

BRUSSELS DECLARATION ON THE PAN–EUROPEAN AGENDA FOR THE FORTHCOMING BELGRADE ENVIRONMENTAL MINISTERS CONFERENCE

Adopted by the Plenary of the European ECO–Forum
2 March 2007, Brussels

Representatives of 62 international, European and national environmental citizens organizations (ECOs) from 34 countries met under the auspices of the European ECO–Forum in Brussels, 1-2 March 2007, to formulate their recommendations to the governments preparing for the 6th UN-ECE European Environmental Ministers Conference, “Environment for Europe” (EfE), taking place in Belgrade, 10-12 October 2007. We agreed on the following declaration.

1. VALUE OF THE ENVIRONMENT FOR EUROPE PROCESS

1.1 The European ECO–Forum is deeply dissatisfied with the **lack of progress in the Pan–European region on environmentally sound sustainable development**, as documented by the 4th Pan–European State of the Environment report produced by the EEA.

- I. Unsustainable production and consumption patterns continue to impose excessive pressures on the environment, accelerating the depletion of natural resources both in the region and globally. We especially note the impact of these patterns on biodiversity, human health and climate.
- II. Biodiversity is threatened by habitat destruction, degradation and fragmentation, along with the introduction of invasive species, overexploitation and pollution. Intensive agricultural practices, unsustainable forestry practices and the introduction of GMOs, as well as new infrastructure development and urban sprawl are among the main drivers and pressures behind these trends.
- III. People’s health throughout Europe continues to be at risk from hazardous chemicals, industrial and radioactive waste, polluted air, soil and water, and from a deteriorating urban environment.
- IV. In response to climate change, several UN-ECE Member states are making efforts to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. However, we are concerned that even the modest targets of the Kyoto Protocol for this region will not be achieved and that business and political resistance against further reductions is building.

1.2 Reversing these trends and removing the threats are matters of **social, economic and environmental justice**. Lasting improvement of the European environment is urgently needed so that all peoples and communities (including those in poverty or living in minority ethnic groups) can prosper in a safe and healthy environment. We remind the Governments of “*the right of every person of present and future generations to live in an environment adequate to his health and well-being*”, as laid down in the Aarhus Convention.

2. STRENGTHEN THE ENVIRONMENT FOR EUROPE PROCESS

2.1 **We strongly object to efforts to undermine the EfE process**: minimizing its importance, calling for its conclusion, excluding the above essential elements from its core agenda, and limiting further work to reviewing existing arrangements. It is necessary indeed to implement existing commitments and ensure sufficient political will, effective instruments and financing. But the EfE process also needs to deliver new commitments, programmes, regional legally binding instruments and financial instruments, also in light of an increasingly economically integrated Europe. We need stronger commitment to change production and consumption, protect biodiversity, internalize environmental objectives in all relevant sectoral policies, and to promote eco-innovation.

2.2 We realize that the political situation in the UN-ECE region has changed with the enlargement of the EU to 27 countries. However, **we strongly object to the apparent wish of several governments to limit the EfE process to the environmental policies and sub-regional programmes outside of the EU**. It must remain focused throughout on Pan–European environmental and sustainable development initiatives and participatory democracy. The EfE process provides the only forum in which all countries of the region are able to meet on a more or less equal footing and to co–operate in addressing their environmental problems. Moreover, this forum is open to the participation of environmental citizens organisations.

2.3 At the same time we call for **a more efficient and effective process**. The procedural proposals discussed but not adopted at the Kiev Conference in 2003 on the future of the EfE process should be considered once more.

2.4 We also propose to use the EfE as a tool to help the countries in the region to build **strong, innovative, sustainable economies**, including by promoting a regional market for sustainable goods and services and by helping vulnerable countries to cope with the negative effects of unavoidable environmental devastation

2.5 We realize that **political will** is decisive for progress towards sustainability. Environmental Ministers have a responsibility to make the Belgrade-2007 EfE Conference the key force in reversing regional degradation of biodiversity climate and people's health.

3. RETURN SUSTAINABILITY VALUES TO THE ENVIRONMENT FOR EUROPE AGENDA

3.1 We urge a return to **human values** in the sustainable development agenda, introduced at the first EfE conference in Dobris by the host, the former Czechoslovak Environment Minister, Josef Vavrousek. Sustainable life-styles, voluntary simplicity, solidarity, equity, ethical choices and behavior, are essential to our concept of sustainability as well as to decrease social tensions and increase safety and stability in people's daily lives.

