<u>**ANNEX I**</u>

of the Commission Implementing Decision on the ENI East Regional Action Programme 2014
Part 1

<u>Action Document for Implementation of the Shared Environmental Information System principles and practices in the Eastern Partnership countries (SEIS East)</u>

1. **IDENTIFICATION**

Title/Number	Implementation of the Shared Environmental Information System principles and practices in the Eastern Partnership countries (SEIS East)
	CRIS number: ENI/2014/036-898
Total cost	Total estimated cost: EUR 7.35 million
	Total amount of EU budget contribution: EUR 7 million
	Estimated co-financing by grant beneficiary: EUR 0.35 million
Aid method / Management mode and type of financing	Project Approach
	Direct management – grant (direct award) and administrative arrangement with Eurostat
DAC-code	41010	Sector	Environmental policy and administrative management

2. **RATIONALE AND CONTEXT**

2.1.   Summary of the action and its objectives

This project builds on the regional EU-funded project "Towards a Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) in the European Neighbourhood" (ENPI-SEIS, EUR 5.7 million, 2010-2014), implemented by the European Environment Agency (EEA). The ENPI-SEIS project supported the environmental and statistical authorities in 16 partner countries both in the East and South European Neighbourhood regions in promoting SEIS principles. During the implementation of this project, a pilot set of regional environmental indicators to be used in decision-making was developed, produced, and shared. Buy-in of the approach and commitment was confirmed through Memoranda of Understanding/Letters of Intent between the EEA and the relevant authorities in the Eastern Partnership countries. At a higher political level, the Heads of State and Government confirmed their commitment to SEIS in the Vilnius Eastern Partnership Summit declaration from November 2013.

The objective of the proposed activity is to support the implementation of SEIS principles and practices in the six Eastern Partnership countries, as a tool for improving the quality, availability and access to environmental information to the benefit of effective and knowledge-based policy-making and to improve good governance in the field of the environment. The main project results will be:

i) Improved implementation of international commitments related to environmental reporting in line with EU best practices;

ii) Improved capacities in the national administrations to produce, manage and use environmental statistics, data and information in decision-making in line with EU best practices; and

iii) Preparation of regular State of Environment reports and indicator-based assessments in line with EU best practices.

2.2. Context

2.2.1. Regional context

The Eastern Partnership[1] was launched by the EU at a Summit meeting with the Eastern European partners in May 2009 in Prague. It sets out an ambitious path for deeper relations with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova[2] and Ukraine, through both bilateral and multilateral dimensions. The Eastern Partnership is based on mutual commitments to the rule of law, good governance, respect for human rights, and respect for the rights of minorities, the principles of market economy and sustainable development. Under the Eastern Partnership, four thematic platforms have been founded. An environment and climate change panel, under Platform 2 on Economic Integration and Convergence with EU Policies, covers promotion of environment protection and strengthening of environmental governance in the partner countries and holds regular meetings.

The multilateral track of the Eastern Partnership is also advanced through a number of flagship initiatives, which give additional momentum, concrete substance and more visibility to the Partnership. SEIS implementation is the activity that underpins the Good Environmental Governance Flagship Initiative. The goal of further promoting and strengthening the flagship initiatives was set at the most recent Eastern Partnership summit held in Vilnius in November 2013. In particular, the Heads of State and Government highlighted the need to continue the process of regulatory approximation and policy convergence in the field of environment and climate change and specifically mentioned shared environmental information system as one of the areas for further approximation. In the declaration, the Heads of State and Government also stressed the need to continue EU assistance in view of establishing fully operational SEIS. From 2014, the European Union cooperates with the Eastern Partnership through projects financed under the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI).

In the pan-European region, environmental monitoring and information management was recognised as a key objective and area for action in the further development of environmental strategies at the 5th "Environment for Europe" Ministerial Conference in Kiev in 2003 and confirmed during the 6th Ministerial Conference in 2007 in Belgrade.[3] The 7th "Environment for Europe" Ministerial Conference held in Astana in 2011 agreed to encourage countries in the pan-European region to further continue implementation of SEIS principles and practices.

2.2.2. Sector context: policies and challenges

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[1] http://eeas.europa.eu/eastern/index_en.htm .
[2] Hereafter referred to as Moldova.
[3] On the "Environment for Europe" process, see http://www.unece.org/env/efe/welcome.html.

