



Sustainable consumption and production governance in countries in transition



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ABSTRACT

Unsustainable consumption and production patterns have brought human civilization to the brink of a global disaster. Alteration of these patterns to minimize adverse environmental impacts has become the key question of survival, a question relevant for every country and citizen.

In this paper we are looking at trends of consumption and production in the post-Soviet republics. These countries have a common history, but they took different routes to development. They are at different stages of economic growth and political processes, with differences also in consumption and production-related environmental pressures and policies.

This study is based on statistical data analysis and snap-shot surveys of national experts from non-governmental organizations, reflecting their views and observations, which often differ from official positions of national governments and international organizations. In order to draw conclusions about the possibilities for further development, we analyze various sustainable consumption and production indicators, policy developments, progress achieved and the main challenges behind sustainable consumption and production governance in these countries.

Sustainable consumption and production policy in the countries of the region is fragmented, and none of the countries uses a holistic integrated approach. The influence of the EU seems to be critical for advancing sustainable development principles. However, the EU accession does not address the growth effect, which is the main driver behind increasing environmental pressures related to consumption. There is still a long way to go from this mosaic of policy elements to a coherent policy with adequate institutional support and funding mechanisms.

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1. Introduction

The Earth has entered a new epoch in which humans constitute the dominant driver of change to the Earth System, and abrupt global environmental change can no longer be excluded (Rockström et al., 2009). To reverse it, changes in current unsustainable consumption and production patterns are needed. Countries differ from each other in consumption and production-related environmental pressures and the drivers behind them, but also in priorities, strategies and policy instruments used in the governance of sustainable consumption and production (SCP).

In this paper we are focusing on the post-Soviet republics of Eastern Europe and the Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine) and the three Baltic States (Estonia,

Latvia and Lithuania). For the sake of brevity, they are referred to as the EE&CB region. This region is rich and diverse in ecosystems as well as in economic activities. It inhabits around 73 million people, producing many services and industrial and agricultural goods. All the countries of the region were members of the Soviet Union but even then there were significant differences among countries in culture, consumption patterns and economic development, e.g., per capita gross domestic product (GDP) ranging from 1146 USD in Armenia to 6783 USD in Lithuania in 1990.

After gaining independence in the beginning of 1990s, their economic, political and social transition processes continued further on different paths: while the three Baltic States used shock therapy to reform their economic and political structures and became European Union (EU) Member-States in 2004, the Eastern European and Caucasian countries were slower in economic liberalization and democratization processes (read more about the socio-economic and political transition in former Soviet Union in Pickles, 1998; Valdivieso, 1998; Dethier et al., 1999; De Broeck and Koen, 2000; Popov, 2000). Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia,

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Moldova, and Ukraine are now united under the so-called EU Eastern Partnership initiative, which provides EU assistance in reforming their economies, governance systems, and social and environmental policies to conform to EU principles and standards.

Over the last 20 years all countries of the EE&CB region have experienced significant changes in social, political and economic systems related to economic liberalization, privatization and democratization. The centrally planned Soviet economy was replaced by the free market and opened for global consumption choices and trade. Such changes have led to new patterns of consumption and production and, consequently, to new household environmental impacts and pressures on global resources and ecosystems.

The main purpose of this paper is to assess the progress of these countries toward sustainable development and their transition to SCP in order to draw conclusions about the possibilities for further development. The paper starts with a statistical overview of some economic and environmental indicators relevant for a SCP policy assessment and then describes the results of a snap-shot policy review carried out with the help of various national environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the studied region.

2. Methodology

This study builds on two previous projects carried out by the Ukrainian National Environmental NGO MAMA-86: “Elucidating national and sub-regional progress on SCP policy development in Western (Belarus, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine) and South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia) countries of the Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA)” and “Supporting environmental activities of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum Working Group 3”. These projects produced two reports (MAMA-86, 2008, 2011) on environmental governance reforms in Eastern Partnership countries. This study takes this work further and explores SCP governance development in the EE&CB region using quantitative and qualitative research methods. First it looks at social, economic and environmental trends in the region and then follows with qualitative empirical analysis based on a snap-shot NGO expert survey to learn about the state of art of the SCP policies in these countries.

