

NEWS MAY 23 PAN-EUROPEAN LETTER ECO'S ENVIRONMENT FOR EUROPE EPER

ECO-Forum International
Conference
May, 22 Review

SIGNING CEREMONY

*Serhey Vyhryst, ECO-Forum,
Eco-Pravo-Kharkov:*

“Compared to other protocols, the **Protocol on Civil Liability** was signed by only 22 states. We expected that more than 8 members of the European Union would sign this Protocol. We are disappointed that the European Commission had not signed it, because the Commission sent a message to accession countries. Many accession states have probably not signed the protocol because of this reason. It is very important to work on ratification process. We were also upset that ECO-Forum was almost denied an opportunity to speak although we submitted the request on time. In the very last moment, we managed to get 60 seconds to present our position.”

Svitlana Kravchenko, ECO-Forum, Eco-Pravo-Lviv:

“The **Protocol on SEA** was signed by 34 countries. 2 more states shall sign it today. This is the greatest number we could expect. SEA Protocol is a

difficult instrument to understand. I expected substantial efforts would be needed to explain its importance. I am very glad that countries showed their understanding although the negotiations were quite difficult. UK, Germany and sometimes France were quite conservative during negotiations, but they signed the protocol. ECO-Forum got an opportunity to speak after 2 ministers and the European Commission, and this is quite remarkable.”

Olga Speranskaya, ECO-Forum, Eco-Accord:

“The **Protocol on PRTR** was signed by 37 countries. Among them there are 5 countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia region. EECCA countries were not very active during the negotiations but showed their readiness to start working on establishing national PRTR system by signing the Protocol in Kyiv. Some EECCA countries expressed hope that EU and international organizations will provide them with the necessary assistance to implement the Protocol. PRTR is another opportunity to harmonize environmental legislation between EU and EECCA. Establishment of PRTRs is a common concern for all UN ECE members. EU countries were trying not to go beyond EPER during the negotiations, but in the end they signed the Protocol. ECO-Forum had a speech in the end of the session and called upon governments to sign the Protocol in Kyiv, ratify it at home and implement rapidly.”

EC COMMISSIONER MEETS NGOS

The EC Commissioner Margot Wallstrom met non-governmental organisations to find out the concerns of citizens groups



across Europe. The Commissioner regretted that in Kiev we continue to negotiate texts that were already negotiated on the road to Johannesburg and at other international meetings.

The Commissioner promised NGOs that the work on widening EPER will start immediately to reflect to the provisions of PRTR Protocol. She showed understanding of the need for capacity building for the implementation of SEA Protocol and stated that support to NGOs to carry out SEAs should be increased. The Commissioner mentioned that they are preparing to the ratification of Aarhus Convention. In response to the question - what EU sees as a regional tool for changing sustainable production and consumption patterns and what are the perspectives for the Strategy on SPAC – the Commissioner answered “we are not ready yet”.

NGOs briefed Margot Wallstrom about the situation with the new regional environmental centers (New RECs) and criticised the Russian REC as a closed structure. NGOs urged the Commissioner to insist on the implementation of the primary mission of the RECs which is the strengthening of civil society. The Commissioner appeared to be well informed of the situation. She mentioned that RECs did not yet become what she would like them to be. She expressed the willingness to meet all interested non-governmental actors during her next visit to Russia.

ECO-FORUM STRESSES THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN EECCA ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGY

The session on EECCA Environmental Strategy attracted the attention of large number of countries and international agencies. Denmark, United Kingdom, the World Bank, OECD and many others indicated their strong support to EECCA Environmental Strategy. *Olga Ponizova* on behalf of European ECO-Forum stressed the importance of civil society in the development and implementation of the Strategy. In the beginning of her statement, she highlighted the diversity of opinions among NGOs on this issue.

“The majority of NGOs welcomes the development of EECCA Environmental Strategy and believes that it can contribute to the improvement of environmental situation in the region based on cooperation between EECCA countries, between East and West, and among stakeholders.”

“At the same time, a number of non-governmental organisations in Ukraine and Moldova is against the participation of their countries in the Strategy and is scared that the participation in this Strategy will prevent their accession to the European Union”.