In 2008, the European Commission confirmed its commitment to implementation of SEIS in the European Union and extending the application of the SEIS principles to the neighbouring countries.[4] The Commission services, in collaboration with Member States and the EEA were entrusted to carry the process forward. Priority areas for action on SEIS have been outlined in a 2013 Commission staff working document[5].

According to the SEIS principles, environmental information should be:
- Managed as close as possible to its source;
- Collected once, and shared with others for many purposes;
- Readily available to easily fulfil reporting obligations;
- Easily accessible to all users;
- Accessible to enable comparisons at the appropriate geographical scale, and citizen participation;
- Fully available to the general public, and at the national level in the relevant national language(s);
- Supported through common, free open software standards.

The application of the SEIS principles will result in an open and shared environmental information system, accessible to decision-makers, civil society, and other international and national stakeholders.

The INSPIRE Directive [6] is key to overcome existing inefficiencies relating to the access and use of spatial data produced by public authorities. SEIS complements INSPIRE as it also addresses data of a non-spatial or non-numerical nature, while focussing in addition on the improvement in the quality and comparability of data.

The EEA has a central role in collecting and providing environmental information in Europe. With the help of its European environment information and observation network (EIONET)[7], it has been a leading proponent of SEIS from the start of the initiative.

The already existing EEA 'Reportnet' infrastructure is aimed at supporting and improving data and information flows as it integrates different web services in all aspects of the data flows – from designing the file formats to the quality assurance of deliveries. Reportnet was initially used for reporting environmental data to the EEA, but gradually it encompassed more reporting obligations and is currently hosting many of the European Union and international environmental reporting requirements. Some Member States use Reportnet for almost all of their European and international reporting requirements, with Sweden responding to 379 environmental reporting obligations through Reportnet, Norway and Slovenia – approximately 260 each. Around 150 of these are coming from the EU legislation with reporting obligations towards the Commission (Environment DG, Climate Action DG, Eurostat), while the rest includes obligations towards the United Nations, UNECE, Marine conventions, etc.

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[4] Communication COM(2008)46 of 1 February 2008 "Towards a Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS)": http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2008:0046:FIN:EN:PDF.
[5] SWD(2013)18 of 25 January 2013: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/seis/pdf/seis_implementation_en.pdf.
[6] Directive 2007/2/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 March 2007 establishing an Infrastructure for Spatial Information in the European Community (INSPIRE): http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2007:108:0001:0014:en:PDF.
[7] EIONET is a partnership network of the EEA, its member states and cooperating countries. It consists of the EEA itself, a number of European Topic Centres (ETCs) and a network of around 1500 experts from 39 countries and 400 national bodies dealing with environmental information.

For the Countries in the Eastern Neighbourhood, the application of the SEIS principles and use of Reportnet can also provide an effective solution to decrease what can appear to be an ever-growing and changing reporting burden – from national demands to international conventions. For example, Ukraine's reporting obligations under various international legal obligations covering UN (UNECE, UNFCCC, UNESCO, Basel Convention), Bern Convention, International Maritime Organisation, Black Sea Convention and others amount to almost 100[8]. Reportnet is already freely open to the countries in the European Neighbourhood, and no additional information technology development will be needed so that these countries use the system in the same way as Member States.

In the six targeted Eastern Partnership countries, inconsistencies of environmental data and information with international standards, inadequate information exchange mechanisms, coupled with gaps in professional and technical capacities for maintaining monitoring and information systems also largely remain a challenge. There are organisational, administrative and technical constraints that still need to be addressed in order to allow open access, sharing and reuse of available environmental information. Efficient dialogue and cooperation between the national authorities collecting and managing different types of environmental information has to be further improved. It is also needed to increase the use of environmentally-relevant data to improve the effectiveness of policy-making and civil society participation. This can have positive impact across a wide range of areas including management of water resources, waste management, air quality improvement, protection of biodiversity, prevention and management of environmental hazards such as floods and forest fires. Furthermore, sound environmental data is essential for economic development as a whole with its key role in sustainable production and consumption.

On the positive side, SEIS-friendly policy documents and action plans are in the pipeline for most countries. Recent developments towards implementation of e-governance in some countries (Georgia, Moldova) have improved the trend of availability of environmental information online and making it publicly accessible. Also, in some countries (Ukraine and Moldova) good progress is made for the setting-up of National Spatial Data Infrastructure that will facilitate access and use of some of the data required for SEIS implementation. The process of preparation of the Association Agreements with the European Union that some of the Eastern Partnership countries have embarked on also serves as catalyst for further advancing EU standards and principles. Moldova is one of the countries participating in the enhanced cooperation programme with the EEA on SEIS, which will be implemented starting from mid-2014.

