

BRATISLAVA DECLARATION

ON THE PAN-EUROPEAN AGENDA FOR THE FORTHCOMING KYIV ENVIRONMENTAL MINISTERS CONFERENCE

**Adopted by the Plenary of the European ECO-Forum
08 December 2002, Bratislava, Slovak Republic**

Representatives of 60 international, European and national environmental citizens organizations (ECOs) from 28 countries met under the auspices of the European ECO-Forum in Bratislava, 7–9 December 2002, to discuss their demands and proposals to the Governments of the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UN-ECE) in the run-up to the 5th Pan-European Environmental Ministers Conference, “Environment for Europe”, 21–23 May 2003. We agreed on the following declaration.

The European ECO-Forum is concerned about the lack of progress in the pan-European region on environmentally sound sustainable development. Consumption and production patterns continue to exert pressure on the environment and accelerate the depletion of natural resources both in the region and globally. Biodiversity is threatened by intensive agricultural practices and the introduction of genetically modified crops, the fragmentation of landscape due to new transport infrastructure and to urban sprawl. Of all the European species, almost half are endangered. Important ecosystems, including wetlands, species-rich agricultural habitats, several arid and semi-arid areas, and coastal zones remain under threat.

Following reductions of greenhouse gas emissions in the 1990s, the lack of attention to this matter is leading to a high risk of resumed growth in emissions, which will make not only the Kyoto targets unachievable, but hamper the more far reaching reductions that are needed to contain climate change. People’s health throughout Europe continues to be at risk from the spread of hazardous chemicals, from polluted air, land and water, and from a deteriorating urban environment.

Removing these threats and reversing the trends are matters of social, economic and environmental justice. Continuing improvements to the European environment are urgently needed so that 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 Article 1 of the Aarhus Convention.

We call upon Governments to consider the forthcoming Environment for Europe (EfE) conference, Kyiv 2003, as the starting point for a major new offensive against these negative trends, to agree on clear objectives and action programmes for the coming years, and to revitalize and strengthen political agreements that were made in Sofia in 1995 with the adoption of the Environmental Programme for Europe (EPE), as well as implementing the Johannesburg 2002 Declarations.

We recall that the EfE process provides the only forum in which all European countries are able to meet on a more or less equal footing and to co-operate in addressing their environmental problems. Moreover, this forum is quite open to the participation of ECOs, which gives it added value. On these grounds we must strongly object to any plans to limit the EfE process to the environmental policies and programmes of the Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia

(EECCA) region. It must remain a focus of pan–European sustainable development initiatives and participatory democracy throughout the region.

In a period of increasing tensions between countries and peoples, 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. Ethics, like solidarity, equity and sufficiency are essential elements of our concept of sustainability.

Given the ECO preference for legally binding agreements, we welcome the intention at Kyiv 2003 to sign three important Protocols, even though we are concerned about the directions that their preparations have taken. Civil society needs ambitious, legally binding instruments which ensure that intention is followed by action and which help to embed best practice. We also welcome the preparation of a number of regional conventions including the Framework Carpathian Convention.

The European ECO–Forum recalls the “*Agenda for Kyiv 2002*”, adopted on the 16th September 2000 in Kyiv. Based on that Agenda and on the recent developments on the official’s level, it comes to the following specific demands and expectations:

1. PUT CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION PATTERNS AT THE HEART OF THE PROCESS

The “Environment for Europe” process should put in its centre the phase out of unsustainable production and consumption patterns in the region, through a combination of regional legally binding instruments, action programmes and accompanying financial assistance. It should realise that this issue has a strong social dimension, as unsustainable consumption patterns include both over– and under–consumption.

In particular, action is needed to make the market work for the environment. Despite theoretical recognition of the need for environmental tax reform and the abolition of environmentally perverse subsidies, only a few countries have taken modest steps, intimidated by the eternal business opposition based on imaginary competitiveness concerns. Using public procurement for promoting environmentally sound production and consumption patterns is usually discouraged.

Promoting sustainable consumption and production patterns also leads to restrictions on the liberalisation of trade and investment in order to keep control over jobs and resources within the local economy. Hence, the WTO agenda needs to be re–shaped so that trade serves the goals of sustainable development and does not undermine them.

We acknowledge the progress made in the EU on implementing individual producer responsibility for end–of–life vehicles and electrical & electronic waste. Such regimes need to be established across the UNECE region and need to embrace a wider range of post–consumer waste.

Labelling is essential for consumer choice. For eco–labelling to be credible, it must be underpinned by transparent criteria, certification and third party verification systems.

