

Longe-range Transboundary Air Pollution: New Protocol

by Harm Dotinga*

A new *multi-effects* and *multi-pollutant Protocol* to the 1979 Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution is being negotiated within the Working Group of Strategies of the Executive Body of the Convention. This Protocol is intended to strengthen the commitments contained in the existing Protocols to the Convention, in particular those dealing with the control of emissions of nitrogen oxides and volatile organic compounds.

The new agreement will be the eighth Protocol to the Convention. The five Protocols that have entered into force include the 1984 Protocol on the European Monitoring and Evaluation Programme (EMEP); the 1985 Protocol on Reductions of Sulphur Emissions; the 1988 Protocol concerning the Control of Nitrogen Oxides; the 1991 Volatile Organic Compounds Protocol; and the 1994 Oslo Protocol on Further Reductions of Sulphur Emissions. Recently, two more Protocols on Heavy Metals and on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) were adopted at a special session of the Executive Body in June 1998.

Although the States Parties to these Protocols have committed themselves to significant reductions of their emissions of the pollutants involved, the existing measures are still considered insufficient to resolve the environmental, human health and other problems caused by these substances in the long-term. Hence the need for a new Protocol.

The new agreement, which has been characterized as a "second-generation" Protocol, will deal simultaneously with emissions of nitrogen oxides, volatile organic compounds and ammonia and their combined environmental effects. The agreement will build on the commitments contained in the first generation of Protocols dealing with these substances, which applied a single-substance approach. Whether the new Protocol will

be extended to include also further reductions of sulphur emissions beyond those required under the 1994 Oslo Protocol is still under consideration.

The rationale for applying a combined and coordinated approach in the new Protocol is to improve the cost-effectiveness of adopted measures and to allow better consideration of the national interests and priorities of the States Parties. The Protocol will apply the "critical loads-approach" (an approach also used in the 1994 Oslo Protocol for sulphur emissions) and will establish differentiated emission reductions based on the effects of the pollutants. On a step by step basis and subject to a review process, each party will be required to reduce its emissions of these substances to limits established under the Protocol by a specified target year.

Progress towards the adoption of the new Protocol was discussed at the most recent meeting (sixteenth session) of the Executive Body for the Convention, which was convened from 8 to 11 December 1998.

At this session the Executive Body also adopted a decision on the review foreseen under article 8 of the 1994 Oslo Protocol on Further Reduction of Sulphur Emissions, a direct result of the entry into force of this Protocol on 5 August 1998. This decision concerns the review of information supplied by the Parties to the Protocol and by EMEP and the evaluation of data on the effects of depositions of sulphur and other acidifying compounds. It also comprises a review of compliance by the Parties with their obligations in relation to the calculated and internationally optimized allocations of sulphur emission reductions, the adequacy of the obligations and the progress made towards the achievement of the Protocol's objectives. In view of the fact that many elements of this review are or will be considered during the negotiations for the new multi-effects and multi-pollutant Protocol, the Working Group on Strategies was requested to perform this review in cooperation with the Implementation Committee and to present their findings at the next meeting of the Executive Board.

* Research Associate, Netherlands Institute for the Law of the Sea (NILOS), Utrecht University, Institute for Public International Law.

The Implementation Committee was established under the 1994 Oslo Protocol and its structure and functions were set out by a subsequent decision of the Executive Board adopted at the fifteenth session (1997/2). The main task of this new committee is to review and report on the implementation of the

1994 Oslo Protocol and compliance with the obligations contained in this Protocol as well as the other Protocols.

The negotiations for the new multi-effects and multi-pollutant Protocol are expected to be concluded by the end of 1999. □