

# REFORM OF THE “ENVIRONMENT FOR EUROPE” PROCESS

## REFORM PLAN

*(as adopted by CEP on 29 January 2009)*

### I. BACKGROUND

1. The Sixth Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe” (Belgrade, 10–12 October 2007) recognized the important value of the “Environment for Europe” (EfE) process as a unique pan-European forum for tackling environmental challenges and promoting broad horizontal environmental cooperation, and as a pillar of sustainable development in the UNECE region. The EfE process was considered to be an important framework for bilateral and multilateral cooperation in the region. The added value of the EfE process was recognized in its close links with other regional and subregional initiatives and processes, which help to integrate environmental and sectoral policies.

2. The ministers in Belgrade agreed that the EfE process, initiated in 1991, needed to be reformed. They committed themselves to continuing a focused and needs-based EfE process concentrated on results-based, action-oriented activities that improve the environment and advance sustainable development in the region and to actively seeking partnerships with civil society, including the private sector. The purpose of the reform was to strengthen its effectiveness and to ensure that it remained appropriate for, and fully aligned with, the growing needs of the UNECE region and the evolving political and economic landscape, as well as the environmental priorities of the region.

3. The Belgrade Ministerial Declaration stated that the reform should focus on, although may not be limited to, the following aspects:

- (a) The format, focus and priorities of the process and Ministerial Conferences;
- (b) Evaluating the performance and impact of the process;
- (c) Attracting the broader interest and more active engagement of all stakeholders, in particular the private sector;
- (d) Expanding the use of partnerships as vehicles for improving implementation;
- (e) Leveraging external contributions of expertise, manpower and resources;
- (f) Assessing ways and means to promote more effectively the UNECE region-wide dimension of environmental cooperation;
- (g) The full cost of the process and the effective allocation of available resources;
- (h) Future secretariat arrangements.

4. In order to address the above issues in depth and with due consideration, the ministers invited the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) to develop, in consultation with EfE partners a plan for EfE reform so that it could be endorsed at the political level by UNECE in spring 2009.

5. The ministers further decided that the next EfE Ministerial Conference would be organized on the basis of the agreed reform.

## **II. OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITIES OF THE “ENVIRONMENT FOR EUROPE” PROCESS**

6. The EfE process should continue to serve as a mechanism to: (a) improve the environment throughout the region, contributing to sustainable development which may in turn contribute to poverty eradication, to improving quality of life, and to a safer world; (b) enhance the implementation of strengthened national environmental policies; (c) support convergence of environmental policies and approaches, while recognizing the benefits from a diversity of approaches to achieve common goals, and the prioritisation of environmental objectives; (d) encourage the participation of civil society; (e) promote broad horizontal environmental cooperation.

7. The political priorities should be based on commitments already taken under the EfE process. These priorities may include:

- (a) Improvement of environmental governance, including strengthening environmental institutions and implementation of policy instruments;
- (b) Streamlining the implementation by Governments of commitments they have made to existing UNECE legally binding and legally non-binding instruments;
- (c) Enhancing efforts in environmental monitoring;
- (d) Ensuring implementation of the Environmental Performance Review programme;
- (e) Raising public awareness of environmental issues;
- (f) Promoting linkages between environmental policy, economic and social well-being and competitiveness.

8. Furthermore, thematic priorities of the EfE process would be identified in line with current needs, national circumstances and in respect to future emerging issues.

9. In the future, the EfE process will be based on general principles and agreements on the operational modalities, as described below.

## **III. GENERAL PRINCIPLES**

10. The ministers in Belgrade agreed that the EfE process should:

- (a) Keep its UNECE region-wide dimension and be open for all interested countries of the region;
- (b) Engage all stakeholders, including the private sector, to strengthen the work in partnership;

- (c) Maintain close links with other regional and subregional initiatives, and focus on specific needs that are not entirely addressed by other cooperative frameworks, instruments or processes in the region and its subregions;
- (d) Concentrate on results-based, action-oriented activities;
- (e) Be kept open to issues on which the process can provide added value;
- (f) Use delivery as a major criterion of its effectiveness. CEP should regularly consider and assess progress achieved under the process.

11. To complement the above principles, a consensus emerged from CEP in relation to the EfE process and the Conference:

- a) On the one hand, the EfE process-related principles are as follows:
  - (i) Broader engagement from the Governments to achieve long-term policy integration of environmental considerations into other sectors;
  - (ii) Stronger focus on implementation of the outcomes of the EfE Ministerial Conferences by relevant responsible actors in the period between Conferences;
  - (iii) Encouragement of and support to subregional activities including stronger involvement of relevant subregional structures in the implementation process, including RECs;
  - (iv) Enhanced cooperation between the regional and subregional partners in the region;
  - (v) Identification of ways to strengthen linkages between the activities under the EfE process and those of relevant international processes.
  - (vi) Enhancement of relevant Governments' implementation and compliance with their commitments under multilateral environmental agreements;
  - (vii) Utilization of the Environmental Performance Reviews as an important instrument for protection of the environment and promotion of sustainable development.
- b) On the other hand, the Conference-related principles are:
  - (i) The ministerial level of the Conferences should be maintained;
  - (ii) Specific mechanisms for attracting high-level participation, including those from the private sector, should be developed;
  - (iii) A limited number of themes, not more than two, to be identified in advance and addressed by each Conference;

- (iv) Within the identified themes there should be a focus on specific needs of the subregions, in order to contribute to better cooperation and more substantive and action-oriented outcomes of the Conference;
- (v) An effective communication strategy, including broad mass-media coverage, as appropriate, should be further developed, comprising, inter alia, special events for journalists, circulation of electronic newsletters and maintaining a dedicated website;
- (vi) The outcome documents, in all forms, should be focused and action-oriented;
- (vii) Carbon neutrality of the Conferences based on the voluntary contributions available.

