

ASTANA DECLARATION

On the Pan-European Agenda for the Astana Environmental Ministers Conference

Adopted by the Plenary of the European ECO Forum
21 September 2011, Astana (Kazakhstan)

Representatives of 70 international, European and national environmental citizens organizations (ECOs) from 30 countries met under the auspices of the European ECO Forum in Astana, 20-21 September 2011, to formulate their demands and recommendations to the governments at the 7th UN-ECE European Environmental Ministers Conference, “Environment for Europe” (EfE), taking place in Astana, 21 – 23 September 2011. We agreed on the following declaration.

I. Green Economy – not just a technological fix

Given the overarching objectives of sustainable development agreed at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, the concept of “green economy” needs to help achieve this objective of changing unsustainable consumption and production patterns and thus implement this commitment made by all countries in Principle 8 of the 1992 Rio Declaration.

We support the initiative to promote a transition to a green economy in the UNECE region. The green economy should **improve the quality of life for all** and functions within the **carrying capacity of the earth**. Public and private investments – of financial, natural and human capital - should result in **reversing** the current negative social and environmental trends.

We need the right **criteria** for choosing the most effective combinations of policy instruments and to help mobilize stakeholders to target those parts of the production and consumption cycle where improvements should be made.

We need **cooperation of all sectors**, - governments, business and civil society - to develop markets with **responsible** consumers and producers. We call for **regulatory frameworks for corporate accountability** in addition to existing corporate social responsibility initiatives. Green economy should promote **fair trade** and socially responsible use and **distribution** of resources.

We need to promote **resource efficiency** throughout the life cycle of products and services. We welcome the EU Flagship initiative on resource efficiency, and recommend similar initiatives by other UNECE countries. We need to develop and transfer **environmentally sound technologies**, with the appropriate **safeguard measures**, requiring an **independent technology assessment** and **effective public participation**.

Governments, international and private actors need to increase investments in research, innovations, education and training for a transition to green economies. We call for a **shift in current research funding** in the EU - and other countries - from its current focus on nuclear industry and other unsustainable economic sectors to green economic sectors.

Improving the quality of life for all, requires more than green jobs, products and investment. The green economy also needs to protect natural resources and help **eradicate poverty, increase social equity** and gender equality.

We need to move from the current **obsession with “GDP growth”** to prioritizing economic security and prosperity for everyone, within the carrying capacity of the earth. We need to stimulate **societal change**, where material wealth is not seen as the only criteria of prosperity. We need to encourage values and norms for a sustainable way of living.

Green economy initiatives need to consider the consumption or demand side of economy by addressing lifestyles and values, tackling drivers for unsustainable consumption patterns, phasing out unsustainable economic activities and ensuring fair distribution of resources. These activities should be supported by integrating the ‘**sufficiency**’ concept into educational systems, credible eco-labelling schemes, awareness raising and educational activities regarding green economy.

We need to establish a new set of measures, indexes and indicators of progress beyond the current focus on increasing production, consumption and exports. Nature should be recognized as the foundation of our life and the precondition for our **long-term wellbeing** of our societies, and not – as currently perceived – an unlimited resource for economic growth. **Development of human capital** should become the basis for our economic progress, moving away from natural capital extraction.

Technological solutions and resource efficiency is not enough. Even if production becomes more eco-efficient, increasing consumption and population pressures result in greater resource depletion. Current lifestyles depend on **overuse of natural resources**. The finite natural world cannot support the infinite growth of resource exploitation. Green economy policies and practices need to take into account the social and biophysical limits to economic growth. We need **resource capping** in governmental and other institutional discussions, and develop economically and socially acceptable caps for all kinds of natural resources. We call for setting up **baselines for resource use** – on both the global and the national level –, identifying **thresholds** within which our economies have to operate.

The **current financial systems do not actively support a transition** to the green economy, we call for regulation of the financial markets, reform of the IFIs, development of mechanisms to bring natural capital valuation into national accounting, inclusion of externalities into prices and introduction of new and innovative financial mechanisms, such as the financial transaction tax, and payment for eco-system services, as a means for financing the transition to the green economy and sustainable development.