“NGOs which support the Strategy consider that the drafting process for the Strategy serves as a good example of public participation. NGOs were involved in consultation process since the emergence of the idea to draft such Strategy. They were informed about the process and had an opportunity to submit comments and proposals and to

participate in the activities of expert groups.”

“Certainly, we are disappointed that the text is not that strong as it was earlier planned. That is why we consider that it is very important to draft an action plan with timelines and indicators based on the Strategy. We call upon you to start this work in the nearest future.”

“We are extremely concerned that environmental ministries in our countries have low status in the structure of governmental authorities. We will push for real changes in this situation since we believe it is the key for effective settlement of environmental problems and in particular for success of the Strategy.”

NGOs SUGGEST PUBLIC WATER CENTERS TO IMPLEMENT THE WATER INITIATIVE

During the discussion on EU Water Initiative, ECO-Forum proposed the establishment of Public Water Centers to raise awareness, provide information and consultations to the public on water issues.

“NGOs are convinced that the success of water partnership depends on social understanding of the need to solve water problems and of the importance of public support for reforms in water sector. NGOs can facilitate raising awareness of the population on key water issues. They can also contribute the involvement of all stakeholders (women, youth, businesses, NGOs, trade unions, local authorities, scientists) in the implementation of the Water Initiative”, *Tamara Bulygina* on behalf of ECO-Forum highlights.

“We would like to stress the role of NGO participation in the

building blocks of Water Initiative – in the development and implementation of both NGO projects and governmental projects.”

ECO-Forum also stressed the importance of regional and basin NGO networks for the implementation of the Initiative and encouraged parliamentary and public hearings on water issues and public access to safe drinking water.

TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION IN THE ECE REGION

This workshop began recalling how governments, over a decade ago at Rio, agreed that unsustainable production and consumption patterns are the major cause of environmental degradation and that the developed, industrialized countries are obligated to take the lead in changing this situation. As we all know, however, sustainable production and consumption (SPAC) has been left behind in the exhaust of the speeding engine of modern development and consumer society, with worsening environmental and social trends the result.

Participants, from both Western Europe, the US and EECCA countries, explored a series of questions on their government’s progress towards SPAC policies. While all expressed a common disappointment with the lack of progress by their governments towards SPAC, they also identified a wide range of different obstacles blocking progress, illustrating the different situations and points of view of their countries, highlighting the importance of the Principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities.

In light of the ECO-Forum's proposal to the ECE for a pan-European regional strategy on production and consumption, participants explored the possible values in monitoring, assessing and reporting on their governments' progress, as well as how they might work together in the future to continue this exploration.

BIODIVERSITY AND AGRICULTURE

Workshop "Relationship between Biodiversity, Environment and Agriculture" on 22 May started with the presentation of the position of Bulgarian Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. The speakers stressed that cooperation between governmental and non-governmental organisations is needed for sustainable rural development. Maria Staniszewska from Poland described the Project on the relationship between Biodiversity, Environment and Agriculture outlined policy, actors and opportunities in Bulgaria and Poland and concluded that "we should not repeat mistakes made in Western Europe". Nune Darbinyan from Eco-Globe, Armenia, shared the experience on the perspectives of developing organic farming in South Caucasus. Many participants agreed that it is important to explain the negative impact of agriculture on the environment as well as the relations between agriculture and biodiversity to wider audience.

CARPATHIAN CONVENTION SIGNED

The Carpathian Convention was signed by Hungary, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovakia and Ukraine. Czech Republic is going to sign the document in the nearest future. Polish representatives com-

mented that Poland supported the Convention but they are not satisfied with some procedural issues; they hope to finalize these issues very soon. The new international instrument is supposed to strengthen sustainable development in all sectors – from use of energy and water resources to cultural development. Creation of network of reserves, increase of rural tourism, development of a system for risk assessment, increase of civil society and local community inputs are provided for in the document. The Alpine Convention was a basis for the drafting of the Carpathian instrument.