2.3.   Lessons learnt

The proposed project is built on the lessons learnt from the ENPI-SEIS project (2010-2014), which has supported the countries in the European Neighbourhood[9] in improving their environmental monitoring and data collection and reporting, as well as in gradually extending the application of SEIS principles. As recognized by the latest Results Oriented Monitoring (ROM) report, the project has been fully in line with government priorities in the Eastern Partnership countries and a good number of regional results have been achieved. Facilitating

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[8]   For more information, see www.eionet.europa.eu/reportnet.

[9]   Initially the cooperation with the ENPI East region was covering the six ENP Eastern partners: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, as well as Russian Federation under the Strategic partnership with the EU. However, in September 2013 Russian Federation has stepped out of the cooperation and has not been involved in any further ENPI-SEIS project activities.

regional cooperation on issues of common interests has been very important in advancing the implementation of SEIS principles.

In the initial phase, it proved effective to have one project with common objectives and similar activities for the East and the South since the priority was to explain and promote SEIS principles in the European Neighbourhood. The actual implementation of the SEIS principles and practices, however, calls for a project dedicated to the Eastern Partnership countries and their specific needs. There is also added value to a regional approach for the Eastern Partnership countries, as they share a similar historical approach to data collection, sharing and reporting, institutional setups, and reluctance to openly share environmental information. A project dedicated to the Eastern Partnership countries will also allow to further engage them in pan-European processes and environment assessments, which have been a very important external driver to advancing the SEIS.

Implementation of the ENPI-SEIS project also showed the need to increase country commitment to implement on a day-to-day basis the SEIS approach. To address this issue, the signing of Memoranda of Understanding/Letters of Intent between EEA and the Governments of the partner countries and/or making specific agreements between EEA and the main holders of environmental information in these countries was initiated. As of June 2014, such memoranda will be either under negotiation or signed with all six countries. The signature of these agreements commits to closer interaction of relevant partners, their engagement in the process and input to SEIS implementation at national level. Inter-institutional coordination at national level can also be greatly improved through the creation of formal SEIS working group or a dedicated coordinating institution; such a process has already been set in place in several countries (i.e. Armenia, Georgia). The recruitment by the project of dedicated national coordinators in each of the beneficiary countries in the second phase of the project will also be necessary to more actively engage stakeholders, better operationalise daily work, coordinate planned events, and follow-up on the implemented project activities. The coordination with the on-going work for establishing more multi-purpose spatial data infrastructures in the region will have to be strengthened.

In the proposed project, more emphasis also needs to be paid to i) developing, adopting, and implementing SEIS/INSPIRE-compatible legislation, ii) collecting and compiling environment statistics according to European and international standards, and iii) demonstrating how improved environmental data can be used in policy-making in the six targeted countries. Adopting the SEIS principles is also an important tool for empowering citizens to take informed decisions concerning the environment and influence public policy. Thus, more efforts are needed to increase the visibility and the wider communication on the principles and benefits of SEIS and engage civil society.

2.4.   Complementary actions

The EEA will continue its cooperation with the other key actors in the frame of the project. The identification and development of common data structures and indicators for the Eastern Partnership countries during the implementation of the ENPI-SEIS project was done in close partnership with the UNECE Joint Task Force (JTF) on Environmental Indicators. The UNECE Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment (WGEMA) has started its work on contributing to establishing a regular process of environmental assessment and the development of the SEIS across the region, jointly with EEA and its partners, as well as to help in improving the quality of environmental assessments. The cooperation with UNECE bodies

have shown strong link and synergies between JTF, WGEMA and ENPI-SEIS activities that are considered useful, appreciated by the countries and should be further encouraged.

The project will also cooperate and exchange information with the UNEP Regional Office for Europe (UNEP/ROE). It can, directly feed to the UNEP/Live platform[10] (see section 3.2: activity 2 under result area III) thus helping the Eastern Partnership countries fulfil their UN obligations for sharing official data and information on the environment. Furthermore, the project will take into consideration the development of the United Nations initiative on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM) aiming at playing a leading role in setting the agenda for the development of global geospatial information and to promote its use to address key global challenges.