3.2 Policies and decisions rooted in **sustainability values** provide a positive response to the negative impacts of globalization as well as other global problems and threats.

3.3 Sustainability values also underlie the transition to **sustainable production and consumption patterns and sustainable lifestyles**, especially when supported through consumer education and educational policies, curricula, and the rights to a high quality education for sustainable development (ESD).

3.4 Recognizing the immeasurable potential of ethically based choices to drive for both policy and business, we call for the governments to **respect** sustainable lifestyle values and practices.

4. MAKE PRODUCTION & CONSUMPTION SUSTAINABLE IN THE PAN-EUROPEAN REGION

4.1 Agenda 21 noted "*the major cause of the continued deterioration of the global environment is the unsustainable pattern of consumption and production.*" Ten years later, the UN-ECE, in its review of progress since Rio, mentioned the increase of production and consumption as the main obstacle undermining regional and global progress towards sustainability. Today the impacts of unsustainable production and consumption include climate change, biodiversity loss, natural resource depletion and. Yet **why has the EfE process still not officially made sustainable production and consumption an "overarching objective" for the region**, as prescribed by the WSSD?

4.2 In the Kiev Ministerial Declaration, Ministers committed themselves to "*encourage national efforts*" and "*development of a 10 year framework of programmes*" supporting "*the shift to sustainable production and consumption*" and "*taking them to our next conference*". Belgrade is that next conference and we hope to see this commitment realized there. **We call for action to indeed develop such a Pan-European Regional Framework for Sustainable Production and Consumption**, essential to supporting national, regional and sub-regional action plans, strategies and initiatives.

4.3 A special contribution of the ECE framework and strategy should be to promote **cooperation and mutual support** across and within EU and non-EU sub-regions EECCA, SEE and EU sub-regions.

4.4 We recommend this framework development to begin with a **multi-stakeholder committee or task force** to assess needs and possibilities, leading to research, consultations and programmes to support country and sub-regional efforts, reporting progress and activities at the next EfE meeting in 2011. We are ready to contribute to such an initiative.

4.5 In addition to initiatives decoupling economic growth from its environmental impacts, **the UN-ECE sustainable production and consumption framework should promote** environmental and social corporate responsibility and accountability, introducing strict environmental standards, consumers' legal access to information (e.g., disclosure on products containing GMOs or hazardous chemicals), and other legally binding as well as market based instruments, underpinning the overall strategy with appropriate institutional arrangements and sufficient financial resources. As an essential part, the costs and prices of production and products should include their social and environmental impacts, thus encouraging cleaner production and greater producer responsibility.

4.6 The framework should **help states develop domestic policies and strategies** to address those production and consumption patterns responsible for the major threats to the environment and human well-being in the region.

4.7 The EU should **prevent export of dangerous and unsustainable technologies, products and processes to EECCA and SEE countries**. EECCA countries should stop providing investment incentives or borrowing money for technologies that fall below best standards from the environmental point of view. **And we oppose the trend to locate fossil power plants in countries outside the borders of the EU to provide electricity for consumers inside the EU.**

4.8 Climate change is a common concern. The EU is taking the lead to reduce global warming, but more is needed. **The EfE process should help develop national, regional and global strategies to limit global warming to reduce CO2 emissions by 60-80% by 2050 in this region.** This can be done by improving energy efficiency and the promotion of renewables (e.g. by introducing feed-in tariffs or a guaranteed market), reducing our use of fossil fuels, while ensuring fossil fuel plants respect the highest possible technical standards, and respecting the carrying capacity of the region and planet. In the area of household energy use, incentives for energy conservation should be provided, e.g. through, eco-labeling, eco-design, insulation, energy efficient household appliances, energy saving regulation systems etc. To promote decentralised renewable energy production, even at the household level, guaranteed uptake of surplus energy at competitive prices should be offered.

4.9 Economic pressures leading to unsustainable production are a main barrier in both the EU and EECCA region. We call upon governments to take speedy measures:

- I. to undertake action for internationally coordinated **environmental fiscal reform**.
- II. to ensure **investments by the public sector are subject to climate change, biodiversity, and sustainability assessments**, in particular investment funds of WB and EBRD and EU structural funds. Private investments should be regulated based on rules for Best Available environmental Technology.

4.10 At almost every EfE conference, Ministers called for unsafe nuclear reactors to close. The environmental and health risks of nuclear energy are unacceptable. **We call on Governments to stop investing in nuclear energy and to instead concentrate on development of renewable energy.** Within the energy sector national policies can support small energy producers using environmentally friendly technologies to ensure they can compete with large energy companies, whose activities often lead to negative environmental impacts and social injustice.