We applaud the adoption of the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants and call for its speedy ratification and entry into force. This is a start but more hazardous chemicals, including those suspected of being hormone–disrupters, need to be slated for phase–out. The EU made a good start last year with its agreement on a new chemicals policy. This targets existing unregulated chemicals, shifts the burden for providing safety data onto producers of chemicals and introduces the substitution principle. We are anxious to see the publication and adoption of the legal instruments that will put this approach into practice in the EU.

Ensure new income–generating opportunities and other support for workers and communities impacted by the closure of unsustainable production facilities.

2. A CHARTER ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY INTEGRATION

The integration of environmental objectives into sectoral policies remains largely a dream. Transport, energy and agricultural policies are predominantly still increasing environmental problems, thereby undermining their natural resource base. Where due to environmental restrictions local improvements are being made, they often lead to increased exploitation of resources elsewhere. We need to finally make integration of environmental objectives into sectoral policies a reality.

Environmental Policy Integration requires stronger environmental authorities *vis–a–vis* other parts of government as well as the private sectors. All countries need to strengthen the position and mandate of the environmental authorities and their capacities combined with clear target–setting, training and awareness–raising among other parts of the public authorities. It also needs effective instruments to engage the public in decision–making, implementation and monitoring.

The European ECO–Forum is grateful for the agreement to have a roundtable between environmentalists and Ministers on these topics during the Kyiv Conference, but it wants the Ministers to decide as well on working towards a Charter on Environmental Policy Integration in the pan–European region, based on:

- Quantified targets, timetables and indicators, essential in order to provide guidance for policies, to define the “urgency” involved, and to measure and assess progress and the additional measures needed.
- Standards and benchmarks based on the protection of health in the most vulnerable stages of life, before and after birth, around reproduction and in old age.
- Inclusion of sectoral as well as cross–sectoral principles and instruments into legislation, in particular the principles of prevention, precaution and extended producer responsibility. Furthermore concrete agreements on environmental liability, ecological taxation reform, reform of subsidy policies and public procurement are indispensable.
- Clear commitments to institutional integration, resulting in intensive and ongoing co–operation between different Ministries and bodies.
- Financial assistance to countries in transition for increasing their administrative capacities to meet their obligations made in international environmental legislation.
- Clear commitments to reducing environmental and health inequalities in every society.

3. ETHICAL VALUES FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Education and the mass media have a growing impact on, and responsibility for, spreading information and improving public awareness, as well as on the value orientations of people. Values, attitudes, preferences and expectations influence the character of education, media, church, art and other generators of information, inspiration and public awareness. At the same time, values underpin consumption and production patterns and conversely, the character of production and consumption influences the behavioural culture of the population, including its value orientations. The strategic aim for the future should be to support a deep reflection of positive values orientations through public awareness and at the same time to influence, in a positive way, the behaviour of decision makers, entrepreneurs and opinion makers via values–oriented education.

Therefore we recommend to restore at the official level the process initiated at the first conference “Environment for Europe” in Dobris and to promote and facilitate a public debate with the involvement of all stakeholders on ethical values and principles,

- to develop a set of relevant activities: research, conferences/seminars/workshops, presentations, mass-media activities, competitions etc. with the aim to highlight the importance of the topic,
- to deal with values-related issues in relationship with such issues as environmental awareness, human priorities/preferences/attitudes and consumption,
- to preserve and increase social, cultural and economic diversity and possibility of lifestyle choices,
- to educate people about the consequences and impacts of their choices,
- to improve transparency, accountability, codes of conduct, justice etc. related to the ethical behavior towards the environment.
- To develop innovative mechanisms for regulating commercial advertising. As a priority, ban advertising to children, thus following the example of Sweden.
- To stop the export of waste, products and technologies that have been withdrawn, banned or restricted domestically.

4. PAN-EUROPEAN EDUCATION STRATEGY FOR ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Education is an essential prerequisite for public awareness, changing consumption patterns and a responsible and active attitude of people in their relationship with the environment and society. Education should put the environment into the broader context of sustainable development.

While in some countries education for environment and sustainable development (EESD) is quite developed by combined or complementary efforts of the formal and informal education system, the proposed UNECE Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development has the potential to make a big difference in many other countries, defining what is an effective EESD. It can also trigger international and bilateral exchange of good practice, co-operation and innovative strategies as well as set timetables for implementation.

