

**MALTA'S INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATIONS
RE ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS**

**Simone Borg
6.XI.02**

Contents

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. International Institutions**
- 3. List of Multilateral Environment Agreements**
- 4. An Assessment of the Obligations of the MEAs**
- 5. Conclusions**
- 6. Recommendations**

MALTA'S MULTILATERAL OBLIGATIONS

Re Environmental Matters

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses Malta's multilateral obligations relating to environmental issues. In turn, multilateral legal obligations emerge from multilateral legal agreements (MEAs) to which Malta is a party, and from membership of international organisations. The latter organisations hold multilateral events which discuss current international environmental policy.

2. INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS DEALING WITH ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES, TO WHICH MALTA IS A PARTY.

As member of the United Nations, Malta may be involved in a number of events organised by the UN, its organs and its institutions.

The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) has organised a number of Special Sessions on environment issues. These sessions usually review the UN Summits on environmental matters. The next event will be organised within two years time in 2004 – a Summit on Sustainable Development in Small Island States which will be hosted by Mauritius.

The Economic and Social Council of the UN, under whose auspices falls the **UN Commission for Sustainable Development (UNCSD)** holds annually the UNCSD session in New York. A ministerial segment is included in this 15 day session which tackles relevant topics by rotation.

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) holds its Governing Council in Nairobi every other year. Malta does not usually attend we have not been members of the Council since 1991. UNEP also holds a Ministerial Council at least once a year. Again Malta has not attended any of these Ministerial meetings.

Under the auspices of the UN there are three other regional institutions.

The first one is the **Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)**, which is based in Geneva and which falls under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council of the UN. The ECE is a very important forum which has spearheaded a number of landmark multilateral environmental agreements, such as the Aarhus Convention. Its next big event is the "Environment for Europe" Conference, in Kiev February 2003. This Conference is perhaps the most important environmental event for next year.

Under the auspices of UNEP falls the **Mediterranean Action Programme** which apart from formulating regional environmental instruments, organises various conferences projects and workshops at which Malta has always participated in an active manner. Usually there has been one focal point for MAP and many other focal points for activities falling thereunder, e.g. MEDPOL.

The **Council of Europe** may also be considered as a regional institution which has spearheaded the formulation of various conventions aiming at environmental protection. Conferences and workshops organised by the Council of Europe, are usually related to the various multilateral environmental agreements falling under its auspices.

Malta is also member of the **European Environment Agency (EEA)**. Malta is represented on the EEA as a Board member as well as on a technical level. There are usually two Board meetings a year and various other technical meetings.

Another regional institution is **EUROMED**, which holds environmental meetings now and again because it runs an environmental programme. One cannot say however that meetings of this nature, are held on a regular basis.

3. LIST OF MULTILATERAL ENVIRONMENT AGREEMENTS

MEAs Biodiversity

International Plant Protection Convention (*MFA*)

Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (RAMSAR) (*MHAE/MEPA*)

Convention on International Trade on Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES) (*MHAE/MEPA*)

Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (*MHAE/MEPA*)

Bonn Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild animals (*MHAE/MEPA*)

Agreement for the Conservation of European Bats (EUROBATS) (*MHAE/MEPA*)

Agreement for the Conservation of Cetaceans in the Mediterranean, Black Sea and their Contiguous Zone (ACCOBAMS) (*MHAE/MEPA*)

Convention on the Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks (*MAF*)

UN Convention on Biological Diversity (*MHAE/MEPA*)

MEAs Pollution Control

International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution of the Sea by Oil (*superseded*)

Convention on the Territorial Zone (*superseded*)

UN Convention on the Law of the Sea

Civil Liability Convention (*superseded*)

International Convention on the Establishment of an International fund for Oil Pollution Damage (*superseded*)

International Convention on Civil Liability for Oil Pollution Damage (*MMA*)

International Convention on the Establishment of an International Fund for Compensation for Oil Pollution Damage (*MMA*)

Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes at Sea and other Matter (*MHAE/EPD*)

Geneva Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution (*MHAE/EPD*)

EMEP Protocol to Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution (*MHAE/EPD*)

MEAs Nuclear Safety

Treaty banning Nuclear Weapon tests in the Atmosphere, in Outer Space and Under Water (*MFA*)

Treaty on the Prohibition of the Emplacement of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction on the Seabed and the Ocean Floor and in the Subsoil Thereof (*MFA*)

Regional MEAs

Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea Against Pollution
(*MHAE/MEPA*)

Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the
Mediterranean (*MHAE/MEPA*)

Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the
Mediterranean (*MHAE/MEPA*)

Protocol for the Prevention of Pollution of the Mediterranean Sea by Dumping from
Ships and Aircrafts (*MHAE/MEPA*)

Protocol for the Prevention and Elimination of Pollution of the Mediterranean Sea by
Dumping from Ships and Aircraft or Incineration at Sea (*MHAE/MEPA*)

Protocol Concerning Co-operation in Combating Pollution of the Mediterranean Sea by
Oil and other Harmful Substances in Cases of Emergency (*MHAE/MEPA*)

Protocol for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against Pollution from Land Based
Sources and Activities (*MHAE/MEPA*)

Protocol Concerning Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean
(*MHAE/MEPA*)

Protocol on the Prevention of Pollution of the Mediterranean Sea by Transboundary
Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal (*MHAE/MEPA*)

Miscellaneous MEAs

Basel Convention for the Transboundary Movement of Hazardous Wastes and their
Disposal (*MHAE/MEPA*)

Vienna Convention on the Protection of the Ozone Layer (*MHAE/MEPA*)

Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer (*MHAE/MEPA*)

Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and
their Disposal (*MHAE/MEPA*)

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (*MHAE/MEPA*)

Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (*MHAE/MEPA*)

United Nations Convention to combat Desertification in Those Countries experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification (*MHAE/MEPA*)

Aarhus Convention on Access to Information and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (*MHAE/MEPA*)

4. AN ASSESSMENT OF THE OBLIGATIONS UNDER MALTA'S MULTILATERAL AGREEMENTS

Multilateral Environment Agreements (MEAs) not only have an important role in the protection and management of the environment at the global level, but they also affect environmental policies and practices at the national level. They open up possibilities for transboundary co-operation and raise public awareness in the countries that are Parties to these Agreements. Sustainable development has been widely accepted as the ultimate objective of Post-Rio multilateral legal instruments relating to environment protection, and these agreements lay down standards, thresholds and action plans towards this end.

Malta is Party to a number of MEAs relating to environmental protection and sustainable development, as explained below.

MEAs Relating to Biodiversity

Malta has a major obligation as a State Party under the “**International Plant Protection Convention**” to have a national organisation for plant protection. As a Contracting Party, Malta required consignments of particular plants or plant products to be imported only through specified points of entry. Such restrictions on points of entry shall not be made unless the plants or plant products, concerned are required to be accompanied by phytosanitary certificates, or to be submitted to inspection or treatment. The Ministry responsible for Agriculture is the focal point for this Convention.

As a Contracting Party to the “**Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat**” (**Ramsar**) as amended by the “Paris Protocol” of 1982. Malta has designated suitable wetlands under the Convention. These Wetlands were selected and listed on account of their international significance in terms of ecology, botany, zoology, limnology or hydrology. The Ministry responsible for the Environment and Environment Protection Directorate within MEPA are responsible for this Convention.

By virtue of it being a Party to the “**Convention on International Trade on Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna**” (CITES), Malta regulates international exports and imports of specimens of species of live and dead animals and plants and their parts and derivatives. This is based on a system of permits and certificates that can be issued if certain conditions are met with. These permits and certificates have to be presented before consignments of specimens are allowed to leave or enter a country. As a Party, Malta also maintains records of trade in specimens of species included in appendices I, II and III of the Convention. Malta prepares periodic reports on the implementation of the Convention and transmits to the Secretariat annual and biennial reports on legislative, compliance and administrative measures taken to enforce the provisions of the Convention. The Ministry responsible for the Environment and Environment Protection Directorate within MEPA are responsible for this Convention.

