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**PARTNER RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE EUROPEAN ENVIRONMENT INFORMATION
AND OBSERVATION NETWORK (EIONET)**

**Discussion paper by Sigfús Bjarnason and Gordon McInnes
European Environment Agency
Copenhagen, Denmark**

Introduction

1. Council Regulation 1210/90 established the European Environment Agency (EEA) and also aimed at the setting-up of the European Environment Information and Observation Network (EIONET). The 15 Member States of the European Union (EU15) plus Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway are currently members of the Agency. In 2001, EEA expects an additional 13 countries to become members, ten of the accession countries within the Commission's PHARE programme who have already participated with EEA in an extended EIONET, and Malta, Cyprus and Turkey.

2. Regulation 1210/90 was amended by Council Regulation 933/1999 in April 1999. The main objective of the Agency as specified in Article 1(2) of the amended Regulation is as follows:

To achieve the aims of environmental protection and improvement laid down by the Treaty and by successive Community action programmes on the environment, as well as of sustainable development, the objective shall be to provide the Community and Member States with:

- *objective, reliable and comparable information at European level enabling them to take the requisite measures to protect the environment, to assess the results of such measures and to ensure that the public is properly informed about the state of the environment,*
- *to that end, the necessary technical and scientific support.*

3. EEA, therefore, is one of the Agencies of the European Community but is not part of the European Commission. However, it works with the Commission Services on behalf of the Community; with national administrations on behalf of the member countries; and with others to develop its Work Programme to meet this main objective. The current Multiannual Work Programme covers 1999 to 2003.

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EIONET

4. The Regulation aims to set up the European Environmental Information and Observation Network (EIONET). In addition to the EEA, the Regulation indicates that the network consists of :

- National Focal Points (NFP)
- Main Component Elements (MCE) and
- European Topic Centres (ETC)

and describes what they are and what are their main roles. As part of the Work Programme, the National Focal Points, European Topic Centres and EEA have been connected together in an IT network, also called EIONET, now sometimes referred to as e-EIONET.

National Focal Points

5. NFPs are appointed and funded by Member Countries and PHARE countries and are in charge of national cooperation with the EEA and national coordination of activities related to the EEA work programme.

Main Component Elements

6. MCEs are nominated by Member Countries and are nationally funded institutions which at the national level are regular collectors and suppliers of environmental data and/or possess relevant knowledge regarding environmental science, monitoring or modelling.

National Reference Centres

7. NRCs are not mentioned in the Regulation but have been defined subsequently as a special subset of MCEs. NRCs are also therefore nationally funded institutions which may be nominated by Member Countries and PHARE countries to play a role in technical coordination within their countries and cooperate with ETCs established to cover various topics.

8. A country need not appoint an NRC for a particular topic and may appoint the NFP to be the Primary Contact Point for some or all topics/ETCs therefore the ETC Primary Contact Point for a topic may be the NFP or an NRC.

European Topic Centres (ETC)

9. ETCs are institutions which are contracted by the EEA to execute tasks identified in the Multiannual Work Programme. They are designated by the EEA Management Board after a competitive expertise and capacity selection process. Guiding principles for selection should be cost-efficient use of existing and potential capacities in the member countries, and avoidance of duplication of work and capacities.

10. The ETCs designated to date are multi-institutional (multi-organisational) consortia consisting of a Lead Organisation which provides the ETC Leader and a number (currently between 3 and 16) of Partner Organisations (ETC Partners).

11. The Agency has a contract (agreement) with the Lead Organisation for each ETC who then sub-contracts some tasks to its ETC Partners. Tasks may also be sub-contracted to others outside the ETC Consortium with the approval of EEA.

12. The ETC therefore works as an extension of the Agency to develop the work programme on that topic and works with the ETC Primary Contact Points to facilitate and develop work in the member countries relevant to that topic.

13. With a few exceptions on specific topics (for example, not all countries will be interested in marine and coastal environment), each ETC works with all member countries to help develop the Work Programme and deliver the agreed data, information, reports and other products and services. Each member country has to fund its own contribution to the work.

14. ETCs (Lead Organisations and Partners) therefore are different from NRCs (and MCEs). They are funded from different sources and they have different roles and responsibilities within the Work Programme. It is therefore not essential to be in an ETC consortium in order to participate in a topic within the Work Programme. However it is possible for one organisation to be involved in a topic as an ETC Lead Organisation or Partner and as an NRC (or MCE); the former on behalf of, and funded by, the EEA; the latter on behalf of, and funded by, the member country.

15. In the period 1995-2000, ETCs have been operating for the following topics:

- Inland Waters
- Marine and Coastal Environment
- Air Quality
- Nature Conservation
- Air Emissions
- Land Cover
- Catalogue of Data Sources (CDS)
- Waste
- Soil

In 2001, the tasks of these ETCs will be continued in five new Topic centres (Air and Climate Change, Terrestrial Environment, Water, Nature and Waste) or, in the case of CDS, continued from within the Agency.

16. Each ETC Lead Organisation has an agreement with the Agency for a period of three years renewable annually. The work to be done and the funding available under the agreement is specified each year in a series of technical annexes in line with the Annual Work Programmes.

17. At the request of the PHARE countries and funded by the PHARE Multi-country Programme, five PHARE Topic Links (PTL) have been established - for Inland Waters, Air Quality, Nature Conservation, Land Cover and Air Emissions - to provide resources and experts to extend the ETCs for these five topics. The extended ETCs work together with the nationally appointed experts in the 18 EEA member countries and 13 PHARE countries to develop the EEA work programme to the benefit of all 31 countries. Funding for these five PTLs is available from the PHARE programme to the end of October 2000.

NFP/EIONET Group

18. The NFP/EIONET Group was established in November 1995. The Group was established with specific objectives 'to assist the Agency in the preparation, implementation and follow-up of the Work Programme and in the development of EIONET' and consists of NFPs, representatives of the Commission (DG Environment, JRC and Eurostat) and the board members designated by Parliament, one member of the Scientific Committee and the ETC Leaders as well as relevant EEA staff.