

# Environmental NGO Batumi DECLARATION

## On the Pan-European Agenda for the Batumi Environmental Ministers Conference

Adopted by the Plenary of the European ECO Forum  
7 June, Batumi (Georgia)

Representatives of 50 international, European and national environmental citizens organizations (ECOs) from 20 countries met at the European ECO Forum in Batumi on 7th of June 2016, to formulate their recommendations to the governments at the 8th UNECE “Environment for Europe” (EfE) Ministerial Conference, taking place in Batumi, 8 – 10 June 2016. We agreed on the following declaration.

### **1. Green Economy**

At the 7<sup>th</sup> EfE Conference, European ECO Forum called on transformative measures for a “green economy” aiming to change unsustainable consumption and production patterns and stressed the need for a Pan-European Framework on Sustainable Production and Consumption. Governments have now approved a Pan-European Strategic Framework for Greening the Economy and the Batumi Initiative on Green Economy (BIG-E), which we see as an important tool for countries to move forward toward Sustainable Development.

We are convinced that this “greening the economy” initiative will not fully meet the environmental, social and economic needs of the region. For that we are concerned that without a regional legally binding framework we will not ensure the necessary transition to green, inclusive and just economies which should include:

- ratification and efficient implementation of all the existing conventions like, UN chemicals conventions and UNECE conventions and protocols, e.g. Aarhus Convention, SEA and PRTRs, as well as UN Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights;
- The adoption of national strategies and overarching frameworks, drawing upon an effective mix of regulatory, legal, market-based, communicative and other policy instruments and approaches. Those have to be in line with the 2030 Sustainable Development (SD) Agenda and with full participation of civil society organisations.

Historical international agreements like 10YFP on SCP, 2030 SD agenda and the Paris agreement should be guiding principles for the any green economy initiative. We also stress that green economy is not only about technological innovation, but also should take into account sustainable food systems, ecosystem services, management of natural resources and social innovation, e.g. local currencies, other business models. Economic investments will create new jobs but environmental and social safeguards and standards for investors are needed, to limit unwanted side effects. Fostering green economy involves a fundamental transition to sustainable production and consumption systems and practices across all

sectors: first of all energy as a backbone for any economy, as well as agriculture, housing, transportation, chemicals and many others.

**We ask UNECE Member States** to initiate a process through which environmental and social standards already agreed within UNECE will be consistently used in all countries of the region when developing large investment strategies and projects (e.g. Silk Road Economic Belt).

**Implementation of effective green economy policies should start with** the principle to stay into the limits of the Earth's carrying capacity and a fair share for all countries in the world. Main elements:

- resource efficiency and sufficiency (decoupling with absolute reductions),
- economic and fiscal instruments, e.g. ecological tax reforms,
- markets for sustainable products and services, phase out unsustainable practices,
- Shift into green investment, technologies and jobs,
- transfer of environmentally and socially sound technologies and the life cycle approach to each economic sector,
- economic security through fair as well as responsible access to resources,
- poverty eradication programs and policies,
- research, education and training,
- sustainable values, norms and behaviour improving the quality of life for all.

We need cooperation among all stakeholders - governments, business and civil society - for the transition toward green economies.

#### **Trade and Environment:**

We need to ensure that the provisions of regional trade agreements (e.g. TTP, TTIP, EurAsEc) as well as WTO rules and practice do not lower environmental standards and roll back environmental legislation in the name of smoother trade flows. Human health and environmental standards can not be violated in favour of trade and investment interests. The EfE needs to continue a special focus to achieve sustainable lifestyles in all UNECE countries.

Integrated environmental governance is an important precondition for transition to green economy which should ensure participation, transparency, accountability and better environmental policy integration. Business deregulation in is often being achieved on the environmental cost. While leapfrogging is most desired scenario to achieve GE, there are compulsory stages to organize the greening of governance and business activities, e.g. adoption as national laws and implementation of EIA and SEA key-instruments.

In coming year, civil society organizations involved in the Environment for Europe process will work to ensure greater public engagement in the process, through education and independent monitoring of implementation of the Greening of Economy Framework and BIG-E actions.

## **2. Air Pollution and Health**

*We welcome the proposal for ECE Air Convention, as indoor and outdoor air pollution are one of the main causes of public health risk in our region, and call on governments and UNECE to look into its development.*

We call for more specification of problematic sources of outdoor air pollution in our region, including emissions from coal and petroleum fired energy plants, metallurgical and chemical industry, agriculture, vehicles and waste landfilling and incineration.

We also call on more specification of indoor air pollution sources, including from unsafe fuels and unsafe building materials, such as POPs, formaldehyde, lead in paint, asbestos, radon and smog from low-stack emissions and burning of (plastic) waste in household furnaces and call on Ministries of environment and Health to take joint action, including under the UNECE-WHO “Environmental Health Process” (“*from Parma to Prague*”).

We call for the commitments of concrete policy actions:

#### **Air Pollution Transparency initiative**

- Emissions and release cadaster/list (*from industry, waste etc*)
- Monitoring program of all PMs and ozone, and other ambient air pollution data
- Inter-governmental and multi-sectoral exchange of information about air pollution
- Educational programs for modelling air pollution

**Policy programs to support households** to identify sources of indoor air pollution, mould, radon, formaldehyde and emissions from unsafe fuel and PM2,5.