Therefore we deeply regret that the UNECE Strategy on Education for Sustainable development might not be signed in Kyiv. We are disappointed about the lack of ambition of some governments from the region to continue work on the Strategy.

On the other hand, we appreciate the willingness of the Swedish and Russian Governments to take the lead in this work. We call upon governments to continue the process of elaborating the Strategy and to adopt it by the year 2005, before the start of the UN Decade on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). We call upon Environmental Ministers to launch the international process on ESD and to invite Education Ministers to join the process. We also propose to establish a Working Group or a Task Force at the intergovernmental level for elaborating the Strategy and to agree on a reporting process at the level of the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy.

We urge Governments to commit themselves in Kyiv to allocate appropriate resources for the ESD Strategy process.

We consider that the following specific topics should be included in the Strategy:

- education on sustainable development for decision-makers, politicians, media and business;
- special education for educators on sustainable development;

- legal structures for developing environmental education strategies at national levels;
- coordination with national and other Strategies for sustainable development and other processes initiated by the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD);
- guidance to develop curricula for education on sustainable development at different levels from pre–school and primary education to university and PhD courses;
- respect the specific conditions of each country, gender issues and the promotion of tolerant behavior.

We want to be assured that the process of Education for Sustainable Development will not become a new slogan and propaganda issue. Instead, we want a real commitment for action and the implementation of an effective Strategy relevant for the entire region. So we want to see concrete commitments made in Kyiv.

5. THE PROTOCOLS FOR TRANSPARENCY AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

We welcome the outcomes of the first Meeting of Parties to the Aarhus Convention, in particular the establishment of a Compliance Procedure that allows citizens to raise non–compliance of parties with the Compliance Committee, and the inclusion of candidates presented by the ECO–Forum in that Committee.

We repeat our call to the EU and its Member States to complete the process of ratification of the Convention

However, we are very much concerned about the trends in the negotiations on two Protocols for signature in Kyiv: on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTR). Dominated by the EU, who is aiming at Protocols that do not go beyond existing EU legislation, the negotiations risk missing an important opportunity to trigger forward looking national legislation that will substantially mobilise the broad public for a better environment and sustainable development.

5. A. PRTR PROTOCOL

With regards to the PRTR Protocol we insist on a system that is multi–media (air, water and land) and includes the following elements:

- (a) Pollutant– and facility–specific reporting on an annual basis;
- (b) A core international pollutant list, including greenhouse gases, ozone depleting substances, acid rain gases, persistent organic pollutants (POPs), proven human carcinogens, radioactive substances, endocrine disrupting chemicals of concern, smog–causing chemicals, particulates, pesticides and internationally recognised priority water–pollutants;
- (c) A core list of activities, including mining operations, power plants, nuclear facilities, waste management facilities;
- (d) Both routine and accidental releases, separately identified;
- (e) Disposal of pollutants on–site;
- (f) Reporting on pollutants leaving industrial sites in products
- (g) Transfers to on–site and off–site facilities, identifying the destination of the off–site transfer.

Recalling the Convention’s mandate for pursuing a progressive, step–by–step approach to developing a PRTR for the region, we urge States to incorporate the following elements in the Protocol, accepting that the obligation could begin at a later date:

- (a) Water, energy and resource (pollutant) use;
- (b) Transfers off–site in products, and

(c) Further specific commitments on reporting of diffuse sources.

(d) Development of criteria for incorporating new pollutants in the future

Bearing in mind that the first reports under the Protocol will not appear until around 2009, the Protocol should include a commitment to continuing development of PRTRs in the region to address unresolved issues, incorporate new concepts, and refine existing mechanisms. Additionally, we call upon the States negotiating the Protocol to establish a Subsidiary Body on Scientific and Technological Advice to assist in the progressive development of the PRTR.

5.B. SEA PROTOCOL

We insist that the Protocol includes in its scope policies and legislation. The current trend to restrict the Protocol to plans and programmes is neglecting articles 7 and 8 of the Aarhus Convention.

We reject the attempts made to limit the right to comment to “the public concerned”, rather than the public at large, as the Aarhus Convention requires.

We insist that in cases of plans or programmes with potential transboundary environmental harm, public participation is guaranteed on the same level as in other cases.

We are disturbed at attempts in the negotiations to provide only minimal access to justice, to omit the responsibility for review by a court or similar body in most situations, and to ignore the need to eliminate financial and other barriers to access to justice.