#### **IV. THE “ENVIRONMENT FOR EUROPE” CONFERENCE**

##### **Preparatory process**

12. Materializing the above-mentioned principles calls for streamlining and improving the preparatory process for the Conferences. In this spirit, the following measures should be taken:

- (a) Not later than 18 months before the Conference the CEP at its regular session will decide on not more than two themes and discuss the outline of the agenda of the Conference. When deciding on the themes preliminary findings of available assessments and statistical reports on environment should be taken into consideration. A decision on the agenda of the Conference should be taken at the regular meeting of the CEP approximately 12 months prior to the Conference and further preparatory work would commence. Documents on substantial themes of the Conference should be released 6 weeks before the Conference;
- (b) CEP would act as the convening body for the preparatory process. To maintain the open nature of the preparatory process and the engagement of all stakeholders, representatives of major groups will be invited to participate in meetings of the CEP in preparation of the Conference, as appropriate, in accordance with the existing UN rules and procedures. Furthermore, CEP would consider and approve the official documents for submission to the Conference. Special sessions of the CEP could be scheduled, if needed, in the year prior to the Conference;
- (c) Particular efforts would be made to involve private-sector representatives in the preparatory process and the Conference;
- (d) To reduce the amount of documents produced for the Conference, only one official document per selected theme would be prepared by the UNECE or another EfE partner, in close cooperation with other EfE partners. The official substantive documentation would thus comprise the pan-European assessment and theme-specific reports;
- (e) Interested UNECE member States, EfE partners and other stakeholders could produce other documents featuring their activities and initiatives related to the EfE process, which would be circulated as information documents;

- (f) The preparatory process would be serviced by the UNECE secretariat;
- (g) For the preparatory process of the Conference and the Conference itself, the necessary extrabudgetary financial resources would have to continue to be provided to UNECE to supplement the United Nations core budget resources;
- (h) The host country should assume relevant financial commitments.

### **Format**

13. The periodicity, duration and the organization of discussions at the Conference should be as follows:

- (a) The Conferences should be held every four to five years, with each Conference lasting two-and-a-half to three days maximum;
- (b) Based on the previous experience, the Conference should start with a short opening event. The host country would be given an opportunity to organize events highlighting its special features in addition to the official Conference agenda;
- (c) The discussions at the Conference should be arranged in an interactive manner and combine various types of sessions, e.g. plenary sessions, roundtables and moderated panel discussions, with a limited number of main speakers from different stakeholders (e.g. UNECE member States, EfE partners and major groups). When possible, interactive sessions, such as roundtables, could be run in parallel;
- (d) The Conference could be structured around the following main clusters (all of them focusing on the agreed priorities):
  - (i) Plenary sessions for the presentation and discussion of the priority topics;
  - (ii) Sessions on ongoing cooperation and partnerships in the UNECE region and its subregions with different stakeholders, including the private sector;
  - (iii) A session of environmental NGOs and ministers in the roundtable format as an integral part of the conference;
  - (iv) A session of private sector representatives and ministers in the roundtable format as an integral part of the conference;
  - (v) Sessions dedicated to announcing new partnerships and initiatives by stakeholders;
  - (vi) A brief concluding session with the presentation (and adoption, if appropriate) of the main outcomes of the Conference;
- (e) To address issues relevant to the agenda of the Conference in more detail, side-events should be organized by interested UNECE member States, EfE partners and relevant stakeholders;

- (f) To attract the attention of the private sector, opportunities should be provided for the organization of promotional events such as poster exhibitions, trade fairs, roundtables and environmental award initiatives.

## **Outcomes**

- 14. Conference outcomes might include:
  - (a) A chairperson's summary;
  - (b) Statements, initiatives, agreements, pledges by interested ministers and stakeholders on specific subjects and/or for specific subregions;
  - (c) An agreed outcome of two pages on follow up and further actions strictly limited, in terms of scope, to the themes of the Conference;
  - (d) Policy tools, including strategies, action plans with time frames, guidelines, recommendations, best practices and lessons learned that are presented to the Conference by interested countries of the UNECE region and/or organizations taking the lead for these issues, and that were not negotiated within the preparatory process for the Conference;
  - (e) Assessment reports used in preparation of or presented to the Conference that are important for the implementation of the Conference's outcomes.

## **V. IMPLEMENTATION**

- 15. Particular efforts should be made by all relevant responsible actors to implement the outcomes of the EfE Ministerial Conferences.
- 16. Member States should regularly consider how to promote objectives and priorities of the EfE process and strengthen implementation of the outcomes of the EfE Conferences, including through national policies and relevant partnerships.
- 17. A mid-term review to be convened by the CEP to assess progress of the implementation of the outcomes of the EfE Conferences and provide renewed impetus to the process. The review should be based on existing information. The findings of the review should be taken into account in the preparatory process of the next conference.
- 18. Active participation by and input of all interested countries of the UNECE, and in particular of interested countries from subregions with specific needs in improving their environmental situation is crucial for the success of the activities under the EfE process.
- 19. The RECs network should continue to play a role in the preparatory process for the Conference and should be encouraged to play a greater role in the achievement of the overall EfE process' objectives and priorities.
- 20. Other EfE partners should continue to be actively involved in the preparatory process and implementation of the EfE process.
- 21. Countries and/or organizations taking the lead for one or more issues are encouraged to do so in ways that would contribute significantly to the EfE process' objectives and priorities.