Many countries in the UNECE region face specific challenge in a transition to a green economy. Especially the EECCA , CEE and SEE countries **face pollution burden from the past**, – obsolete pesticide stockpiles, nuclear waste, and mining tailing in particular – which need to be clean-up with great cost to the current economies – funds which cannot be invested in “green jobs”. For example, many countries have **no funds to pay for decommissioning of closed nuclear power-plants or containment and clean-up of uranium mining tailings**, causing long-term, inter-generational and partly cross-border pollution and security risks for water, food, and eco-systems. Many of the Western European countries, have severe challenges with e.g. pollution from industrial agriculture, nuclear waste and transport.

In addition, many countries’ economies are currently highly **dependent on “brown” economic sectors**, – including in the EU and Northern America – such as nuclear energy, uranium mining, coal, oil, mercury, and asbestos.

The UNECE region needs a policy framework and institutional mechanisms to define and implement green economy, involving not just governments but civil society and the private sector. We need a **regional framework and roadmap on sustainable production, consumption and the green economy** to develop plans and mobilize multi-stakeholder partnerships over the next decade. Such a 10-year framework could in turn implement the 2002 WSSD mandate to develop a 10 Year Framework of Programs. Also, the UN ECE region should play a leading role on the Green Economy towards RIO+20 and beyond, developing and implementing ambitious regional and national roadmaps on the green economy.

Regarding the “Green Economy” we call on governments to:

- Mandate the UNECE and other UN partner organisation to create a “SCP and Green Economy” **task force** for exploring the options and developing such a regional framework and roadmaps for sustainable consumption, production and the green economy
- Develop measurable targets and legislative tools for green economy and progress indicators going beyond an environmentally adjusted GDP and including social and environmental aspects linked to green economy
- Review and improve the implementation of the “Education for Sustainable Development” strategy incorporating the green economy concept
- Eliminate harmful subsidies to unsustainable economic activities, in particular subsidies to the nuclear sector, coal mining, fisheries and industrial agriculture
- Consider the important role of ecosystem services and environmental limits which should be taken into account in development planning within the transition to green economy and support research on ecosystem services
- Support the initiative of Millennium Consumption Goals to be agreed in RIO+20 and to identify, to agree and to work on reaching these goals, which should set up clear targets for socially inclusive and fair life within global ecological limits
- Implement a 10 year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production mandated at WSSD
- Review and ensure continuity of previous decisions endorsed within EfE process on biodiversity, agricultural and forest which can support the transition towards the green economy
- Develop monitoring and assessment system which will provide the necessary data for decision makers as well as for society at large for active participation in governance processes regarding green economy
- Include absolute resource capping in governmental and other institutional discussions and deliberations with the view of lifting this discussion to the global level at the “Rio+20” Conference.
- Commit to Independent Technology Assessment and Monitoring of new technologies before their widespread use – e.g. geo-engineering, which guarantees prior informed consent and

rights of communities impacted by the financial flows, timely information, effective participation, and redress mechanisms.

- For UNECE countries to take a lead in developing a global strategy to address the risks that nuclear energy and the whole uranium cycle, such as mining and waste disposal, pose to global environment and human lives and health, and decide on an effective and rapid global government response. In particular:
 - Establishment of a UN rapporteur on uranium and nuclear risks.
 - Establishment of a global financial mechanism to redress and clean-up of damage and pollution of nuclear and uranium lifecycles.
 - Establishment of an independent institutional framework to document, monitor and assess the environmental damages and risks of nuclear and uranium activities and increased lifecycle control. Such an institution will assure effective public participation, transparency and access to information.

II. Water and Water-related Eco-Systems

We recognize that some progress has been made and some best practices in some parts of our region exist but – despite 20 years of some progress – we have not come to grips with the most urgent and threatening water management problems. The greatest challenges of water management problems which our region faces are threefold.