Considering the fact that in the field of environmental statistics Eurostat plays a key role at the Community level, a close cooperation between EEA and Eurostat will be sought in the framework of the project. Both Eurostat and the Joint Research Centre (JRC) were invited and involved in the execution and management of ENPI-SEIS within the framework of the project Management Group and Steering Committee. Several capacity building and training activities in the ENPI region were held with the support of Eurostat and JRC experts. This project can greatly benefit from the expert advice and assistance from Eurostat and JRC in the implementation of capacity-building activities related to INSPIRE, to standardised statistical formats, waste management indicators, land-use and soil-related indicators (see section 3.2: activity 2 under result area II). Close dialogue with the Environment DG on the relevant developments and processes was maintained and is considered necessary for any further activities.

The project will also continue to work together with other regional partners and on-going projects, which have complementary objectives and similar thematic scope. Links to other regional relevant projects will be ensured, in particular where the activities foresee building and managing data sets in the priority areas targeted (full list of regional environmental indicators in page 10 - Box 1) or developing environmental data tools (such as in the case of the regional programmes for Prevention, Preparedness and Response to Man-made and Natural Disasters in the ENPI East Region (PPRD East), which has and Electronic Regional Atlas tool). These links will be established through a mechanism for exchange of information and through participation in projects' Steering Committees/Advisory Boards, where considered appropriate after consultation with the Commission. Training and capacity building activities in the priority areas for cooperation will be implemented jointly with other ongoing regional projects/activities in air quality and climate change, in water jointly with the project on Environmental Protection of International Rivers, in biodiversity with the Emerald Network project and for further development of indicators in conjunction with the project on Greening Economies in the Eastern Neighbourhood (EaP-GREEN). Representatives of other Neighbourhood ongoing projects will continue to be invited to attend the national workshops and events organised in the partner countries. Coordination with the Black Sea Synergy and the Black Sea Commission Secretariat will be ensured. Synergy with other activities and other on-going regional initiatives and projects would be pursued depending on the common elements and value added for the beneficiary countries.

2.5. Donor coordination

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[10] The UNEP/Live platform (http://www.uneplive.org/) was established in 2013 following a decision by the UNEP Governing Council as a follow-up on the 1992 Rio Declaration and Rio+20 Conference in 2012.

Regular dialogue will be ensured with other environment-related projects involved in production of data/indicators relevant for international reporting obligations. While there is a record of some national and regional programmes and initiatives funded by international organisations and EU Member States in the environmental field in recent years, not many of them are directed to improving environmental information and statistics. Links will be maintained with the EU Delegations in the beneficiary countries that act as a focal point in communicating and ensuring coordination with relevant country support initiatives. In that respect the EEA can play an important role being part of advisory boards of relevant regional projects. In addition, EEA ensures a regular information flow and dialogue on activities in the neighbourhood region with its 39 member and cooperating countries through the Eionet National Focal Points meetings that take place three times a year.

3.   DETAILED DESCRIPTION

3.1.   Objectives

The global objective of the proposed activity is to further mainstream evidence-based environmental information into knowledge-based policy-making and good governance in the field of the environment.

The specific objective of the proposed activity is to support the implementation of the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) principles in the six Eastern Partnership countries as a tool for improving the quality, availability and access to environmental information.

3.2.   Expected results and main activities

The main project results and activities foreseen are the following:

Result I: Improved implementation of international commitments related to environmental reporting in line with EU best practices

The project will allow for the timely delivery of the partner countries' environmental reporting obligations (data flows) to the United Nations regional and global conventions and in producing the corresponding indicators with the required high quality. This will be achieved through a dedicated expert technical assistance support to the beneficiary countries provided by a national expert/coordinator based in each country, EEA backstopping and expert missions to the beneficiary countries, and dedicated capacity-building activities.

➢ Activity 1: Expert technical assistance focused on the process of **compiling the monitoring data into relevant data sets to meet reporting obligations** of the countries to UN global, regional conventions, obligations and commitments, such as the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution (CLRTAP) and protocols on emissions of pollutants (SO_2, NO_x, Ozone, POPs, etc.), Aarhus Convention and the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTR), Water Convention and Protocol on Water and Health, Environment Impact Assessment. The technical assistance will be aimed at aggregating and reporting data on particular datasets/indicators for each relevant reporting obligation. Capacity building activities at country level in the forms of hands-on thematic workshops and experts' visits, working together on national data, and training national experts and policy-makers from the Eastern Neighbourhood region in the identified priority areas (based on the updated

country reports and bilateral discussions), involving Eionet expertise wherever appropriate.