Under the “**Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats**” Malta is obliged to conserve wild flora and fauna and their natural habitats, especially those species and habitats whose conservation requires the co-operation of several States, and to promote such co-operation. Particular emphasis is given to endangered and vulnerable species, including endangered and vulnerable migratory ones. Malta takes requisite measures to maintain the population of wild flora and fauna at, or adopt it to, a level that corresponds to ecological, scientific and cultural requirements, while taking account of economic and recreational factors and the needs of sub-species, varieties or forms, locally at risk. The Ministry responsible for the Environment and Environment Protection Directorate within MEPA are responsible for this Convention.

As a State Party to the “**Bonn Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals**” Malta promotes co-operation to support research on migratory species. Malta is obliged to provide immediate protection to such species. Malta has also concluded agreements to conserve and manage migratory species namely, the “**Agreements for the Conservation of European Bats**” (EUROBATS) and the “**Agreement for the Conservation of Cetaceans in the Mediterranean, Black Sea and their Contiguous Zone**” (ACCOBAMS). The objective of each of these agreements is to restore the migratory species concerned to a favourable conservation status. The Ministry responsible for the Environment and Environment Protection Directorate within MEPA are responsible for this Convention.

As a Party to the 1982 “**Convention on the Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks**”, Malta undertakes to co-operate with other State parties to adopt measures that would improve the conservation and management of fish stocks particularly migratory fish stocks. Ships registered under the Maltese flag are also subject to the obligations of the Convention. Malta’s accession was significant because it brought the Convention into force. The Ministry responsible for Fisheries is the focal point for this Convention.

Malta is in the process of preparing a national strategy and programme to implement the obligations of the 1992 “**UN Convention on Biological Diversity**”. Malta has also embarked on a process to integrate conservation and sustainable use of biological

diversity into the relevant sectoral and cross-sectoral plans, programmes and policies. As a Party to this Convention, Malta is also integrating the consideration of conservation and sustainable use of biological resources into national decision-making and to minimise or avoid adverse impacts on biodiversity. The Ministry responsible for the Environment and Environment Protection Directorate within MEPA is responsible for this Convention.

MEAs relating to Pollution Control

Malta is a Party to the “**International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution of the Sea by Oil**”, the “**Convention on the Continental Shelf**”, and the “**Convention on the Territorial Zone**”. These Conventions however have been superseded by the 1982 “**Convention on the Law of the Sea**”, to which Malta is also a Party as noted above.

Malta’s obligations relating to sustainable development and environmental law also include the provisions on the protection of the marine environment and those relating to fisheries. Under the “**Law of the Sea Convention**”, Malta is to notify other States and other competent international organisations if they are likely to be affected by imminent or actual damage to the marine environment by pollution. To this end, Malta has developed and promoted contingency plans for responding to pollution incidents in the marine environment.

By virtue of the “**Law of the Sea Convention**”, Malta has been able to establish its right as a coastal State to set up, implement and enforce legislative measures and obligations regarding the exploitation of marine living resources situated within the marine territory over which it has jurisdiction. Malta, for example, claims an Exclusive Fishing Zone but has not declared an Exclusive Economic Zone. As a coastal State, Malta is empowered to enforce national conservation legislation such as fishing methods, closed and open fishing seasons and the restriction of fishing in certain ecologically vulnerable areas. There are various Ministries responsible for this Convention. The Ministry responsible for the Environment and Environment Protection Directorate within MEPA are only responsible for the Parts relating to the protection of the marine environment.