1. Proper management of water resources in the transboundary context

Effective Transboundary cooperation on IWRM and delay of Water Basins Plans development and implementation is a crucial problem, and urgently needs stronger mechanisms and stakeholder participation. The most striking example is the dying of the Aral Sea. 20 years have past, and the root problem of the Aral Sea shrinking have not been solved, but the problems caused are increasing, not only for the populations on its former shores, but increasingly sand from the sea is leading to a faster melting of the glaciers of the pamir mountains.

Western European countries have substantial experience and best practices on implementation of the Water convention, Water Framework Directive and the IWRM and River Basin Management, which are already showing positive results. **In the EECCA countries IWRM as well as development of transboundary cooperation is still a challenge.** Lack of political will, skills and capacities to implement the IWRM is resulted in decreasing access to safe water for people and nature, food and economy; increasing acute competition and conflicts for water between different consumers and riparian countries and poses a serious barrier for sustainable development in the region.

2. Industrial, mining and agricultural based pollution of waters

Mining, nuclear and industrial pollution. Among others thanks to the work by the Environmental Security Programme, we are now informed of the immense risk of irreversible pollution of groundwater in the EECCA region. The risk of pollution of groundwater from the mining areas in Central Asia with radio-nuclides from the uranium mining tailings needs to be addressed with utmost urgency.

Water pollution from **POPs, pesticides and chemicals in products** has been recognized as a further major threat to the surface and groundwaters. The great cost of clean-up of (uranium) mining and POPs and pesticide pollution needs an international financial mechanism paid by a polluter pay charge. After 20 years of USSR disintegration, stockpiles of obsolete pesticides in EECCA countries still pose acute risk to human health and environment. The majority of POPs are being defined as mixture of unknown substances therefore being considered as POPs. Improper storage typical for EECCA countries causes regular affluence of POPs from POP stockpiles into rivers and ponds ended in the ground water streams. Due to improper inventories, the quantity and allocation of most risky stockpiles as the water contamination sources are often unknown.

Water pollution from **agricultural** including from nutrients (nitrates) and (persistent) pesticides continues to be a serious threat. In particular, **forbidden pesticides** continue to enter into most of EECCA countries due to lack of control at borders. Their use is a great threat to ground water quality and populations health.

3. Rural water supply and sanitation

Water, Sanitation & Health. Rural populations in the UNECE region are suffering health damage from lack of access to safe drinking water and sanitation. The WHO has not revised its figures that some 120 - 145 million people live without access to safe drinking water. Many people live without safe sanitation. Most of them live in rural areas. But uncontrolled sprawl in peri-urban areas is also a problem for water resources in all the UNECE region and in particular in South Eastern Europe. The situation in most Eastern countries has deteriorated in the last 20 years.

Further challenges identified are:

- **Invasive species in aquatic eco-systems**

Water based invasive species are representing not only a potential loss of agriculture produce, danger of public health, but an increasing danger for biodiversity – and it has been amplified by climate change, increased mobility and change of agricultural practices.

We call upon the governments to use the example of the EU and other countries to develop strategies without delay for effectively combating the spread of invasive species, particularly related to fresh water systems.

Regarding the sustainable management of water and water related eco-systems, we call for

We call on governments who have not yet done so to submit their **Astana Water Actions and to ratify the Transboundary Water Convention and the Protocol on Water and Health**. We also call on parties of the **Protocol on Water and Health** to implement the Protocol's mechanisms, focussing on the target setting process, addressing the 3 identified problem areas as most urgent in their countries.

We call governments to include urgent and time-bound actions which aim at:

1. Water management

- Transboundary river and aquifer agreements need to be developed and signed for all river and aquifer basins by 2015. We call on governments to ratify the transboundary water convention.