4.11 The transport sector is the fastest growing contributor to green house gases and airpollution in the region. UN-ECE member states need to tackle this problem with a combination of policies: spatial planning, policies focusing on public and non-motorized transport, making the polluter pay, and increasing strict requirements concerning fuel efficiency and fuel quality. **We call for a full ban of leaded-petrol in all UN-ECE countries now**, as agreed at the EfE conference in 1998. We also call for a **cautious policy on bio-fuels**, first assessing and ensuring it has no negative environmental or social impacts and, if employed, that production follows strict environmental standards.

4.12 We call for a **pan-European initiative for taxation of kerosene**, to finally introduce the polluter pays principle in the air-transport sector. Inclusion of air-transport in emission trading is not enough to tackle the fast growth of this sector and the accompanying increase of environmental impacts. The regional initiative should as soon as possible lead to a global agreement.

4.13 To protect public health in the region, we call for a **strong and uncompromised implementation of the REACH chemical legislation** (passed by the EU in a weakened form), and at the same time a legally binding process under UN-ECE to make this into a Pan-European chemicals policy, also to prevent moving of EU companies to other parts of Europe. This Pan-European REACH should be confirmed as soon as possible but in any case no later than the next EfE Conference.

4.14 **Eco-Innovation should be subject to health impact assessments.**

4.15 We ask that **future EfE meetings and conferences are organised in an environmentally friendly manner**, putting into practice the principles discussed, minimizing the ecological footprint of the event.

5. PROTECT BIODIVERSITY: MEET THE 2010 TARGET!

5.1 **Biological diversity and ecosystems** provide the basis for all life on Earth. Its **protection should be legally recognized as an indispensable part of the right of every person to a clean environment**, as referred to in par. 1.2. above.

5.2 At Kyiv in 2003, **ministers set a deadline** of 2010 to reduce biodiversity loss in the region. The Belgrade Conference is just three years before that deadline, yet most of the interim targets have not been reached. The first findings of the 4th EEA State of the Environment report conclude *“all in all, biodiversity in the Pan-European region is likely to decline further and the 2010 target will not be achieved without considerable additional efforts.”*

5.3 The Belgrade conference should be a **decisive moment** to identify the obstacles and define responsibilities on the way to the 2010 target, agree on strategies and make commitments to future work on biodiversity conservation in the Pan-European region.

5.4 We urge governments to **ensure implementation of Kiev-2003 commitments** on Biodiversity conservation **and to give higher priority and commitment to:**

- I. increasing institutional, financial and human capacities, using fiscal instruments for achieving of the 2010 target;
- II. integrating biodiversity conservation, the sustainable use of natural resources and ecosystem services concerns into national economic policies;
- III. committing in Belgrade to develop adequate national key measures to achieve the 2010 target in pan-Europe, coordinate regional activities for CBD COP in 2008 in Germany and report on the progress made by then. This includes support for the Pan-European Environmental Network and national ecological networks, high value farmlands and old-growth forests, as well as establishing the responsibility of land users to protect biodiversity;
- IV. implementing and providing the necessary financial resources to PEBLDS;
- V. raising awareness on biodiversity issues with all stakeholders, especially decision makers.

5.5 Welcoming the series of indicative maps of the Pan-European Ecological Network (PEEN), we stress the need to put PEEN into reality. **We call for support for a network of environmental citizens and non-governmental organisations** implementing public care for core areas, corridors, and buffer zones in order to complement relevant governmental efforts for creating real PEEN in time.

5.6 Recognizing the importance of biodiversity and ecosystem services it provides, **we ask international institutions, donors, private businesses to support projects and campaigns to conserve this essential resource.**

6. ENSURE CONTINUED EFFECTIVE PAN-EUROPEAN COOPERATION ON EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

6.1 **We welcome adoption of the UN-ECE Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)** in 2005 and the organization of a Ministerial Segment on ESD at the level of Ministers of Environment and Ministers of Education in Belgrade-2007.

6.2 **We urge governments to ensure immediate implementation of the UN-ECE Strategy on ESD** in line with the Vilnius Framework for the Implementation (2005), especially actions agreed for the first stage of implementation ending in 2007. This should include guaranteed provision for sufficient funding, supportive legal frameworks and mechanisms for multi-stakeholder cooperation at national/state level.

6.3 **In particular we call upon governments to:**

- I. ensure full integration of ESD in national/ state educational standards;
- II. ensure quality training in sustainable development for educators, decision makers, mass media;
- III. use ESD as a tool to mobilize citizens for sustainable development; and
- IV. develop quantitative indicators assessing the impact of ESD.

