



Letter to the Ministers in Preparation of the 5th Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe"
(Kyiv, Ukraine, 21-23 May 2003)

MAKE KYIV-2003 A HISTORICAL STEP FORWARD FOR EUROPE'S ENVIRONMENT!

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Dear Minister

The 5th Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe" (EfE) in Kyiv, Ukraine is coming near. Environmental organisations from across the region will be in Kyiv in great numbers to support you taking decisions that will help to effectively fight environmental degradation in the pan-European region, and ensure that UN-ECE countries take a lead in addressing the global challenges that were re-discussed in Johannesburg last year.

As you know, in the framework of the «Environment for Europe» process, environmental citizens organisations work together in the European ECO-Forum, set up in 1991 at the occasion of the first Ministerial Conference in Dobris. The ECO-Forum has been active in the preparations for the Conference at all levels and in all specific processes.

In December last year, the participants in the European ECO-Forum, agreed the "Bratislava Declaration", presenting you the main expectations of the environmental community for Kyiv. We attach this Declaration (<http://www.eco-forum.org/Towards/bratislava-declaration.pdf>).

In the last weeks before the Conference, a lot of work still has to be done to make it a success. In this letter we would like to emphasize a number of specific issues that we see as conditional for a successful conference, partly to be resolved beforehand, partly during the meeting itself.

1. Legally Binding Instruments

Three Protocols and a Convention will be signed at the Conference. They will help to create more transparency about the movements of dangerous substances in our society, organise strategic environmental decision-making with regards to plans and programmes on the national levels, environmental liability in cases of transboundary impacts of accidents and the Carpathian Convention. These are three more products of what has been an important pan-European process of cooperation of environmental authorities and environmental organisations.

We call upon all Ministers:

– To sign these **Protocols on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTR), and on Civil Liability and Compensation for Damage Caused by the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents on Transboundary Waters, and the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians**, even if you have not taken part in the negotiations.

As signatories or potential signatories, agree that further work needs to start without delay on:

- Proposals to further include decision-making on policies and legislation into the Protocol on SEA

- The inclusion of further substances and activities in the Protocol on PRTR, as well as the possible expansion of the situations to which the Protocols apply, in particular on storage and on-site transfers.
- Implementing all three Protocols nationally to the maximum extent possible, not waiting for its entry into force.

2. Responses to global challenges

Kyiv will be the first meeting of Environmental Ministers of the UN-ECE after the Johannesburg Summit. The UN-ECE region includes most of the industrialised part of the globe, with an enormous ecological footprint causing serious problems for the rest of the world. We are at a **decisive moment** for the future of the Earth: will governments be prepared to address the global challenges or not, will the industrialised countries be prepared to take the lead or not. Therefore, the European ECO-Forum insists:

- That the Ministers agree to start, in the framework of «Environment for Europe» work on a **pan-European regional strategy to phase out unsustainable production and consumption patterns**, to be ready one year after the Kyiv conference, and with a period of implementation of 10 years. This strategy is an indispensable regional contribution to the work the CSD and UNEP will undertake to implement the WSSD decision to *«encourage and promote the development of a 10-year framework of programmes in support of regional and national initiatives to accelerate the shift towards sustainable consumption and production to promote social and economic development within the carrying capacity of ecosystems.»* As the WSSD programme of implementation states: *«fundamental changes in the way societies produce and consume are indispensable for achieving global sustainable development»*, and *«developed countries are to take the lead»*. Besides the material impacts such a strategy is to have in our own region, such a united effort could create the necessary trust with developing countries, a precondition for progress on the global level.

The decision on the work on such Strategy should be taken in Kiev including the agreement on the secretariat support from the UNECE and reporting procedure in the framework of the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy. The CEP should take this issue on its agenda.

An important element of this strategy shall be the systematic promotion of environmental policy integration, including the broader use of price mechanisms to support policy integration, the removal of environmentally harmful subsidies, increasing market access to environmental goods and services, including by public procurement, extended producer responsibility, as well as specific objectives for sectoral policies, in particular transport, energy and agriculture. In market economies, it is important that corporate interests cooperate fully and are accountable to the public.