➤ Activity 2: Expert technical assistance and capacity building activities in the form of **thematic workshops and training of national experts on harmonised formats and standards for regular production of the full set of 36 regional indicators[11] and their underlying data flows**. These are envisaged to be made available online in line with the SEIS principles, building on the experience accumulated during the ENPI-SEIS project. The work under this activity will contribute to improving harmonisation, access and quality of data shared by the beneficiary countries. Collaboration will be initiated with Eurostat on waste management indicators and with JRC on land and soil-related indicators. Continuation of the indicators production will be addressed also through the UNECE Joint Task Force on Environmental Indicators, which is operational since 2010, and by capitalising on the work done under the initial ENPI-SEIS cooperation. Linkages with relevant national and regional initiatives contributing to management, accessibility and quality of environmental data will be maintained through joint meetings and participation in their advisory boards.

Result II: Improved capacities in the national administrations to produce, manage and use environmental statistics, data and information in decision-making in line with EU best practices

The emphasis will be on addressing specific country needs on environmental data handling/data coordination, identified in dialogue with relevant stakeholders at national level and key regional partners during ENPI-SEIS and subsequently, and in using it for decision-making in line with EU best practices.

➤ Activity 1: Direct technical support to the national coordinating entities in data structuring of SEIS-compatible infrastructure. This work will take into account the EU provisions for establishment of the various elements of spatial data infrastructures in support of interoperability and harmonisation of environmental data and information in the INSPIRE Directive[12].

➤ Activity 2: Capacity building activities at country level in the forms of hands-on thematic workshops and experts' visits, working together to increase the availability and quality of national statistics and data, and training national experts and policy-makers from the Eastern Neighbourhood region in the identified priority areas (based on the updated country reports and bilateral discussions), involving Eionet expertise wherever appropriate.

➤ Activity 3: Expert support in the development, updating, and implementation of SEIS-compatible legislation where relevant and aligning it with European Union legislation, particularly for the countries that have advanced in the preparation of Association Agreements with the European Union. To the extent possible, NGOs and civil society will be actively involved in the process.

Result III: Preparation of regular State of Environment reports and indicator-based assessments in line with EU best practices

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[11] Full list in page 10 (Box 1). The Revised Guidelines on the Application of Environmental Indicators are available at: http://www.unece.org/environmental-policy/areas-of-work/environmental-monitoring/areas-of-work/enveuropemonitoringiandr-en/revised-guidelines-on-the-application-of-environmental-indicators.html.

[12] See foonote 6.

The activities under this area of work will support the countries in preparing high-quality environmental assessments in line with EU (as considered relevant) and national legislation, making use of the collected and made available environmental data and information.

> Activity 1: Expert assistance to the countries in producing a regional indicator-based State of Environment reporting as part of the upcoming in 2016 'Environment for Europe' assessment and in complementarity to the EEA State of Environment Report 2015[13].

> Activity 2: Regional and country-level contributions to relevant regional and global processes (for example, Black Sea State of Environment, Environment and Health, Forests in Europe, UNEP/Live portal, UNEP Global Environmental Outlook assessment – GEO6). Direct link to the UNEP/Live portal will be pursued.

> Activity 3: Capacity building activities in putting together a structure to contribute to future sustainable 'Environment for Europe' assessment process. This activity will be based on the lessons learnt from the 2016 'Environment for Europe' assessment.

Table 1. Comparison of baseline and expected outcomes under Result 1

ENP East country	Indicators produced and regularly updated			Data on the agreed indicators shared in line with SEIS principles		
	2010 baseline before SEIS-ENPI	**2014** expected towards end of SEIS-ENPI	**2019** planned for end of SEIS East	**2010** baseline before SEIS-ENPI	**2014** expected towards end of SEIS-ENPI	**2019** planned for end of SEIS East
Armenia	0*	8	36	N/A	8	36
Azerbaijan	0*	6	36	N/A	6	36
Belarus	0*	8	36	N/A	8	36
Moldova	0*	8	36	N/A	8	36
Georgia	0*	7	36	N/A	7	36
Ukraine	0*	4-5	36	N/A	4-5***	36

* Environmental indicators available at national level and used for reporting on ad-hoc basis, however no harmonisation process in place at a regional level.
** 2010 corresponds to the baseline before ENPI-SEIS implementation, 2014 – to the expected status in June 2014 towards end of ENPI-SEIS implementation, and 2019 – to the planned results under SEIS East.
*** Sharing is pending Government decision.