BETTER LINKS BETWEEN HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT

The many and varied links between health and environment issues were made very clear in a seminar this morning. A presentation about the situation in Chelyabinsk showed how the nuclear legacy from weapons and power programmes is still causing deaths, while EcoPravo Kyiv spoke about developing concerns in the EECCA and CEE regions about transport and health issues.

There was also much discussion about the upcoming World Health Organisation conference on Environment and Health to be held next year in Budapest. A draft statement about NGO involvement in this process was read about and will be open for discussion and comment by members of the Health Issues Group of the EcoForum and others. Many other NGOs commented on the need to take these ideas forward and go from talk to action: it will be up to us to make this happen.

FIVE YEARS AFTER AARHUS

Over 50 people came to an open discussion at the side-event on implementation of Aarhus Convention. Five years after the ministers agreed on citizens' environmental rights it is still questionable whether we have these rights. People have the right to participate in decision-making but they do not use it. Why? Is the ratification of Aarhus Convention enough to ensure that citizens are informed and the public participates in environmental decision-making?

NGOs and ministerial officials answer differently to these questions. However they agree that the educational level of population should be increased. The Secretary of the Aarhus Convention Jeremy Wates says it is not enough to pass legislation. We need to change the culture, and this is a common concern for all countries.

The EU Programme "Environmental Information, Education and Public Awareness" works in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine to help these countries implement the Aarhus Convention. Jeremy Wates stresses that this programme is a valuable experience on the implementation of the Convention in daily life. The Georgian Environment Minister Nino Chkhobadze considers that the Aarhus Convention gave us a new concept of specific environmental rights. NGO representatives claim that the difficulties in implementing the Convention often arise out of conflicts between business interests and interests of environmentalists. The participants of the side-event agreed that the Aarhus Convention should be regarded as a basis and needs to be supplemented by additional legally binding instruments.

GMOs RAISE CONCERNS BUT ARE IGNORED BY THE KIEV CONFERENCE

The Ministerial Conference does not discuss the issue of genetically modified organisms (GMOs). At the early stage of negotiations on the Protocol on Civil Liability, ECO-Forum insisted that GMO releases were included in the Protocol. However, the scope of application of the Protocol does not include GMOs. The Ministerial Declaration to be signed tomorrow does not address the issue as well, and this fact raises real concerns among NGOs. At its press conference, IUCN briefed the participants about the importance of the Protocol on Biosafety. The Protocol provides for precautionary principle in the regulation of GMOs. IUCN expert Svitlana Kravchenko presented to the journalists a new guide on Cartagena Protocol. The Russian translation of the guide will soon be available.

INFORMAL DISCUSSION BETWEEN NGOs AND MINISTERS SETS GOALS FOR FURTHER COOPERATION

An informal discussion between ECO representatives and environmental Ministers took place on the second day of Environment for Europe Conference. It was aimed at sharing ideas and views for further cooperation between civil society and governments in the integration of environmental requirements into sectoral and horizontal policies with a focus on agriculture. The roles of governments and ECOs for the development of environmental policy integration was on the agenda.

The Minister of Environment of Ukraine called upon all governments to increase partnership with NGOs. He highly appreciated Public Environmental Assessment Report prepared by Ukrainian NGOs and its applicability for further development of environmental policy in the country. He also stressed the need for NGOs to be more involved in practical issues of environmental protection rather than political battles.

Environmental minister from Sweden was also impressed by the contribution of Ukrainian NGOs in preparing environmental policy evaluation. She emphasized the role of NGOs in working on sustainable development issues together with the government and stressed that successful dialogue depends on democratic settings.

Romanian Minister mentioned the need to strengthen public participation, access to information and awareness raising. Romania ratified Aarhus convention in 2001. Since then, public access to information as well as participation in community action programs were significantly improved.

The Minister of Environment of Moldova noted good partnership between NGOs and the government. He emphasized the need of getting more experience in providing NGOs with financial support from national sources.

Georgia and Azerbaijan mentioned the need to integrate environmental policy in agriculture and sustainable use of water resources. Several reporters emphasized poor water management and pesticide contamination as key problems to be addressed while integrating environmental issues into sectoral policies.

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