In addition, Malta is Party to the “**Civil Liability Convention**” and the “**International Convention on the Establishment of an International Fund for Oil Pollution Damage**”. These two Conventions were superseded when Malta ratified the 1992 “**International Convention on Civil Liability for Oil Pollution Damage**” and the 1992 “**International Convention on the Establishment of an International Fund for Compensation for Oil Pollution Damage**”. These new Conventions have a wider scope of application and provide for oil pollution damage, not only in territorial waters but also in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) (if declared). Furthermore, the Conventions have an in-built mechanism to increase compensation limits. The Ministry responsible for Maritime Affairs, and the Malta Maritime Authority are responsible for this Convention.

As a Contracting Party to the 1972 “**Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes at Sea and other Matter**”, Malta has agreed to this Convention thereby accepting that dumping is a source of marine pollution, and that States should use the best practicable means to prevent such pollution and develop products and processes which will reduce the amount of harmful wastes to be disposed of. Malta therefore is obliged to promote the effective control of all sources of pollution of the marine environment, and pledges itself to take all practicable steps to prevent the pollution of the sea by the dumping of waste and other matter that is liable to create hazards to human health, to harm living resources and marine life, to damage amenities, or to interfere with other legitimate uses of the sea. The Ministry responsible for the Environment and Environment Protection Directorate within MEPA, is responsible for this Convention. The Ministry for Maritime Affairs and the Malta Maritime Authority are also responsible in regulating aspects of the Convention relating to shipping.

Malta’s obligations under the 1979 “**Geneva Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution**” is to endeavour to limit and as far as possible, to gradually reduce and prevent air pollution. Malta is also a party to the **EMEP Protocol** under this Convention, which gives rise only to administrative obligations rather than legal ones.

MEAs relating to Nuclear Safety

Malta is a Party to the “**Treaty banning Nuclear Weapon Tests in the Atmosphere, in Outer Space and Under Water**” and the “**Treaty on the Prohibition of the Emplacement of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction on the Seabed and the Ocean Floor and in the Subsoil Thereof**”. The aim of these two Treaties is mainly to ensure that the atmosphere, outer space, the sea-bed, and the ocean floor and its subsoil, are not used for nuclear testing or stockpiling of nuclear weapons, in order to maintain world peace and to ensure that the marine environment is used by humankind only for peaceful purposes. In order to promote the objectives of and ensure compliance with the provisions of these Treaties, Malta, as a State Party shall have the right to verify through observation the activities of other State Parties. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is responsible for this Convention. There are other Conventions relating to Nuclear Safety.

Regional MEAs

Malta has been a Party to the “**Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea Against Pollution**” now called the “**Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean**”. Malta ratified the Amendments to the Barcelona Convention in 1999. The amended Convention changed the name of the existing Convention to “**Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean**”. The amendments have not yet entered into force because not enough States have ratified the amendments to the Convention. The amended version of the Convention includes within its objectives, post-Rio concepts in international environmental law and policy, where the ultimate goal is

not only to eliminate pollution in the Mediterranean Sea to the fullest extent possible, but also to contribute towards its sustainable development.

Malta is also a Party to the 1976 **“Protocol for the Prevention of Pollution of the Mediterranean Sea by Dumping from Ships and Aircrafts”** as amended and which is now the 1996 **“Protocol for the Prevention and Elimination of Pollution of the Mediterranean Sea by Dumping from Ships and Aircraft or Incineration at Sea”**. As a Contracting Party, Malta is to prevent, abate and eliminate to the fullest extent, possible pollution of the Mediterranean Sea, caused by dumping from ships and aircraft and incineration at sea with respect to ships and aircraft registered in its territory or flying its flag, as well as ships and aircraft loading in its territory wastes or other matter that are to be dumped. Ships and aircraft believed to be engaged in dumping in any area under its jurisdiction also fall within the scope of its obligations under the Convention. As a Party, Malta is to ensure that its ships, aircraft and other appropriate services, are to report to the authorities, any incidents or conditions in the Mediterranean Sea Area which may give rise to suspicion that the obligations of this Protocol may have been infringed.