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[13] The decision of the preparation and production of the next assessment is to be taken by the UNECE Committee of Environmental Policy (CEP) in the autumn of 2014. Irrespective of the fact whether EEA is tasked to produce this assessment (as was the case for the previous five), the results of this specific activity will feed into the process.

Box 1. Key Environmental Indicators for Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia *

Air pollution and ozone depletion
1. Emissions of pollutants into the atmospheric air
2. Ambient air quality in urban areas
3. Consumption of ozone-depleting substances

Climate change
4. Air temperature
5. Atmospheric precipitation
6. Greenhouse gas emissions

Water
7. Renewable freshwater resources
8. Freshwater abstraction
9. Household water use per capita
10. Water losses
11. Reuse and recycling of freshwater
12. Drinking water quality
13. BOD and concentration of ammonium in rivers
14. Nutrients in freshwater
15. Nutrients in coastal seawaters
16. Polluted (non-treated) wastewaters

Biodiversity
17. Protected areas
18. Forest and other wooded land
19. Threatened and protected species
20. Trends in the number and distribution of selected species

Land and soil
21. Land uptake
22. Area affected by soil erosion

Agriculture
23. Fertilizer consumption
24. Pesticide consumption

Energy
25. Final energy consumption
26. Total energy consumption
27. Energy intensity
28. Renewable energy consumption

Transport
29. Passenger transport demand
30. Freight transport demand
31. Composition of road motor vehicle fleet by fuel type
32. Average age of road motor vehicle fleet

Waste
33. Waste generation
34. Transboundary movements of hazardous wastes
35. Waste reuse and recycling
36. Final waste disposal

* The selected eight indicators for the pilot phase are underlined.

The key environmental indicators adopted at the Belgrade Ministerial Conference in 2007 are presented in Box 1, highlighting the eight pilot indicators selected under ENPI-SEIS.

The EEA will be fully responsible for implementation and coordination of the project activities. The governance and management structure underlying the implementation of these activities will include:

- At regional level, a steering committee which will meet annually and will guide decision-making;

- At national level, focal points at the government administration, working groups at inter-institutional level, and dedicated experts recruited by the project as full-time national coordinators.

3.3. Risks and assumptions

There is a risk of a lack of inter-institutional cooperation between the different partners and organisations in the national setting, particularly between the environmental and statistical authorities. This will be mitigated through increased support to the creation and functioning of formal SEIS working groups or dedicated coordinating institutions at national level.

Risks of lack of commitment to open access to quality environmental information will be addressed through Memoranda of Understanding/Letters of Intent between the EEA and the partner countries. The Commission will also use the political dialogue with countries in the context of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement Sub-committee meetings to advance the high level political commitments made at Vilnius. In case where the data is available and made accessible to the project, the data accountability and data quality rests with the data holders. There will be quality assurance checks by the EEA and trainings for the data producers provided based on the specific country requests.

The administrative barriers linking to the distinction between the ones monitoring and collecting environmental data at national level, on one hand, and the policy-makers, on another could be addressed through encouraging signing of inter-institutional agreements between the actors concerned. This work has already been undertaken during the ENPI-SEIS project with concrete results/agreements put in place in some countries.

Unstable political and economic situation in the target countries pose an additional risk with frequent and sometimes rather extensive changes in the national administrations. Continuity and availability of human and financial resources to support the process of SEIS implementation at national level in the ENP countries is a constant challenge. This also links to the stability in the administrations of the relevant organisations to ensure continuity of work and dialogue. The EEA will work with a broad base of technical experts at the national administration, which are unlikely to change in a potential political turnover. While this is beyond the project control, having a dedicated national coordinator in place operating as closely as possible to the respective national authorities in each of the Eastern Partnership countries will ensure continuity of the invested efforts. It is expected that at the end of the project, in-country capacities and work routines will be established, allowing for a phasing out of the role of national coordinator (or at least EU financial support for this function), ensuring sustainability of the action.