6. THE PROTOCOL ON TRANSBOUNDARY CIVIL LIABILITY

Corporate responsibility is essential to changing unsustainable consumption and production patterns. Corporations must be made to take their responsibility by the implementation of strict liability regimes for environmental and other damages. More proactively, the precautionary principle must be enacted by demands for assurance bonds prior to granting permits for starting activities, whose impacts may be uncertain.

We insist that in preparing the Protocol, its scope not to be limited to hazardous activities in the mining and manufacturing industries but should consider also the potential adverse impact from the accidental release of bacteria, viruses and GMOs.

The Protocol should adequately guarantee access to information, public participation and access to justice within its scope.

The Protocol should be subject to ratification, acceptance, approval and accession by any interested State, regional and international organisation. We reject the requirement that only those countries that are party to both related Conventions can join the Protocol.

To make the negotiation process effective, we invite delegations to reach consensus on including progressive language on the non–discrimination issue, contributory fault, financial security and definitions of terms of “damage” and “industrial accident”.

We are concerned about the reluctance of EU Member States to agree on a Protocol before the EU has adopted its EU Directive on Environmental Liability. We are disappointed by the failure of the European Commission to present an effective Draft Directive and encourage EU governments to work in parallel on the EU level and the pan–European level to establish effective legal regimes that fully implement the principles of prevention and the polluter pays. In particular, strict liability, obligatory insurance, broad inclusion of biodiversity protection, GMO releases, and access to justice for the public need to be included in an unambiguous way.

While we insist that the Protocol be ready for signature at the Kyiv conference, we want to call upon the governments to invest resources from then on in the promotion of the practical implementation, ratification and further development of the agreements laid down in that Protocol.

7. ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION PROGRAM FOR CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE. ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGY FOR EASTERN EUROPE, CAUCASUS AND CENTRAL ASIA

We welcome the effective role that Environmental Action Program (EAP) for Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and the EAP Task Force played in promoting environmental policy and capacity building in economies in transition. In all CEE countries National Environmental Actions Plans (NEAPs) have been prepared and Local Environmental Actions Plans (LEAPs) have been initiated with a particular focus on Agenda 21. Following the EAP methodology in many CEE countries Regional Environmental Actions Plans (REAPs) are now being preparing together with criteria for selecting new regions. In all CEE countries financial strategies were developed to facilitate financing of environmental projects.

We recall that the activity of the EAP Task Force for the EECCA has been focused on identifying obstacles to and opportunities for financing of environmental investment projects and building mechanisms to finance environmental projects with various degrees of success in different countries.

However, we are very much concerned about the low awareness among NGOs of CEE and EECCA about the EAP Task Force activities in their countries.

We consider that the work on implementation of the EAP in CEE region should continue. We insist on improving the efficiency of this work. For this purpose, the EAP Task Force needs to continue its work in CEE and the EECCA, taking into account new environmental problems such as new sources of pollution, consumption habits, public participation, misfits between environmental problems and financing, the need to harmonise environmental policy between EU, accession and non–accession countries and to implement it at national level.

We are aware of the process of the EECCA Environmental Strategy elaboration and have had on–going discussion on its elements and background documents. NGOs of the region express a wide range of opinions on the developing Strategy and procedures. We will continue the discussion and further formulate our positions and proposals in preparation to Kyiv.

We propose the creation of multi–stakeholder bodies to assist in the process at national level.

We welcome the NGO initiative to assess national environmental policies in their countries and invite the REC and the New RECs support this activity in the spirit of cooperation with the ECO–Forum and civil society.

8. THE PAN–EUROPEAN BIOLOGICAL AND LANDSCAPE DIVERSITY STRATEGY

Biodiversity conservation and its sustainable use should form an integral part of all sectoral policies and activities. We welcome governmental and NGOs efforts to implement this approach within the Pan–European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy (PEBLDS). We had high expectations based on the numerous initiatives, conventions, treaties and strategies all aiming to protect our common natural heritage, benchmarking the way from Dobris to Kyiv. We had high expectations from the commitments of high–level national representatives when endorsing these documents but were disappointed to see them being neglected. Therefore, we have been

voicing ever stronger concerns about the lack of an implementation and result oriented approach, of stakeholder involvement and synergy between PEBLDS and other initiatives.

We ask the European Governments to reinforce the PEBLDS implementation and to provide adequate funding for its secretariat. We ask the European Governments to ensure that the biodiversity in our region will stop declining as soon as possible. We welcome the commitments to halt biodiversity loss by 2010. However, we call on European governments to identify the status of biodiversity that is to be achieved in the year 2010. Moreover, we urge governments to undertake concrete actions that are different from those already proven to be inefficient. Biodiversity considerations have to be incorporated into economical and social mechanisms in order to link conservation activities within the general framework for sustainability.