6.4 We call upon Ministers of Education and of the Environment in Belgrade to **ensure continued cooperation** on ESD within the framework of the EfE process, demonstrating pioneer example of successful cooperation between different sectors. We stress the need to include this issue into regular programme of work of the UN-ECE Committee on Environmental Policy and envisage budgetary support to this issue on the equal basis with the other items.

6.5 We invite both governments and NGOs to **join forces** and improve cooperation to promote and introduce values for sustainable future in policies and daily life, to develop ESD and ensure coherence with the UNDES International Implementation Scheme at all levels.

7. STRENGTHEN PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

7.1 The **Aarhus Convention** is an important achievement of the EfE process. We call upon all UN-ECE Member States to become parties of the Convention and to apply its provisions systematically both on the international and national levels, including the development of financial infrastructure and financial measures for enforcement of the Convention.

7.2 We welcome the adoption of the **Guidelines on Public Participatin in International Forums** at the Meeting of Aarhus Parties in Almaty in 2005 and the consultation process with international bodies that has been undertaken. We stress the necessity to implement these Guidelines in all relevant international forums, and therefore to raise awareness about the Convention inside national governmental and administrative bodies that link to these forums.

7.3 We welcome the participatory and informative mechanisms developed under the Convention in particular **the Compliance Review Mechanism and the Clearing House** and call for their continued strengthening and support.

7.4 Building upon Aarhus principles the **EfE documents and decisions should be made easily accessible**. Civil society organizations should be given full opportunities to participate in the EfE decision making process.

7.5 **We express our deep concern on the reluctance by many Parties and the European Community to fully implement the Access to Justice pillar of the Aarhus Convention**. Financial barriers in Access to Justice should be eliminated as well. Besides, Parties to the Convention should develop mechanisms for alternative dispute resolution.

7.6 We welcome the further developments of Aarhus process, including the **Protocol on PRTRs, SEA protocol to the Espoo Convention and the Almaty Amendment on GMOs**. We call upon UN-ECE Member States to ratify these instruments and implement them pending their entry into force.

7.7 We stress upon the necessity to properly implement the provisions of **Articles 7 and 8 of the Aarhus Convention**, leading to meaningful public participation also in environment related strategic decisions, policy making and legislation.

7.8 We call upon all UN-ECE countries to **systematically support its public**, and in particular environmental citizens organizations, in taking part in participatory decisionmaking, in order to improve the quality and acceptance of its outcomes.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY COOPERATION IN AND FOR EECCA COUNTRIES

8.1 It is necessary to continue assistance to strengthen environmental policy in Eastern Europe Caucasus Central Asia (EECCA) countries at the regional, sub-regional, national and local levels. Despite differences within the region, the potential of regional cooperation is considerable. However **major changes are needed to make this assistance effective**. The EECCA Environmental Strategy should be strengthened and linked with national and local environmental policy and action plans. The status of the regional process should be raised to the level of Prime-Minister. Greater cooperation between ministries of environment, agriculture, economy, finance and other ministers should be encouraged and facilitated.

8.2 The **coordinating role of the Environmental Action Programme (EAP) Task Force should be strengthened**. Its work should more directly respond to the needs of all stakeholders working in the region. Information about its work should be disseminated more widely. These improvements could take place through greater cooperation with regional and national partners, including NGOs networks.

8.3 Funders of **New Regional Environmental Centers (NRECs)** need to insist that NRECs implement their initial task: to promote public participation and environmental cooperation in the EECCA region. It is premature to consider NRECs as effective institutions with sufficient capacity to replace the EAP Task Force in the region. They should assist the Task Force in supporting NGO coalitions, councils and networks to play a useful role implementing the EECCA Strategy, but this should be done in a neutral manner, inclusive, not duplicating or competing with the activity of other organizations working effectively in the region.

8.4 Civil society plays an important role strengthening environmental policy in EECCA, stimulating government to undertake more effective and timely reforms, raising the standards of the environmental pillar of development policies, stimulating environmental policy integration and implementing public control over environmental compliance. **A special program to support NGOs activity on environmental policy strengthening should be created**.

We would like to thank those governments that have been supporting the international NGO Coalition/ European ECO-Forum participation in the EfE process and especially our preparatory work towards Belgrade-2007. We express our sincere gratitude therefore to the Governments of Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain (Fundacion Biodiversidad) and Sweden, and call upon all other UN-ECE member states to support ECO's active participation and contribution to the EfE process.