In countries where budget support is provided, use of SEIS-produced environmental indicators might be considered as part of the indicators, to secure the long term commitment of partner countries to implement and use SEIS.

3.4. Cross-cutting issues

Environmental information is closely linked to the quality and quantity of environmental resources (the state of the environment), as well as to human activities affecting the state of the environment (pressures), the impact of environmental degradation on human health, economic productivity and other variables affecting wellbeing (impacts), and societal responses, including government measures that try to improve environmental quality, reduce pressures on the environment, cost-benefit and other economic analyses used in environmental decision-making.

Improving the availability of reliable environmental information by strengthening environmental monitoring and information management is critical for environmental policy-making at all levels, from local to global. It is also relevant for supporting policymaking in related policy areas (such as health and poverty alleviation). Good and timely information is needed to support policy development and implementation across different policy areas, guide allocation of financial resources, support better environmental governance and raise environmental awareness also preventing environmental degradation in the long run, as well as to support international negotiations and implementation of international agreements dealing with transboundary issues. Environmental information is also relevant for developing national disaster risk reduction strategies for the beneficiary countries.

Where relevant, gender-disaggregated data will be encouraged.

3.5. Stakeholders

The key target groups at the national level will be the environmental and statistical organisations leading in the field of environmental information. Close contacts will be continued with the Ministries for Environment and Statistical Offices, and other relevant Ministries such as Ministry of Economy, Public Housing, Public Health/Epidemiology, Transport and Energy, Ministry of Industry, Ministry of Agriculture and extension services, Ministry of Regional Development and Construction, Ministry of Emergency will be involved for environmental data mainstreaming. The mentioned under 2.3 working groups at inter-institutional level will act as the coordinating structure ensuring the regular and active engagement of relevant stakeholders, as well as proper follow-up of the implemented project activities at national level. The National Workshops to be organised in the project framework to discuss progress and activities will aim to engage key national stakeholders as well as civil society, NGOs and the Regional Environmental Centres (RECs) in the planned activities.

The Aarhus Centres, existing in all six Eastern Partnership countries, play a crucial role in promoting all three pillars of the Aarhus Convention[14], namely Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in environmental matters. They improve awareness among the public and governmental authorities by disseminating environmental information and carrying out numerous educational and training projects. Therefore, they can be

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[14]http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/documents/cep43e.pdf.

engaged in project communication, dissemination of information and awareness-raising activities/events, where their tasks in each country will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

4.   IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES

4.1.   Financing agreement

In order to implement this action, it is not foreseen to conclude a financing agreement with the partner countries, referred to in Article 184(2)(b) of Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012 or Article 17 of Annex IV to the Cotonou Agreement.

4.2.   Indicative operational implementation period

The indicative operational implementation period of this action, during which the activities described in sections 3.2 and 4.3 will be carried out, is 60 months (48 months is the indicative duration of the project) from the date of entry into force of the financing agreement or, where none is concluded, from the adoption of this Action Document, subject to modifications to be agreed by the responsible authorising officer in the relevant agreements. The European Parliament and the relevant Committee shall be informed of the extension of the operational implementation period within one month of that extension being granted.

4.3.   Implementation components and modules

To implement the project, two components are foreseen:

- Component I: Direct grant to EEA
- Component II: Administrative Arrangement with Eurostat

Component I: Direct grant to EEA

Grant: direct award (direct management) with an EU specialised agency

(a)   Objectives of the grant, fields of intervention, priorities of the year and expected results

The objective of the grant is to support the implementation of SEIS principles and practices in the 6 Eastern Partnership countries, as a tool for improving the quality, availability and access to environmental information to the benefit of effective and knowledge-based policy-making and to improve good governance in the field of the environment. This grant is an ad-hoc grant. Activities undertaken in the frame of this grant are not to become recurrent activities, after the end of project implementation. The main results will be:

> i) Improved implementation of international commitments related to environmental reporting in line with EU best practices;

> ii) Improved capacities in the national administrations to manage and use environmental data and information in decision-making in line with EU best practices; and

> iii) Preparation of regular State of Environment reports and indicator-based assessments in line with EU best practices.

(b)   Justification of a direct grant

Under the responsibility of the authorising officer by delegation, the grant may be awarded without a call for proposals to the European Environment Agency (EEA).