**Mandatory phase out of sources** of air pollution and **transition to clean and safe alternatives** including phase out of coal fired energy power plants, moving from waste landfilling and incineration to circular economy with full reuse of products.

**Specific policies for longer** term phasing out of all combustion vehicles in residential areas and moving to integrated mobility promoting a combination of public transportation and individual mobility including cycling and walking.

**Test of air quality often find pesticides and toxic substances in the ambient air**, even in cities, partly from spraying of pesticides, of uncontrolled burning in toxic and or illegal waste dumps. Local authorities and citizens need better information about toxins in the air, and environmental emergencies such as e.g. fires in waste dumps.

**Awareness raising programme for the public** about air pollution and risk assessments of public health.

### ***3. Education for Sustainable Development and data access***

#### **Key role of NGOs**

The transition to green and sustainable societies needs continued education - formal, non-formal and informal - on all areas of environment and the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. However in times of economic crisis, the budget for education, in particular on environment and sustainable development, are the first to be cut.

There is a rich potential of NGOs which authorities are called on to use. Even though NGO are cost efficient, NGOs need stable and sufficient financing for their education and capacity building activities. NGO are already providing education tools on the 2030 Agenda, and we encourage government to cooperate with NGO and create the enabling conditions national and internationally to use NGO educational tools and increase their role in all forms of education on sustainable development activities.

#### **Open data**

European ECO Forum calls on governments to ensure that all educational materials and scientific data, paid by public funds, should be publicly accessible with open access licensing, this avoids inefficiency and duplication, and improves quality.

## **Monitoring on SDGs**

Monitoring on SDGs can be supported by participatory monitoring and citizen science, which gathers data which is made available for monitoring progress on Sustainable Development. European ECO Forum calls for wider cooperation between of academic sector, National offices for Statistics, NGOs and schools on promoting participatory, civic science activities, and linking this to the Global Action Program of UNESCO.

## **4. Astana Water Action**

European ECO Forum supports **Astana Water Action Initiative and its continuation** after 2016 as a practical tool for implementation of the International Water Acts and Declarations, including SDGs. More participation and support of Stakeholders, including NGOs is needed in implementation, monitoring and progress assessment of the EfE Actions Initiatives.

## **5. Sustainable Development Goals – 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change**

European ECO Forum strongly encourages that the Batumi Chair's Summary states that all actions arising from the Batumi Environment for Europe Conference will be in **line with the goals and targets of the universally adopted 2030 sustainable development agenda and the Paris Agreement. We also urge the environmental ministers to play a bigger role in the negotiations at the HLPF/ECOSOC in New York, where the environmental dimension getting weaker more and more.**

European ECO Forum calls on governments to make the **SDG implementation as a highest priority**, in all the UNECE countries, directly under the responsibility of the head of state.

We urge **Ministers of Environment** to play a leadership role in developing national SDG strategies with ambitious targets and indicators, whilst ensuring coherence with all areas and levels of government.

The SDG implementation needs **full participation of all major groups of civil society**. European ECO Forum will enhance its coordination and cooperation will all major groups, including NGOs, women, youth, indigenous peoples, trade unions, farmers and local authorities to strengthen the environmental dimension of the SDGs.

European ECO Forum notes that the Paris Agreement has as a target to remain below 2 degrees global temperature increase, even closer to 1,5 degrees. At the same time, the combination of Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDCs) to global reductions of CO<sub>2</sub>, fail to remain below 2 degrees, and will lead to a 4 degree increase of global temperature. As our UNECE region is the greatest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, **we call on the Batumi Conference to increase the ambition of the INDCs for all countries of the UNECE region, including immediate action towards achieving SDG Goal 15, aiming to halt deforestation by 2020**, which is essential also for climate protection, and remains a great challenge in the region.

## **6. Civil society participation**

The urgently needed transition to sustainable development cannot happen without the full and active engagement of an informed and empowered public. As representatives of civil

society we note with concern that the opportunity for the free and open expression of opinions in many countries in the UNECE region is reducing in a disturbing way. Human Right defenders are more and more threatened. We urge the UNECE member states to fully respect human rights, freedom of speech and organisation. We express our deepest concern at the process of monopolization of information space and decision-making mechanisms by the official authorities, in numerous countries.

Twenty years after the negotiations on the Aarhus Convention began, quite some UNECE countries have yet to become Parties to the Convention and many of those that are Parties implement its provisions in an inadequate or minimalist way. We call on those governments which have not yet acceded to the Convention and its Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers to do so as soon as possible and call on all governments to strictly follow the spirit, principles and letter of Convention and Protocol.

The European ECO Forum NGOs wish to actively to contribute to the 2018 review and continued implementation of the outcomes of the Batumi EfE ministerial conference.

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### **Gratitude**

We thank the governments of Georgia and Italy for their support of the European ECO Forum NGO delegation. We also thank the secretariat of the UNECE for their support in organising the NGO preparatory process.