raising
- Awareness campaigns for local communities in affected areas
- Awareness campaigns for the academic and research community/private sector
- Training of professional trainers in land degradation.

42. Participants in the regional meeting in Minsk agreed that the Forest Research and Experimental Centre of the Ministry of Nature Protection of Armenia would serve as a RTC in the area of reforestation/afforestation. Bulgaria proposed use of the Institute of Soil Science N. Poushkarov as a RTC in the area of soil conservation strategies/planning. Bulgaria also proposed to use this institute for the training of professional trainers in land degradation. A process of development of relevant activities is being launched in close cooperation with, and with the assistance of, the UNCCD secretariat.

43. With regard to organizing exchange of information and documentation (pillar four), the regional meeting in Minsk agreed that this would be developed through regional reference centres (RRCs). The UNCCD secretariat received a proposal from the Czech Republic to use the Faculty of Science at the Palacky University, Olomouc, as the RRC in the area of soil conservation strategies/planning. The process of development of relevant activities is being launched in close cooperation with, and with the assistance of, the UNCCD secretariat.

44. The regional meeting in Minsk identified several areas for developing subregional cooperation between the Balkan states with the participation of interested neighbouring countries on drought monitoring in this subregion, and between Belarus, Ukraine and the Russian Federation on issues relating to the Chernobyl accident in the context of the UNCCD.

45. As a follow-up to the regional meeting in Minsk, the UNCCD secretariat, in close cooperation with all interested countries, has launched the process of identifying possible mechanisms for developing regional cooperation based on four pillars, which will become a basis for the RAP.

46. Concerning the development of subregional cooperation, a technical workshop on drought preparedness in the Balkans within the context of the UNCCD was organized by the secretariat in Romania, in October 2004. (See also paragraph 21). This involved for the first time the participation of national focal points, national meteorologists and national experts working on the problem of drought. The conclusions of the workshop contain, in particular, a decision to establish a Balkan Drought Management Centre, that the activities of the centre should be expanded later to the whole area of CEE, and that close cooperation should be established with the Northern Mediterranean drought mitigation activities, creating a European drought monitoring and mitigation system. The UNCCD secretariat has also launched the process of developing cooperation between Belarus and Ukraine in cooperation with relevant institutions from Germany on issues relating to the Chernobyl accident.

**V. AGENDA ITEM 7: CONSIDERATION OF WAYS AND
MEANS OF IMPROVING PROCEDURES FOR
COMMUNICATION OF INFORMATION, AS WELL
AS OF IMPROVING THE QUALITY AND FORMAT
OF REPORTS TO BE SUBMITTED TO THE COP**

47. The second regional meeting of countries of Annexes IV and V recognized that national reports provide indispensable information regarding the UNCCD process and serve as important elements in decision-making by potential partners. The need further to improve the quality of national reports was recognized. The involvement of NGOs in the assessment process was welcomed. The national reports of 2002 demonstrated that the degree of compliance with the structure for the reports proposed by the Help Guide was particularly low for science and technology issues. Information provided in national reports was not comprehensively inter-linked. As was noted in the lessons learnt during the second reporting exercise, the Help Guide should note the particular conditions in these countries, as defined in Annex V to the Convention. More substantive information on a country profile basis would be helpful to future monitoring.

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND EMERGING TRENDS

48. The CEE country Parties are affected to varying degrees by land degradation, including soil erosion, risks of desertification, drought, deforestation, and general degradation of the environment. In spite of existing peculiarities, obstacles and different priorities, these countries have made definite contributions to the implementation of the UNCCD on global issues before CRIC 3.

49. NAPs that do not specifically address the land degradation problems in an integrated approach with other related issues (sustainable development, growth in particular of agriculture and rural development, social cohesion, protection of biodiversity, climate change, pollution prevention and control, natural disaster and industrial accident prevention, floods prevention, spatial planning) may have difficulty in attracting necessary financial resources from the public and private sectors, as well as from international sources.

50. Implementation of the UNCCD in the CEE countries should be linked to European and global developments in terms of opportunities for cooperation. The existing NAPs and RAP in preparation may need to be adjusted to reflect new European social, economic and environmental circumstances.

51. Due to drought and the occurrence of land degradation in recent years, concerned CEE countries reflect issues of drought, land degradation and desertification to different extents in legal acts/policies/strategies.

52. The GM, as was requested by the second regional meeting of countries of Annexes IV and V, should continue to support affected country Parties in mainstreaming the NAPs into national development frameworks, especially Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), where applicable. A renewed emphasis should be given to the implementation of the GM/UNCCD JWP to ensure the timely provision of requested funds for preparation of NAPs and launching a partnership-building process in the CEE region.

53. Regional and subregional cooperation has been gaining momentum in the CEE region, which will contribute to development of the RAP and SRAP. Intra-regional cooperation may also be developed between CEE countries members of the EU and non-members from the CEE region.

54. The process of political and economic stabilization noted in the CEE country Parties in recent years creates a good basis for future more predictable and efficient drawing of financial resources needed for combating land degradation and desertification.