- In particular we call on the signing of the Moldova-Ukraine Dniester River agreement – which is almost ready for signing – as soon as possible, and at least by the end of 2012.
- We are calling for appropriate assistance and capacity building to be provided for the implementation for transboundary basin agreements.
- Increase as far as feasible, the reuse of waste water and grey water and develop necessary policies and capacity building, whilst taking all measures to reduce waste of drinking water, including for irrigation, sanitation and industrial use.
- We urge EECCA governments to move forward IWRM, develop and implement national water strategies as part of the National Policy Dialogues and in line with the EU water framework directive.
- We call on governments who have not yet done so to ratify and implement Protocol on Water and health. We call on parties to the protocol to set up implementation the protocol and assure effective public participation in the implementation of the Protocol by a governmental decree. We furthermore call for a strengthening of the financial base of the PWH.
- (Bio)monitoring should be introduced at community level, for example, Water Safety Plan methodology can become part of school curricula.

2. Halting and significantly curbing industrial, agricultural, mining and waste based pollution of waters by 2015

2.1. Uranium mining tailings

Immediate containment of uranium mining tailings is needed to reduce risk of widespread and irreversible pollution of surface and groundwater, in this regard:

We call on governments

- Develop a framework agreement on mining rehabilitation in the UNECE region.
- Calculate total cost all clean up of uranium mines in UNECE region, based on state of art clean up in former East Germany uranium mine Wismut
- Transparent access to information on pollution and pollution-risk
- Agree on timebound targets aiming to contain uranium mining tailings.
- Include cost of full clean up in mining products, including clean up and containment of uranium mines in prices of uranium.
- Strengthen the Environmental Security programme

2.2. Shale – Gas, Heavy metals, Chemicals

- Agree on a moratorium on shale gas as the risks from chemical pollution of groundwaters is as yet unknown
- Reduce mining pollution through legally binding targets on reusing metals in waste, e.g. gold
- Phase out subsidies, including indirect, for mining
- Include full insurance cost and cost for rehabilitation after mining closure in the price of mining products

- Implement capacity building to strengthen control at borders to halt entry of forbidden pesticides
- Phase-out harmful chemicals which currently enter into waste water from products used, by adding environmental liability and reversing the burden of proof to product safety legislation in the EU and EECCA countries.
- Provide technical assistance for conducting proper inventory of POPs in EECCA countries
- We urge EECCA Governments to ratify Stockholm convention on POPs and Adopt NIPs to enable access to financial and technical support mechanism under SC

2.3. Waste

Solid Waste

- Policy targets for a cradle- to – cradle solid waste framework, to protect water sources from solid and other municipal waste. Targets are needed by which waste landfills are banned by 2020, as well as annual targets to increase the share of waste which needs to be recycled and reused.
- Enforce ‘Water Source Safety Zoning’ through legislation, capacity building and enforcement

Obsolete pesticides

- Provide technical assistance for conducting proper inventory of OPs in EECCA countries
- Urge EECCA Governments to ratify Stockholm convention on POPs and Adopt NIPs to enable access to financial and technical support mechanism under SC
- EECCA National Governments to programming and allocate resources from National EF for inventory, re-packaging and safe destruction of OPs.

3. Assuring rural water supply and sanitation

We call on governments to:

- Provide required financial resources to implement the Millennium Development Goals, in particular MDG7, target 10, till 2015, for the 120-145 million people currently lacking safe water supply and sanitation
- Create institutional, legal and financial framework for improving rural water supply and sanitation, including:
 - Introduction of a ‘water-penny’ by all UNECE states, as a means of funding monitoring , water supply and sanitation in areas which currently are lacking, as well as other measures as recommended by the working group on “Equitable Access” under the Protocol on Water and Health
 - Development and adoption of guidelines for small scale water supply and sanitation to national legislation under the Protocol for Water and Health, including programmes for capacity on sanitation and waste water planning
 - Regulative frameworks and financial mechanisms for community run rural sanitation services for investment and maintenance of sanitation services, where households pay a usage fee
 - Allocate a main share of the EBRD water fund to invest in achieving access to water and sanitation in rural areas in the EECCA region

III. Water and Green economy

Availability of water resources is a precondition of sustainable development. In a global context, the European region is a water-rich region but **an increasing number of countries** in Southern and Eastern Europe, Central Asia are effected by **water scarcity**. For a transfer towards the green economy, there needs to be a **balance between water resources available and human and nature water demands**. The availability of an adequate quantity of water, of sufficient quality, is a **service provided by ecosystems**.

