

## Belgrade-2007

Last Updated Wednesday, 17 June 2009

The 6th Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe" (EfE) took place in Belgrade, Serbia, on 10-12 October 2007 under the slogan "Building Bridges to the Future". The Conference was attended by Ministers and Heads of Delegations from 51 countries of the UNECE region, as well as by international organizations, non-governmental organizations under the auspices of the European ECO Forum, and media.

### INTERNATIONAL ECOs STRATEGY MEETING

On 1-2 March 2007, in Brussels, the European ECO Forum had an International ECOs Strategy Meeting to prepare for the 6th Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe". The meeting was organised by the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) on behalf of the ECO Forum with the support of the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment of the Netherlands and Federal Public Service Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment of Belgium. The meeting discussed the draft ECO Forum Environment for Europe Implementation Report with the review of the implementation of EfE decisions. The Brussels Strategy Meeting also focused on the preparation for the NGO pre-conference on biodiversity and sustainable production and consumption in Belgrade, and the preparation of the special session (round-table) with Ministers in Belgrade on biodiversity. At the International ECOs Strategy Meeting, NGOs adopted the Brussels Declaration. Among other things, the Brussels Declaration calls to develop a Pan-European Regional Framework for Sustainable Production and Consumption and establish a multi-stakeholder task force to assess needs and possibilities in this area; to ensure implementation of Kyiv-2003 commitments on biodiversity; to strengthen the coordinating role of the EAP Task Force and to create a special program to support NGO activities on environmental policy strengthening.

### IMPLEMENTATION REPORT

In the run-up to Belgrade, the European ECO Forum developed and published the Implementation Report in English and Russian to assess the achievements of the EfE process and to raise awareness among all stakeholders on the history, challenges and key outcomes of the process.

### EUROPEAN ECO FORUM IN BELGRADE

In Belgrade, on 8 October 2007, the European ECO Forum held a Preparatory Conference to come up with ECOs' position on major challenges for the Ministerial Conference. On 9 October, the Pre-Conference on Biodiversity and its Link to Sustainable Production and Consumption Patterns was organized to draw attention to this relationship, to provide input into the Ministerial Conference discussions and to foster future cooperation.

On 9 October, the plenary of the European ECO Forum adopted the Belgrade Statement to emphasize NGO position on critical issues discussed by negotiators. It stressed that the EfE process is the only platform where nations within the EU, EECCA and SEE regions can meet to address environmental issues and policies of common value on high political level. However, the EfE process must become more effective. Decisions and initiatives of the EfE need to be transferred from the international level to national/regional and local levels, while adequate level of financing remains an important precondition to achieve progress. European ECO Forum called for the continuation of the open and transparent character of the EfE process. In their Belgrade Statement, NGOs stressed three issues for the EfE to make progress on: Sustainable Production and Consumption, Biodiversity, and Water.

The representatives of European ECO Forum delivered key note addresses and interventions to stress NGO position at the sessions of the Ministerial Conference:

- Ms. Victoria Elias, Chair of European ECO Forum CB: on the implementation report
- Mr. Fikret Jafarov, For Sustainable Development, Azerbaijan: on education for sustainable development
- Ms. Liliana Josan, Biotica Ecological Society, Moldova: on High Nature Value farming
- Mr. Nikolay Sobolev, Biodiversity Conservation Centre, Russia: on the Pan-European Ecological Network
- Ms. Vera Coelho, GEOTA, Portugal: Western European NGO intervention in the roundtable discussion
- Mr. Sreten Djordevic, Gradac, Serbia: SEE NGO intervention in the roundtable discussion
- Mr. Oleg Tsaruk, WWF Russia, Caucasus Office: EECCA NGO intervention in the roundtable discussion
- Mr. Rustam Murzakhanov, Uzbekistan: reflection from the youth
- Ms. Olga Ponizova, Eco-Accord, Russia: keynote address on the EECCA Strategy
- Mr. Oleg Pecheniuk, NGO "Independent ecological expertise", Kyrgyzstan: intervention on the EECCA Strategy
- Mr. Saydirasul Sanginov, Ecoforum of Uzbekistan: intervention on Central Asian perspectives
- Mr. Lavdosh Ferunaj, Organic Agriculture Association, Albania: intervention on SEE perspectives
- Mr. John Hontelez, EEB: keynote address on environmental competitiveness
- Mr. Gunnar Boye Olesen, International Network for Sustainable Energy (INFORSE): on finance
- Mr. Janis Brizga, Green liberty, Latvia: on sustainable consumption and production
- Mr. John Hontelez, EEB: on the Ministerial Declaration
- Ms. Anna Golubovska-Onisimova, Mama-86, Ukraine: on the future of the EfE process
- Ms. Alla Lytvynenko, Youth and Environment Europe: on the future of the EfE process on behalf of youth

In Belgrade, ECO Forum has published daily Newsletters to reflect on key issues of Belgrade agenda:

Newsletter 10 October 2007

Newsletter 11 October 2007

Newsletter 12 October 2007

In the Final Statement on 12 October in Belgrade, the European ECO Forum described its major concerns about the proposed EfE reform. ECO Forum noted that real political will was needed to follow up agreements made by the EfE process so far. All countries should show a real commitment, with regards to funding, exchange of practices, strengthening

national and regional institutions, etc. The European ECO Forum remains convinced that new initiatives and legally binding instruments to help in making progress should be introduced after Belgrade. European ECO Forum called for the monitoring of implementation targets through mid-term reports, assessments and the use of response indicators. ECO Forum also emphasized the need for stronger commitments from the countries participating in the process and warned against EfE transformation into a purely technical mechanism for capacity building. ECO Forum also stressed that NGOs as EfE partners should be fully involved in the reform of the EfE process.

#### BELGRADE-2007 OUTCOMES: THE DECISION TO REFORM

From the very beginning of the preparatory process, the conference was supposed to focus on assessment of implementation. However, for many participants, it was a disappointment to see that because of US and a few other countries position the whole conference was narrowed to one issue: whether the "Environment for Europe" process should continue.

The outcome of negotiations is that the EfE process should continue; however, it should be reformed. The UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) will have to develop, by the end of 2008, a plan for EfE reform so that it can be endorsed, at a political level, by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe at its next session in spring 2009. Such plan should be developed "in consultation with EfE partners". The ministers agreed that the UNECE region-wide dimension of the EfE process should be maintained, while delivery should be seen as a major criterion of the effectiveness of the EfE process.

The Ministerial Declaration says 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.

The next EfE Ministerial Conference will be organized on the basis of the agreed reform. There was an offer from Kazakhstan to host the next Conference in 2011. The Belgrade conference agreed that the OECD should continue providing EAP Task Force Secretariat, although some of these functions should be gradually transferred to new Regional Environmental Centers (new RECs) in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia, "as their capacities allow, starting with subregional, country and project-oriented tasks".

#### ISSUE SPECIFIC OUTCOMES

The fourth assessment report on the state of the environment, the Belgrade Assessment, was prepared by the European Environmental Agency with support of countries, the European Commission and UNECE, and in cooperation with NGOs. While noting some improvements, the report shows continuous degradation in the areas of air pollution, access to safe water and sanitation, biodiversity decline, energy consumption, improper management and disposal of hazardous chemicals, and others.

Another report, Policies for a Better Environment: Progress in EECCA, prepared under the leadership of EAP Task Force in cooperation with NGOs, stresses that more effective results-based action-oriented approach is needed, tailored to specific needs of EECCA subregions, groups of countries and individual countries, while there still is a need for an EECCA region-wide effort to exchange information and good practices in the areas of common interest and to facilitate dialogue with donors. The Ministerial Conference considered the report on implementation of UNECE multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs). It stressed that major challenges remain MEAs' ratification and implementation. South-Eastern European and Central Asian countries that are not Party to UNECE MEAs and protocols were specifically invited to continue acceptance and implementation. The conference also called for continuation of the Environmental Performance Review programme.

Despite attempts to get biodiversity out of Belgrade agenda, in the end, the conference was relatively positive on this issue. The Ministers reaffirmed the pan-European targets to halt the loss of biodiversity by 2010 as endorsed in Kyiv-2003. They reaffirmed the need to continue to cooperate with PEBLDS and to support the implementation of the Pan-European Ecological Network. The Biodiversity Roundtable, organized jointly by the European ECO Forum and the PEBLDS, became an important event to stress the link between biodiversity loss and unsustainable consumption and production patterns, to address strengthening the institutional framework and to call for pan-European cooperation both from governments and NGOs.

In Belgrade-2007, the Ministers of Education and Environment have adopted the Statement on Education for Sustainable Development. Their joint session urged countries to further strengthen efforts for the implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD at all levels. The Ministerial Conference welcomed the efforts of Central Asian countries in implementation of the Central Asian Initiative on Sustainable Development.

The Ministerial Conference supported the inclusion of the 10 year framework of programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production patterns within the working cycle of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (UN CSD), and the need to consider the development of a pan-European initiative within the Marrakesh process (but not within EfE).

The conference also noted several new projects and partnership initiatives, e.g. the EECCA-focused initiative on Strategic Environmental Assessment, the Belgrade Initiative on Enhancing Regional Cooperation of Interested South-

Eastern European Countries in the Field of Climate Change, the project on Financing Energy Efficiency Investments for Climate Change Mitigation, the mountain partnerships and other initiatives.

**THANK YOU FOR FINANCIAL SUPPORT!**

The European ECO Forum gratefully thanks the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, the FPS Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment, DG Environment of Belgium, Fundacion Biodiversidad (Spain) and the governments of Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden, as well as the UNECE Secretariat for their generous support to ECO Forum's preparation for and participation in the Belgrade Conference.