55. The national reporting format should cover all requested information in a more efficient way without increasing the workload of country Parties too much. The use of impact indicators on the progress of NAP implementation should be more developed. Comprehensive national reporting procedures should be supported by a system of data collection, quality indicators and monitoring and evaluation actions.

56. Affected CEE country Parties may use CRIC 3 to demonstrate their experience, in particular, in the fields of rangeland management, reforestation and soil conservation. It should be noted that matters of better integration of the CST recommendations into the UNCCD national reporting process will be considered at CRIC 3.

Annex

LIST OF DOCUMENTS CONSULTED

<u>Document symbol</u>	<u>Title or description</u>
COP 4/AHWG	
ICCD/COP(4)/3/Add.3(A)	Compilation of summaries of reports submitted by Northern Mediterranean and other affected country Parties
ICCD/COP(4)/3/Add.3(B)	Synthesis of information contained in national reports from Northern Mediterranean and other affected country Parties
ICCD/COP(4)/AHWG/6	Report of the Ad Hoc Working Group to the fifth session of the Conference of the Parties
ICCD/COP(4)/3/Add.4	Synthesis of reports submitted by developed country Parties
ICCD/COP(4)/3/Add.5	Review of information provided by relevant organs, funds and programmes of the United Nations system as well as IGOs and NGOs
ICCD/COP(4)/CST/5	Synthesis of scientific and technical information, particularly with regard to the benchmarks and indicators used to measure progress, and an assessment thereof, contained in the reports received from country Parties for consideration by the CST
COP 5	
ICCD/COP(5)/3/Add.1	Consideration of additional procedures or institutional mechanisms to assist the Conference of the Parties in regularly reviewing the implementation of the Convention
CRIC 1	
ICCD/CRIC(1)/5/Add.2	Compilation of summaries of reports submitted by Northern Mediterranean, Central and Eastern European and other affected country Parties
ICCD/CRIC(1)/5/Add.1	Synthesis and preliminary analysis of information contained in reports submitted by Northern Mediterranean, Central and Eastern European and other affected country Parties, and progress made in the formulation and implementation of subregional and regional action programmes in the Northern Mediterranean, Central and Eastern Europe and other affected country Parties

<u>Document symbol</u>	<u>Title or description</u>
ICCD/CRIC(1)/5/Add.3	Inputs from the regional meeting of Northern Mediterranean, Central and Eastern European and other affected country Parties

ICCD/CRIC(1)/6/Add.1	Synthesis of reports submitted by developed country Parties
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CRIC 3

ICCD/CRIC(3)/INF.3	Explanatory note and help guide for affected country Parties
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SUBREGIONAL AND REGIONAL ACTIVITIES

Activity Master 2003 on CEE cooperation on land resources management

Report of the meeting and letter of follow-up	Regional meeting for strengthening the cooperation in the field of land resources management in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), 15-16 December 2003, Minsk, Belarus
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Report	Technical workshop on drought preparedness in the Balkans within the context of the UNCCD, 25-26 October 2004, Poiana Brasov, Romania
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CEE NATIONAL REPORTS

Albania (2002)
Armenia (2000/2002)
Azerbaijan (2000/2002)
Belarus (2002)
Bulgaria (2002)
Georgia (2000/2002)
Hungary (2002)
Republic of Moldova (2000/2002)
Romania (2000/2002)

DEVELOPED PARTIES REPORTS MENTIONING CEE

Canada (2002)
Czech Republic (2002)
European Community (2000)
Germany (2002)
Japan (2002)
Spain (2002)
Switzerland (2000/2002)
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (2002)
United States of America (2000/2002)

NATIONAL ACTION PROGRAMMES

Armenia (2002)
Georgia (2003)
Republic of Moldova (2000)
Romania (2000)

OTHER DOCUMENTS AND WEBSITES

GM/UNCCD joint work programme 2004-2005 and GM website
GEF website including the Technical Advisory Group
UNDP/Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (RBEC) website
Roster of experts of CST for CEE
Relevant pages from European Commission website
Environment in Slovenia 2002, Environmental Policy 2004
State Environmental Policy of the Czech Republic 2001, 2004
Environmental Indicators of Hungary, 2002
OECD Environmental Performance Review of Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovak Republic
National and Pilot Agro-Environmental Programmes of Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania
UNEP and EEA "High Nature Value Farmland", 2004
Framework Convention for the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians
Declaration of the UNECE Fifth Ministerial Conference, Environment for Europe, 2003
Environmental Strategy for Countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, 2003
National Development Plans of selected countries of the CEE region for the EU Structural Funds and Cohesion Fund
Agriculture and Biodiversity, OECD, 2003
Sustainable Development in Europe, North America and Central Asia: Progress Since Rio, UN ECE, UNEP 2002
UNECE Environmental Performance Reviews of selected countries of the CEE region (Armenia, Bulgaria, Georgia)
Europe's environment: the third assessment, EEA, 2003
Global Environmental Outlook 3, UNEP 2002
State Environmental Policies, National Sustainable Strategies and other relevant strategies and policies papers of the respective countries of the CEE region

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