Beside the natural water scarcity, man-made depletion and pollution of water resources and degradation of water ecosystems, mostly **caused by mismanagement**, can limit access to water even if it is available locally to meet human needs. In a number of **EECCA countries extraction of water from river basins for human purposes is higher then the limit of 25%**, which is not aiding the increase in **physical water scarcity**.

To save water for future generations, **sustainable management of water, based on proper accounting** is key. However **official statistics and data in many EECCA countries are not suitable for measuring and assessing the effectiveness of policy mixes**. Transparency, reliability, actuality of information on surface and underground water resources' is needed. Data on quantity and quality and water related ecosystems are needed as a basis for adequate policy instruments and planning.

The current water sector reforms in EECCA countries are mainly focussed on improvement of the financial status of water utilities, resulting in increased tariffs, which are not always affordable for all water users. The promotion of the private sector in the water sector is creating new barriers for provision of access to safe water for all people in EECCA countries.

Privatization of water supply and sanitation sector should not be promoted, and when, should be carefully framed, and limited in time and scope. Best practices exist in a number of countries, for example the Netherlands, which forbids private ownership of more than 49% of water resources.

Work on 'Water for a Green Economy' has to be based on new knowledge and effective participation of the public and water consumers, making best use of the expertise and potential of NGOs who are experiences in raising public awareness on water for sustainable development.

Regarding Water and the Green Economy, we call upon Governments to take action on:

- Water saving considerations should be integrated into economic sectors strategies
- Targets for water resources use reduction should be adopted for all river basins, first of all where WEI exceeds 25%. Targets should be adjusted against transboundary effects thus strengthening transboundary cooperation on basin management.
- The management of, and investment in, ecosystems is essential to address water security for both people and ecosystems in terms of water scarcity, flood risk and water quality.
- Investments should be increased for renovating water supply and sewage utilities in the EECCA countries
- Resources user pay full cost principal should be converted into legal framework towards reflecting the full costs of water use in ways that do not compromise the needs of disadvantaged people in a community;

- Water accounting should become a core part in any policy planning and assessment, based on the following indicators:
 - The number of people without access to reliable supplies of clean water and adequate sanitation;
 - The volume of water available per person in a region;
 - The efficiency of water supply in the urban sector and water use;
 - The efficiency of water use in the agricultural and industrial sectors; and
- The “water footprint” of companies and countries is a tool which merits widespread use, among others:
 - To support education for sustainable water consumption and saving as a part of all curricula including knowledge on sustainable water use and water footprint.
 - To adopt water sensitive green procurement policy and introduce the labelling for “water friendly” products to support sustainable consumer choice
 - To support the NGOs working on water education and empowering consumers to act for water conservation and protection of water ecosystems at local – national levels.

IV. Environment in Europe process should continue and strengthened

1. Value of the Environment for Europe Process

We highly value the Environment for Europe process as a useful and effective tool for international cooperation. During its 20 years of existence, the EfE process has played a leading role in the development of programs, plans and strategies to improve environmental quality in the region. Many initiatives developed through the UNECE preparatory process and approved by Ministerial Conferences can serve as models for other regions, such as the Environmental Action Program for CEE, the Pan-European Strategy for Biological and Landscape Diversity, the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation and Access to Justice on Environmental Matters and the Strategy for Education on Sustainable Development (ESD). These EfE results have made a significant contribution in addressing environmental problems and initiated a lot of activities at regional, national and local levels.

Within the framework of EfE, a unique system of East–West partnerships was developed. From the very beginning, the EfE process considerably helped economies in transition to address environmental problems notwithstanding the complicated situation of overall transformation of their societies from totalitarian command–and–control economies to market economy and democratic societies. Within the EfE process, countries otherwise diverse in economic, natural and cultural terms, have united their efforts to improve environmental situation in the region.