We demand close cooperation between the “Environment for Europe” process and the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of forests in Europe.

On the basis of the precautionary principle, we demand that a moratorium on the environmental release and placing on the market of genetically modified organisms be introduced or upheld across the UNECE region until all laws regulating the production, use and trade of GMOs — and their labelling — are in place. Special attention should be paid to the prevention of the invasion of alien species.

Every project on carbon sequestration to combat climate change must go through an Environmental Impact Assessment to study the influence of the project on biodiversity. Reforestation and afforestation should be considered as an integral part of developing the Pan–European Ecological Network together with other restoration activities such as wetland and grassland rehabilitation and mountains conservation.

The environmental NGO community expresses its support for a radical reform of the common agriculture policy (CAP) of the EU. Failure to reform the CAP now will mean that the present agricultural practices of EU will quickly spread among the accession countries and beyond, jeopardizing the existing organic agricultural practices. We ask for an institutional framework of cooperation between the governmental bodies responsible for nature protection and agriculture on Pan–European and national levels.

Since the Aarhus Ministerial Conference in 1998 we have insisted on the development of common guidelines for the Pan–European Ecological Network, which is a real tool to improve biodiversity and land use planning. Nevertheless, no real changes have occurred. Now we are concerned by attempts to substitute the development of this Network by the development of lists of protected sites such as Emerald and Natura–2000 networks as conservation of isolated wild nature spots alone cannot stop the further decline of overall biodiversity.

9. TOWARDS MORE SUSTAINABLE ENERGY STRUCTURES FOR EUROPE

The extraction, conversion and use of energy is causing a number of environmental problems. European countries are major contributors to these environmental problems, including climate change. Without adequate actions to reduce the environmental effects from energy, Kyiv’03 cannot be regarded as a success.

In 1998 in Aarhus, the environment ministers decided to promote the removal or reduction of environmentally harmful energy price subsidies by 2005 and to increasingly internalise external costs. This raised the expectation of substantial changes in all countries. Unfortunately the activities to implement these decisions on a Pan–European level have been minimal. Therefore we propose that the ministers in Kyiv in 2003:

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- make a country–by–country evaluation of the progress since 1998 in phasing out environmental harmful energy subsidies,
- start a common process to oversee the continued phase out of environmental harmful subsidies until 2005,
- adopt common guidelines for reforming energy subsidies.

In 1998 the ministers also welcomed Pan–European Guidelines on Energy Efficiency, including proposals for energy efficiency labelling and initiatives for efficient district heating. These valuable proposals have not been implemented on a Pan–European level, and thus we propose that the ministers:

- strengthen co–operation on Pan–European standards and labelling schemes for energy efficiency,
- Initiate joint activities / co–operation on sustainable heating supply, in particular by changing current unsustainable heating supply in CEE/EECCA to more efficient supply based on renewable energy and co–generation of heat and power.

The decision to ask international finance institutions (IFIs) to make energy efficiency a priority in their operations did not lead to improvements in IFI lending policy. Thus, we call on the ministers to:

- ask their governments to instruct the IFIs to phase out investments in fossil fuel and nuclear, and redirect these funds to energy efficiency and renewable energy.

The liberalisation of energy markets throughout Europe can improve the opportunities for cleaner energy and more efficient energy supply and use. However, more than ten years of experience shows that such market changes only benefit the environment if environmental concerns are well integrated in the processes. Thus, we call for environmental ministers to:

- be involved in the restructuring of energy markets to ensure that environmental concerns are well integrated,
- help to create an enabling environment for energy efficiency and renewable energy, e.g. through pricing policies, and the use of public service obligations,
- require common standards for all electricity suppliers that deliver to a common market, irrespective of their location, to avoid environmental dumping.

At the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg it was not possible to agree a global target for renewable energy, in spite of strong support from the European countries. Thus it is proposed that the ministers agree, in co–operation with their energy ministers, on:

- Pan–European targets for renewable energy for 2010 and 2015,
- specific renewable energy targets for each country in line with the Pan–European targets.

We also call upon the ministers to improve the implementation of the Pan–European Strategy to Phase–Out Leaded Petrol.