To describe the SCP trends in the region, we used several economic and environmental indicators presenting potential consumption and production-related environmental drivers and pressures. Similar approaches can be found in other studies, such as Wilson et al. (2007); Moran et al. (2008). The time span of the data observed extended from 1990 to 2010. Statistical data on GDP, CO₂ emissions, energy consumption and household final consumption (constant 2000 USD) come from The World Bank statistical database (<http://data.worldbank.org>); data on population are from the United Nations (UN) statistics division (<http://data.un.org>); ecological footprint data are taken from the Global Footprint Network studies and data on total material extraction are from the SERI database (www.materialflows.net).

We performed Spearman's rank correlation (SRC), which measures the degree of association between selected indicators to explore patterns in data. SRC was preferred over Pearson's correlation as the data sample is rather small. We also tested Environmental Kuznets curve hypotheses, which consider a nuanced relationship between income and environmental impact, and suggest that environmental emissions might rise as income increases until a particular level is reached, at which point emission levels begin to fall (Arrow et al., 1995). The fundamental implication of this theory is that economic growth may be seen as favoring environmental protection, which is an important aspect in the region as during the last 20 years these countries have experienced

several economic shocks and are anxious to reach the prosperity levels of the West.

The qualitative analysis is based on assessments of the situation in the countries by experts from leading environmental NGOs (one from each of the countries) reflecting their views and observations, which often differ from official positions of national governments and international organizations. The information was collected during the above-mentioned projects, through a structured questionnaire, as well as in expert discussions held during the international conference “Sustainable Development in Eastern Partnership Countries: Taking Stock of the Progress and Setting Goals on the Road to Rio+20”. That conference was organized by MAMA-86 on April 19–20, 2012 in Kiev, where all the experts presented their SCP country analyses and discussed results.

The questionnaire (Annex A) was constructed around the several aspects of SCP governance, covering questions about sustainable development strategies and their goals, principles and objectives, institutional and legal mechanisms and policy instruments used for the SCP governance, as well as SCP principles in other sectoral policies and plans. To provide information on these issues, the experts operated not only with official statistics and policy documents but also relied on their own experience and knowledge about ongoing processes in their respective countries. The specific feature of EE&CB countries is that official statistics do not always objectively reflect the state of affairs due to the low quality of data reported and imperfection of the indicators used. Legislative progress cannot be assessed purely on the basis of the presence or absence of specific legislation. It is also necessary to take into account how these policies and laws are integrated and implemented. Such were the reasons behind the present review.

3. Statistical overview

Over the last 20 years all the countries in the region experienced steep economic (GDP) fall after the collapse of the Soviet Union, followed by a rapid economic growth during 1996–2007 period, e.g., the GDP growth rate in Latvia during this period on average was 7.5% annually (see Fig. 1). In the same period GDP, comparative price level and household final consumption expenditure of Central and Eastern European countries converged with EU15 (old EU Member States) (Liobikienė and Mandravickaitė, 2011). The three Baltic States are leading in per capita GDP and only Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia have not reached the level of 1990. However, the global economic crisis of 2008 hit most of the region and especially the Baltic States, which experienced the sharpest decrease of GDP in the European Union. It created many problems in providing sustainability but also opened new possibilities.

Despite their common past, regionally there are significant differences in socio-economic development among the countries. United Nations data show that the highest poverty risk remains in Armenia, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, while Azerbaijan has managed to decrease its poverty significantly. Per capita household final consumption expenditures vary from over 3000 USD in Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia to below 1000 USD in Moldova, Azerbaijan, Ukraine and Georgia. There are also similar differences in per capita GDP. The World Bank classifies Estonia as a “high-income economy”, Latvia, Lithuania, Azerbaijan and Belarus as “upper middle-income economies”, but Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine are considered to be “lower middle-income economies”. The difference also lies in the countries' economic structure, with agricultural prevalence in the economies of Armenia, Georgia and Moldova, a rather large share of industry in the economies of Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Belarus and service-based economies in the Baltic States.

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