Within the framework of EfE process, a unique interaction of governments with NGOs was developed, which remains exemplary for other international processes. Non Governmental Organizations became significant and officially recognized partners in the process, and they enjoy unique opportunities to provide their views, participate in drafting official documents and

participate actively in implementation of EfE decisions. However, we are concerned that support for the broad involvement of civil society is declining and we call government from UNECE countries to actively support participation of NGOs in the EfE process.

2. Assessments of Assessments

We welcome the Assessment of Assessment Report, prepared by the EEA showing among other things the necessity to strengthen the linkage with and use of assessment in the policy-making. We are hopeful that Ministers at this conference will agree to develop a regular process of environmental assessment and share environmental information system across the Pan-European region.

European ECO Forum also welcomes the Second Assessment of Transboundary Rivers, Lakes and Groundwaters in the UNECE region. The preparation of this document took a long time because of a great volume of work. European ECO Forum welcomes the fact that the process of elaboration of this assessment was done online in a transparent manner allowing those interested to provide an input. At the same time we believe that the drafting process of a Third Assessment **could be even more transparent, inviting all stakeholders to be part of the process.**

3. new RECs

The establishment of new RECs in the EECCA did not meet our expectation. It is now evident that these organizations have become privileged, demand-based consulting companies. Public participation is generally not among their priorities and we are not certain that they are effective in terms of a cost/benefit comparison. At previous EfE conferences we have called for a broad dialogue aiming to improve effectiveness of the new RECs in the EECCA region – and we renew our call here in Astana.

4. Dynamisms of European Eco-Forum process

European Eco Forum welcomed the decision on reform of the EfE process taken by the Ministers at their conference in Belgrade in 2007. However we regret that some of the countries as well as regional structures in the UNECE have used this reform process to limit the process to a general discussions about previously agreed themes with no concrete negotiated outcomes and, in this way, reducing the possibility to develop new instruments to assist implementation of the decisions made by Ministers during the previous phase of the EfE process. This, to our mind, contradicts with other decision of the Belgrade conference to focus on implementation of the decisions taken by Ministers during their previous conferences – we find this development unacceptable. We call on ministers to overcome this stalemate and provide their strong leadership to restore dynamics to the EfE process in order to move towards achieving of sustainable development with effective policy instruments. In particular, we urge Governments to upgrade the existing EfE instruments where necessary with dedicated funds, compliance mechanisms and other measures.

5. More attention for Biodiversity

In the Astana documents on the Green Economy we regret the lack of attention for biodiversity and intact eco-systems as a basic for a healthy Green Economy. We therefore welcome the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services and urge governments for its support. We also would like to remind Governments that one of the most important results of the 10th Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity, is the endorsed new Strategic Plan for CBD. It calls a.o. for the preparation or review of the National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans. Protection and sustainable use of inland waters is a key topic for

CBD, therefore we encourage that the recommendations of this Conference are used in the preparation of the NBSAPs and thus further ensuring implementation of EfE outcomes.

6. Public Participation in EfE

Due to severe lack of recourses, public participaion in the preparatory process of the Astana EfE conference has been quite modest. We confirm however, our commitment as European Eco-Forum to continue to be full and active partners in the EfE process, including organizing of a NGO-Ministers Round Table and we call upon the governments to provide a full support for this.

7. Need for concrete, quantifiable and time-bound commitments

We are concerned about the lack of quantifiable and time-bound commitment in the draft Ministerial Declaration. However, we believe that the discussions at this conference will help countries to agree on future joint activities, as well as provide an impulse for the development of further steps in cooperation, including preparations for the Summit on Sustainable Development "Rio +20" and implementation of its decisions in the UN ECE region.

Finally, we welcome the interest of the Government of Kazakhstan to move towards a green economy among others through their Green Bridge Initiative and look forward to a broad discussion with effective public participation on this issue.

Gratitude

We thank the government of Kazakhstan for its support of the NGO preparatory conference. We also thank the government of Sweden, the IPEN Quick Start Funding Programme, Eco-Accord, WECF and the secretariat of the UNECE for their support in organising the NGO preparatory process.

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Annex Transboundary River Basin Management (text Tatiana to be added)