

Belgrade Statement of the European ECO-Forum

We, representatives of environmental citizens organisations from the UNECE region, participating in the 6th Ministerial Conference 'Environment for Europe', gathered in Belgrade on 8-9 October 2007 for our preparatory meetings, adopted this statement.

The EfE process is a unique regional platform for cooperation. This is the only platform where nations within the EU, EECCA and SEE regions can meet to address environmental issues and policies of common value and importance on high political level.

We have reviewed the work done in this process and published this as 'Environment for Europe Implementation report'. One key conclusion is that this process should continue since it has a clear value and shows obviously positive outcomes in the whole UNECE region.

We would like to reiterate the key messages of the 'Brussels Declaration' adopted by ECOs of the UNECE region in Brussels in March 2007 and presented to this conference.

Reflecting on the Belgrade Assessment we call upon the Belgrade Conference to agree upon the following priority initiatives:

Sustainable Production and Consumption

This cross-cutting issue needs to be at the centre of the EfE. We call for the development of a multi-stakeholder Pan-European Task Force on Sustainable Production and Consumption. Such a Task Force can help avoid duplication and ensure effective coordination across the region.

Biodiversity

Biodiversity should remain as an integral part of the EfE. The PEBLDS shall continue and kept high on the EfE agenda because biodiversity is the basis for economic and social development and well-being. The loss of biodiversity is often an irreversible damage. It is important therefore to develop a long-term vision on the role and importance of biodiversity for future of mankind. The next EfE conference in 2011 shall in particular focus on the progress made towards the 2010 target and take stock of the achievements.

Water

Water should be one of the main issues on the EfE agenda. Integrated water resources management should form an essential part of environmental policy. National water policies should take due account of the issue of water and sanitation and also be considered in the climate change perspective. The EfE process should take the lead in supporting national governments in developing economic instruments of integrated water resources management

including payments for ecosystem services. It should also facilitate further international cooperation including building partnerships and assisting in establishing transboundary water commissions and other joint bodies as well as ensuring public participation therein.

The EfE process must become more effective. We are deeply dissatisfied with the lack of progress and implementation. Decisions and initiatives of the EfE need to be transferred from the international level to national/regional and local levels. On the national level, we call for inter-ministerial panels with the participation of NGOs to implement EfE commitments. Stronger communication of results to a broad audience will ensure national EfE implementation mechanisms and improve the influence of environmental authorities. Lessons learned, best practices shall be shared within the whole Pan-European region.

On the EfE level, we call for the monitoring of implementation of targets in between the EfE conferences through mid-term reports, assessments, the use of response indicators, etc. This should lead to a permanent progress assessment from the view of government, international organisations and civil society groups. The process should remain at ministerial level and should not shy away from introducing legally binding instruments where they can help to make progress. Precise and measurable responsibilities should be put upon countries participating in EfE process.

Adequate level of financing of all elements of the EfE process remains an important precondition. Without that it will be impossible to achieve progress.

We are against the transfer of responsibilities from EAP Task Force to the RECs of the EECCA region. Such a decision should only be made after thorough evaluation of the REC's functions and performance has taken place, with the full involvement of environmental citizens organisations, in particular, from that region. We also urge governments to be more active in the process and make more commitments to implement this EECCA Strategy.

The European ECO-Forum calls for the continuation of the open and transparent character of the EfE process, with full involvement of environmental citizens organisations, at all levels.

We would like to thank the governments of Belgium, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, as well as the UNECE Secretariat and Fundacion Biodiversidad (Spain), for their financial support to our preparations and participation in the Belgrade Conference.