Under the responsibility of the authorising officer by delegation, the recourse to an award of a grant without a call for proposals is justified because the action has specific characteristics requiring a specific type of beneficiary for its technical competence, specialisation or administrative power. Indeed, the EEA has been entrusted exclusive responsibilities of the implementation of the SEIS principles and practices in the European Union and SEIS extension to the neighbourhood countries. The project activities proposed directly correspond to the core EEA competencies, networking practices and expertise. Some of the activities will be undertaken in collaboration with the Joint Research Centre (particularly on Result I, activity 2, and Result II, activity 1), UNEP (particularly Result III, activity 2) and UNECE (particularly Result I, activity 2).

(c)   Eligibility conditions

Not applicable

(d)   Essential selection and award criteria

The essential selection criteria are financial and operational capacity of the applicant.

The essential award criteria are relevance of the proposed action to the objectives of the programme; design, effectiveness, feasibility, sustainability and cost-effectiveness of the action.

(e)   Maximum rate of co-financing

The maximum possible rate of co-financing for grants under this call is 95%.

The maximum possible rate of co-financing may be up to 100 % in accordance with Articles 192 of Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012 if full funding is essential for the action to be carried out. The essentiality of full funding will be justified by the responsible authorising officer in the award decision, in respect of the principles of equal treatment and sound financial management.

(f)   Indicative trimester to contact the potential direct grant beneficiary

Project preparation with EEA is expected to be finalised in the third quarter of 2014 and grant contract is expected to be concluded in the third quarter of 2014.

Component II: Administrative Arrangement with Eurostat

An administrative arrangement with statistical office of the European Union – Eurostat will be concluded with the objective of supporting the implementation of activities with a specific focus on waste data (particularly on Result I, activity 2 and Result II, activity 2).

This setup is justified because the action has specific characteristics requiring a specific type of beneficiary for its technical competence, specialisation or administrative power. Indeed, Eurostat has been entrusted exclusive responsibilities of the implementation of waste statistics in the European Union as part of the work on SEIS. The project activities proposed directly correspond to the core Eurostat competencies and expertise.

The administrative arrangement is expected to be concluded in the third quarter of 2014.

4.4. Scope of geographical eligibility for procurement and grants

The geographical eligibility in terms of place of establishment for participating in procurement and grant award procedures and in terms of origin of supplies purchased as established in the basic act shall apply.

The responsible authorising officer may extend the geographical eligibility in accordance with Article 9(3) of CIR Regulation (Regulation 236/2014 of 11 March 2014) on the basis of urgency or of unavailability of products and services in the markets of the countries concerned, or other duly substantiated cases where the eligibility rules would make the realisation of this action impossible or exceedingly difficult.

4.5. Indicative budget

Module	EU contribution (in EUR thousands)	Third party contribution (indicative, where known) (in EUR thousands)
Direct grant to EEA (direct management)	6,600	350
Administrative arrangement with Eurostat	400	N.A.
Total	**7,000**	**350**

4.6. Performance monitoring

Project progress will be monitored based on objectively verifiable indicators (OVIs), which will be tied to the specific project objectives. Proposed quantitative OVIs include: timely delivery on reporting obligations to key multilateral environmental agreements, regular production and open sharing of the full set of 36 environmental indicators and their underlying data flows, national legislation revised and adapted to SEIS principles, inter-instructional coordination mechanism on environmental information in place in all partner countries. These indicators will be further elaborated in the Description of the Action.

Monitoring will be ensured internally by the EEA and by meetings of the project Steering Committee. External monitoring will be regularly carried out by the external Results-Oriented Monitoring (ROM) programme of the European Union.

4.7.   Evaluation and audit

Independent evaluations of the performance shall be carried out at mid-term and at the end of the project.

4.8.   Communication and visibility

Communication and visibility of the EU is a legal obligation for all external actions funded by the EU.

This action shall contain communication and visibility measures which shall be based on a specific Communication and Visibility Plan of the Action, to be elaborated before the start of implementation and supported with the budget indicated in section 4.5 above.

The measures shall be implemented either (a) by the Commission, and/or (b) by the partner country, contractors, grant beneficiaries and entrusted entities. Appropriate contractual obligations shall be included in, respectively, financing agreements, procurement and grant contracts, and delegation agreements.

The Communication and Visibility Manual for European Union External Action shall be used to establish the Communication and Visibility Plan of the Action and the appropriate contractual obligations.