For changing consumption and production patterns, legislation, financial incentives, research and technology development are important. At the same time, in particular for consumption patterns, there is an **ethical dimension** as well. Ethical values, like solidarity, equity and sufficiency are essential elements of our concept of sustainability. This was recognised by the first Efe conference but this notion was not given a follow up. We urge the return of ethical values in the Ministerial environmental and sustainable development agenda. The regional strategy should include promotion of an ethical behaviour towards nature and the environment we are living in. Given the limits to the use of natural resources we face, this should base on solidarity, within and beyond borders, including with future generations. Issues should include the promotion of cultural diversity, re-localisation of the economy, and consider regulation of advertisement to prevent it to promote unsustainable life-styles.

- That Ministers use the Conference to do whatever possible to convince three important members of UNECE: USA, Russia and Turkey, to join the **Kyoto Protocol**. In particular the first two have a major responsibility for climate change given the dimension of greenhouse gas emission originating there. Russia may need further encouragement from other countries. The USA should get a clear message that its decision to allow continuing increase of its domestic greenhouse gas emissions is utterly irresponsible and undermines seriously the potential to find peaceful solutions for global common threats.

- That the Ministers reconfirm their 1998 position on **the relationship between Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) and the multilateral trading system**. Ministers and Heads of Delegations of 51 countries agreed on the following statement at the Aarhus Efe Conference in 1998, with the USA being the only one against. We call upon you to reconfirm: *«that the objectives and obligations of MEAs should not be hampered by other international agreements, and the need to ensure that the WTO rules, provisions and procedures take full account of the need to promote a high level of environmental protection. In particular, the multilateral trading system should, under clear and predictable rules, accommodate the use of trade measures taken in the framework of MEAs (par. 11 of the Aarhus Ministerial Declaration).»*

3. Region-wide Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development

As education is an essential part of mobilising and empowering the public for the protection of nature, environmental policies, and sustainable development, and as we are convinced that current practice can be dramatically improved in most if not all countries, we advocate **agreement on the development of a region-wide Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development by 2005, in cooperation with Education Ministers and other interested bodies**. Much has been done to develop environmental education during last decades in the UNECE region. Therefore it is a right time now to extend this work and to focus on education for sustainable development stressing all its' three pillars. The initiative should come from you as environmental ministers and the work should be done under the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy with its extended mandate in cooperation with UNESCO. We think that such Strategy should become the UNECE regional contribution to the UN Decade on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) that will start in 2005.

The Strategy in our view should provide for at least a minimum background on ESD for all countries in the region and include framework program for education of educators, decision-makers, trainings for professionals and mass media. It should include education at all levels from pre-school to high education, formal and informal education and life-long learning.

It should be developed and implemented with a full involvement of all interested stakeholders and environmental citizens organizations in particular.

4. Effective assistance to countries in transition on implementation of environmental policies

Much efforts have been put into the development of a framework for an effective strategy to solve environmental problems in the region of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia, which includes both cooperation and assistance. The European ECO-Forum has been involved in the preparations, but this does not mean that all environmental citizens organisations are happy with the results. In two countries (Ukraine and Moldova), the majority of organisations have fundamental problems with the approach. In other countries, ECO's have practical concerns about the effectiveness of the framework and the way the process is expected to be coordinated. We consider that it is essential to involve all stakeholders and in particular environmental citizens organizations at all stages of development and implementation of the Strategy, an essential requirement for any initiative that is registered as a Partnership Type II for the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, 2002.

We would like also to draw your attention to the necessity to address the work on sustainable consumption and production patterns within this Strategy specifically, because much remains to be done in particular in this region.

We are concerned that environmental policy integration in trade and industry are not addressed in the Strategy, while remain to be priority sectors as well as those that have been mentioned.

We are aware of the new expectations that governments and the European Commission have with respect to the **New RECs** for the implementation of this Strategy. We urge you, Ministers, that these should not undermine the basic mission of these centres, as agreed at previous Efe Ministerial Conferences, which is supporting public participation and civil society development. This mission is essential for building democracy and transition for sustainable development in the EECCA region and we call upon addressing this in the Strategy and in the Kyiv Ministerial Declaration. ECO's in the some of the EECCA countries are of the opinion that much improvement is needed with regards to that basic mission of the new RECs, and that this should have priority. For them, shifting the focus of the new RECs at this moment is therefore not a good idea at all.