Malta is also a Party to the **“Protocol Concerning Co-operation in Combating Pollution of the Mediterranean Sea by Oil and other Harmful Substances in Cases of Emergency”**. As a Contracting Party to this Protocol, Malta is obliged to co-operate in taking the necessary measures, in cases of grave and imminent danger to the marine environment, due to the presence of massive quantities of oil or other harmful substances, resulting from accidental causes of an accumulation of small discharges, which are polluting or threatening to pollute the Mediterranean Sea.

As a Party, Malta issues instructions to the masters of ships flying its flag and to the pilots of aircraft registered in its territory, requiring them to report, through the most rapid and adequate channels, all accidents causing or likely to cause pollution of the sea by oil or other harmful substances. The presence, characteristics and extent of spillages of oil or other harmful substances observed at sea which are likely to present a serious and imminent threat to the marine environment or to the coast or related interest of one or more of the Parties, are also to be reported.

Malta is a Party to the 1996 **“Protocol for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against Pollution from Land Based Sources and Activities”**. This Protocol, known as the LBS Protocol, was adopted on 17th May 1980, by the Conference of Plenipotentiaries of the Coastal States of the Mediterranean Region for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea Against Pollution from Land based Sources, held in Athens. The original Protocol was modified by amendments adopted on 7th March 1996. The amended Protocol, renamed the **“Protocol for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea Against Pollution from Land Based Sources and Activities”** has not yet entered into force. As a Party to the Protocol, Malta is to address discharges originating from land based points and diffuse sources and activities within the territories of the contracting parties that may affect the Mediterranean Sea Area, directly or indirectly.

Malta is a Party to the “**Protocol Concerning Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean**”. Its preamble contains the concept of conservation of biological diversity. This is a regional response to the adoption of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity. As a Party, Malta is to protect, preserve and manage, in a sustainable and environmentally sound manner, areas which are threatened, as well as endangered species of flora and fauna. In so doing Malta is to identify and compile inventories of the components of biological diversity, adopt strategies, plans and programmes for the conservation of biological diversity and integrate them in policy instruments. Malta is also obliged to monitor the components of biological diversity and identify processes and activities, likely to have a significant adverse impact on them.

Malta has already established specially protected areas and is in the process of designating more in the imminent future. This new Protocol provides for an entirely new regime namely the establishment of the list of “**Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance**” (SPAMI). As a Party, Malta is to draw a list of these SPAMI.

Malta has also ratified the “**Protocol on the Prevention of Pollution of the Mediterranean Sea by Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal**”. This Protocol has not yet entered into force, because not enough States have ratified it, to date. It is a regional response that supplements and builds upon the “**Basel Convention for the Transboundary Movement of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal**”. As a Party, Malta’s general obligations under this Protocol are to take all appropriate measures to prevent, abate and eliminate pollution of the Protocol area, which can be caused by transboundary movements and disposal of hazardous wastes. Malta has to take all appropriate measures to reduce to a minimum and, where possible, eliminate the generation of hazardous wastes.

Malta is embarking on a legislative and administrative process to reduce to a minimum the transboundary movement of hazardous wastes, and, if possible, to eliminate such movement in the Mediterranean. Under this Protocol Malta, as a Party, has the right to ban the import of hazardous wastes. Other parties shall respect this sovereign decision and not permit the export of hazardous wastes to States, which have prohibited their import.

All these regional MEAs fall under the auspices of the Ministry responsible for the Environment and the Environment Protection Directorate within MEPA.

Miscellaneous MEAs

Malta’s major obligations under the 1982 “**Vienna Convention on the Protection of the Ozone Layer**” relate to the adoption of legal and administrative control on a municipal level to protect human health and the environment from the adverse effects of ozone depletion. In so doing, it is obliged to co-operate, harmonise and formulate agreed measures, procedures and standards for the implementation of this Convention. As a

Party, Malta has to assess the causes and effects of ozone depletion and is duty bound to transmit that information and to exchange information and technology.