10. PHASE–OUT NUCLEAR POWER

Governments should agree a phase–out strategy for nuclear energy and a time frame for its implementation. As a first step, the Lucerne, Sofia and Aarhus agreements to decommission the most dangerous nuclear plants must be implemented, including in EECCA. We call for the following key elements of the phase–out strategy, including:

- a ban on new nuclear power installations and phase–out of existing nuclear installations. An international Agency should be set up to facilitate the closing down of such installations throughout Europe;
- no funding for commissioning of new nuclear power capacity, from EBRD, from Euratom, or from other public sources;

- no export of nuclear waste, including spent fuel, to CEE and EECCA countries;
- the establishment of international decommissioning support funds for the highest risk reactors in Armenia and Russia as is done for EU Accession countries;
- minimising the transport of radio–active waste;
- phasing out reprocessing;
- storing spent fuel at the site of the nuclear power plants until safe solutions have been found for final storage of the waste.

II. WATER ISSUES

Taking into account the Millennium Development Goals, in particular to have the proportion of people that do not have access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation by 2015, the Governments of EECCA have to implement water sector reforms to guarantee access to safe drinking water and sanitation as a basic human right.

The Protocol on Water and Health signed in 1999 in London in the framework of the Environment and Health process needs to be ratified as soon as possible by all European countries.

The European ECO–Forum supports the EU Water Initiative: Water for Life — Health, livelihoods, economic development and security. This initiative has to promote integrated water management, multi–stakeholder partnership and co–operation between countries sharing international river basins. The public has to be involved in the design and implementation of such initiatives. NGO river networks and experience have to be used and supported by governments for developing Integrated Water Resources management and water efficiency plans by 2005.

To speed up the implementation of the river basin approach the Caucasus and Central Asia States should adhere to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes.

12. THE FUTURE OF THE “ENVIRONMENT FOR EUROPE” PROCESS

The European ECO–Forum agrees with the need to discuss the future of the EfE process. There is a lot to be improved in particular in ensuring follow–up to commitments made at the Ministerial Conferences, and we can agree with the objective to integrate with, and reach out to, other inter–governmental processes with pan–European relevance.

However, we want to emphasize that the EfE process should remain truly pan–European, aiming to improve the environment in the entire pan–European region. The EfE process has to underline the common future we have in environmental and sustainable development terms. We would like to highlight in particular the role the EfE process has had in keeping the environment and nature protection on the national agendas in parts of the region, in reducing the marginalisation of environmental authorities, as well as the opportunities it created for environmental citizens organisations to organise themselves on the regional level as well as be more effective at home. We are convinced that the EfE can continue to play this role, and are concerned that it would lose this function if it would be converted into a platform solely for channeling environmentally motivated development assistance from one part of the region to another.

The basis for the EfE process should be to promote further effective policies to protect the environment and nature conservation. This means in practice that the Environmental Ministers should use EfE to promote environmental policy integration, environmental democracy and sustainable development. Overarching objectives should be:

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- the implementation and further development of the Environmental Programme for Europe;
- the development and implementation of a regional Action Programme for Sustainable Consumption and Production patterns, contributing to the implementation of the Johannesburg Agenda.
- The promotion and evaluation of effective National Sustainable Development Plans, leading also to new pan–European initiatives to strengthen such national plans.

Furthermore, we insist that the EfE can be effective only if it results in legally binding instruments like the Aarhus Convention, or action programmes with clear roles and obligations for the participating countries, effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and concrete solutions for the lack of financial resources, knowledge, capacities, etc.

For environmental policy integration and sustainable development the active involvement of other Ministers, and even Prime Ministers, is necessary. For the foreseeable future, it is clear however that the leadership role of Environmental Ministers is indispensable, and therefore they need to meet frequently and regularly. They should have more space for taking new initiatives, based also on direct discussions with stakeholders, in particular environmental citizens’ organisations. They should start a routine of having joint meetings with other Ministers, in order to adopt pan–European integration and sustainable development policies. This includes the possible integration of the Environment and Health process. This also means that an annual frequency with full participation of Environment Ministers is necessary to fulfill this leadership role.

The trend of increased openness and involvement of environmental citizens’ organisations in the process needs to be safeguarded. Electronic communication tools should be used in creative ways to further involve NGOs and citizens in the international process.

We would like to thank those governments that have been supporting the international NGO Coalition/ European ECO–Forum in the past, and in particular the Danish, Dutch, Norwegian Governments, the Union of Towns and Cities of Slovakia as well as the REC for the CEE, REC of the Republic of Moldova, Russian REC, OSCE–Yugoslavian office, who have sponsored the preparation and organisation of the Bratislava ECO–Forum Strategy meeting. We also express our gratitude to the Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs for cooperation and help in organisation of this meeting.