5. Act to reduce the environmental burden and risks related to energy production

The Aarhus Conference in 1998 started activities to promote energy efficiency and phase-out of environmental harmful energy price subsidies that in effect promote energy use. In Kyiv you will discuss the results of work done in different forums.

We call upon the Ministers:

- To reiterate the urgency that the Aarhus Conference expressed, by the need **«to progressively reduce and where possible remove energy price subsidies which counteract an efficient use of energy and/or have harmful effects on the environment by 2005»**. Without underlining, in this concrete form, the need for urgency in Kyiv, the European ECO-Forum has little confidence that much will happen in practice.

Far too little have been done to phase-out of environmentally harmful subsidies since the Aarhus Conference and the Kyiv Conference must give a high-level message to speed up the development.

•To agree, with regard to the targets for renewable energy, to establish national and regional targets and timetables within a year from the Kyiv Conference. Only then will the Kyiv Conference be a substantial step forward in this field.

Furthermore, in view of the continuing grave concerns about **nuclear installations**, both for the risks for major accidents and the ongoing increase of the legacy to future generation of nuclear waste, we pledge you to agree on a **phase out** of all these installations as soon as possible. We want to remind ministers that the most recent Eurobarometer on environmental issues, compiled autumn last year, shows that the public in the EU Member States, is more worried about nuclear power plants than about any other environmental threat!

We also propose the establishment of **international decommissioning support funds** for the highest risk reactors in Armenia and Russia as is done for EU Accession Countries.

In light of the on-going discussion on **EURATOM Treaty** we consider that in its current form it must come to an end. Nuclear safety issues should be dealt with either through the general treaties or in the new constitution. Any new, revised or consolidated European agreement relating to the nuclear energy sector should be solely about safeguarding health and safety of the public, protection of the environment and the physical security of nuclear materials.

6. Protect Europe's biodiversity from invasion of genetically modified organisms

In view of the uncertainty of the impacts of the use of **genetically modified organisms** in agricultural practices, we call upon to agree on a moratorium for the use of such organisms in agriculture in the region, and the distribution of products which involved GMO use, until there is undisputed evidence about lack of potential threats to the environment or effective measures to prevent such threats.

7. Strengthen the organisational setup for the Environment for Europe Process

The European ECO-Forum strongly supports the EfE process to continue on a pan-European level and to be the platform for regional and sub-regional initiatives, including several that are now running in parallel. We believe **annual Ministerial meetings** would create an ongoing momentum for improvement of the environment in Europe. We call upon Governments to continue with the upward line of the involvement of environmental citizens organizations in the Environment for Europe process. Whatever the organisational setup may be, we insist on the same transparency and inclusion (as observers or advisors) of environmental citizens organisations, in particular the European ECO-Forum, into all the bodies and sessions, formal and informal, relevant to the implementation of EfE decisions and preparations for future meetings.

8. Be welcome at the Roundtable with NGOs on Environmental Policy Integration

As part of the official programme of the Ministerial meeting, the second afternoon, a roundtable will take place initiated by the European ECO-Forum. The aim is to provide a space for discussions between Ministers and representatives of environmental citizens organisations on how to promote environmental policy integration in practise. We have sent you the programme earlier. We would appreciate very much to see your personal and active involvement in this event.

The aims of the Roundtable are:

- an informal and frank discussion between environmentalists and Ministers about the nature of the bottlenecks for integration of environmental requirements into relevant sectoral and horizontal policies;
- discuss good examples of environmental policies and their integration into sectors and horizontal policies in the UN/ECE region, look at their potential and discuss ways to promote these;
- discuss and clarify roles of governments and environmentalists and their complementarity.

The discussion will be divided on three parts:

- Let the market work for the environment
- Integration of Environmental Policies in the Agricultural Sector
- Overcoming institutional obstacles

Several of you have been asked, and agreed, to give introductory remarks on one of the three issues. We aim for a multi-interactive discussion, in which all Ministers and NGOs present will take part.

We count on you!

Sincerely yours,

Victoria Elias

Chairperson

on behalf of the ECO-Forum Coordination Board