Malta is also a Party to the “**Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer**” as amended in 1990. Under this Protocol, Malta has set firm targets to reduce and eventually to eliminate consumption and production of a range of Ozone Depleting Substances. Consequently, Malta has established controls of consumption and production patterns to protect the interests of producers and importers, and to deter price inflation and over-production in the interim period, till the phase-out.

As a Party to the “**Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal**”, Malta has taken steps to control and safely dispose of hazardous wastes that are subject to transboundary movement. Under this Convention, Malta is to ensure that the generation of hazardous waste or other waste, is reduced to a minimum, taking into account social, technological and economic considerations. Furthermore, it has to make available adequate waste disposal facilities, for the sound management of hazardous and other wastes.

Malta is finalising the process that would enable it to fulfil its commitments, under the “**United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change**” namely, to develop, update, publish and make available to the Conference of the Parties, national inventories of anthropogenic emissions by sources and removals by sinks of greenhouse gases not controlled by the Montreal Protocol. It is obliged to formulate, implement, publish and regularly update, national programmes containing measures to mitigate climate change, by addressing anthropogenic emissions by sources and removals by sinks of all greenhouse gases not controlled by the Montreal Protocol, and to take measures to facilitate adequate adaptation to climate change.

Malta ratified the **Kyoto Protocol** to the “United Nations Framework Conventions on Climate Change” in November 2001. This Protocol supplements the Climate Change Convention by providing specific targets to reduce emissions.

As a Party to the “**United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification**”, particularly Africa. Malta is bound to ensure the participation of all stakeholders in the design and implementation of programmes to combat desertification.

Malta is a party to the **Aarhus Convention on Access to Information and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters**. This Convention obliges State Parties to give the public right of access to environmental information, the right to participate in the decision making process and the right to access to justice in environmental matters.

All the miscellaneous MEAs fall under the auspices of Ministry responsible for the Environment and EPD, MEPA.

5. CONCLUSION

It is difficult to predict the exact number of meetings abroad, involved, both as a result of being members in these multilateral institutions and also as parties to these MEAs.

But it is safe to assume that each MEA holds annually a Conference of the Parties (COP) to which all members are obliged to attend. There are very few MEAs which organise COPs, biennially CITES is the only case I can think of.

Besides COPs, a number of technical meetings and workshops are sometimes also organised under the auspices of these MEAs especially when a new MEA is being drafted.

Malta must also pay a financial contribution as a party to these MEAs. I believe that contributions to the institutions except in the case of European Environmental Agency are borne by MFA.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

There should be a unit which acts as a “clearing house” for all international affairs both at MEPA and the Ministry responsible for the Environment which will liaise with MFA and the Secretariats of the MEAs and international organisations to ensure coherence. Such units would ensure that meetings are duly followed and attended to and that representatives sent follow the necessary political instructions and are aware of the political groups which Malta forms part of, e.g. the Western European & Others Group, Alliance of Small Island States, Central Group II, Vinci Group, Group of 77 and China etc.

These units would ensure that reports are made and thus information would be readily available to any person requiring it. This should constitute a wealth of material to be passed on to, over the years thus ensuring also continuity.

The Environment Protection Directorate had the legal and multilateral section which used to carry out this clearing house function, which is not to be confused with the role of the “focal point”. This ensured that things worked as smoothly as possible and that there was always a watch dog to ensure that participation at these Conferences, is not missed. This section used to prepare briefs not only for the Minister for the Environment but also for example for the OPM when environmental issues at international fora and Summits, were discussed.

Such units should help to advise delegates who attend such meetings as the legal and human resources operating within political obligations involved. Such political legal issues must also be taken into consideration, when adopting a technical position.

It is also useful that such units are closely linked with legal EU transposition matters, as very often obligations are closely interrelated. This will be especially valid when we become EU members because all MEAs must be negotiated via the EU.

Last but not least international obligations should be taken very seriously and delegates sent to such meetings must be well trained and well briefed. Above all they need to act in keeping with the “national interest” and in support of political alliances as instructed by the foreign office or the Minister and not only with technical opinions whether they are personal or institutional.