

MINISTERIAL DECLARATION

Introduction

1. We, the Ministers and Heads of delegation from 51 countries in the UNECE region and the Representative of the European Commission, met at Belgrade, Serbia, from 10 to 12 October 2007, in the sixth of a series of Ministerial Conferences held as part of the “Environment for Europe” (EfE) process.

2. We are committed to further environmental improvement in countries of the UNECE region. We recognize the important value of the EfE process as a unique Pan-European forum for tackling our environmental challenges, and promoting broad horizontal environmental cooperation, as a pillar of sustainable development in the region. The EfE process is a valuable response to our common intention to improve the environment throughout our region contributing to sustainable development which may in turn contribute to poverty eradication improving quality of life and safer world. It supports convergence of environmental policies and approaches, while recognising that we benefit from a diversity of approaches to achieve common goals and encourages the participation of civil society. Taking into account the diversity of developments in the UNECE region an approach based on specific needs and priorities should be taken.

We confirm our strong commitment to cooperation on environmental protection among countries in Europe, North America, Caucasus and Central Asia. We underline the important role of a more focused and needs-driven EfE process, reflecting the changing political and socio-economic landscape, which makes real progress on environmental protection and sustainable development in our region and its sub-regions, by, among other things, enhancing the implementation of national policies, bilateral and multilateral environmental agreements, and international cooperation. We also recognize the added value of EfE in its close links with other regional and subregional initiatives and processes that help to integrate environmental and sectoral policies.

3. We are committed to strive to achieve and maintain, together with our citizens and civil society, including the private sector, a healthy environment for present and future generations. We also reconfirm our commitment to promote sustainable development which is increasingly affected by globalization. In this regard, we will intensify our efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and to put in effect the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI) of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD). In doing so, we recognize the need to address environmental issues in an integrated manner and we will cooperate with other regions by providing leadership and sharing lessons learned and experience gained. Our regional contribution to the review cycle of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) is an example of these efforts.

4. We note the fourth assessment report on the state of the environment (*Belgrade Assessment*) prepared by the European Environment Agency (EEA) with the support of countries, the European Commission and UNECE, and in cooperation with other partners. While noting some improvements in the state of the environment at the pan-European level and in some subregions and countries, we are particularly concerned by the report’s findings that in countries covered by the report:

- (a) More than 100 million people in total still do not have access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation across the pan-European region;
- (b) Air pollution, mainly by fine particles, ground-level ozone, and nitrogen oxides, shortens average life expectancy by almost one year and affects the healthy development of children in the pan-European region;

- (c) Biodiversity decline and the loss of ecosystem services continue;
- (d) Consumption and production patterns are a growing concern: environmental impacts of waste and transport are growing in relation to economic development across the pan-European region;
- (e) Energy consumption and resulting greenhouse gas emissions have been increasing in the pan-European region, despite energy efficiency improvements and an increased use of renewable energy in certain areas;
- (f) Climate change impacts are projected to occur in many sectors of the economy and on natural resources;
- (g) Improper management and disposal of hazardous chemicals continue to have environmental impacts.

5. We also note the report *Policies for a Better Environment: Progress in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia* prepared by the Environmental Action Programme (EAP) Task Force through a broad, participatory multi-stakeholder process. It complements the *Belgrade Assessment* by focusing on the policy actions taken by the countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia. We note that the report documents examples of progress and shows that some countries are now achieving results because of sustained efforts made over several years.

However, we note that progress in addressing the prioritized needs of countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia, which were expressed at Kiev, has been uneven and many environmental problems remain. Therefore, a more effective results-based, action-oriented and differentiated approach is now needed, tailored to the specific needs of the Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia sub-regions, groups of countries and individual countries. At the same time, there is still a need for an Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia region-wide efforts to exchange information and good practices in areas of common interest, and to facilitate dialogue and cooperation with donors.

We note the recommendations of the report, in particular, on the need to have a clear vision, adopt a step-by-step approach to reform, to have a stronger focus on implementation and environmental management, work for improved institutional framework, strengthen environmental enforcement and compliance, build capacities at the local level, adopt a comprehensive approach to environmental financing, make strategic investment in skills, rely on stronger engagement of stakeholders and promote a more supportive international cooperation framework.

We believe that although there is no single roadmap for the countries of the region, following the recommendations may contribute to overcoming bottlenecks and accelerating progress. Strong political commitment from countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia and their partners in the region to tackling environmental issues is also needed to achieve sustainable progress.

6. We welcome the achievements in the UNECE environmental performance review (EPR) programme. We note the report on *Critical issues in implementation of environmental policies highlighted by the UNECE EPR programme* and invite countries reviewed by the UNECE EPR programme to implement recommendations of their national EPRs in accordance with their national needs and priorities. We understand that the implementation of these recommendations will require political support for resolving persistent environmental problems, strengthening their environmental institutions and governance, fostering integration of environmental policy into other sectors, as well as into their general development plans and poverty reduction strategies where appropriate, allocating sufficient financing and human resources for these actions, and moving towards effective implementation. We invite UNECE to report to our next Conference on the results of the second round of its EPRs.

7. We stress the need to further improve the indicator-based environmental assessments and reporting in the region. To this end, we, Governments of the Pan-European region endorse and call for

the adoption and full implementation of the UNECE recommendations on environmental indicators and indicator-based assessments, and the guidelines on enterprise monitoring for countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia. We invite UNECE to continue its efforts, in cooperation with EEA and other partners, to make monitoring an effective instrument in environmental policymaking in countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia and South-Eastern Europe. We call on EEA to consider preparing the fifth assessment report for our next EfE Ministerial Conference building on its partnerships and call upon those countries that will be covered by the report to fully participate in this work and to appropriately improve their monitoring efforts.

I. PROGRESS MADE SINCE KIEV

8. We acknowledge the report on the implementation of UNECE multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) and recognize the role the MEAs have played in addressing environmental problems in the region. However, we note with concern that major challenges remain with MEAs' ratification and implementation, and that the beneficial effects of these instruments are not being fully achieved. We recall the Kiev Guidelines for strengthening compliance with and implementation of MEAs in the UNECE region and urge further application of these by all Governments. We, the Ministers and Heads of delegation of Parties to the UNECE MEAs and protocols invite countries that are not Parties to those instruments to consider ratifying them. We, the Ministers and Heads of delegation of Parties to the UNECE MEAs and protocols also call for enhancing policies and measures to implement and comply with them, and encourage additional efforts to improve their effectiveness and coherence and integration into other sectors. We also recognize the importance of subregional conventions which address specific environmental issues. We acknowledge the need for further efforts to create synergies in the implementation of the subregional, regional and relevant applicable global MEAs and to share best experience gained. We invite MEA governing bodies to continue to explore opportunities for developing efficient mechanisms to aid implementation across the region, in particular support for capacity-building as well as for sharing their information and experience with regions outside UNECE.

9. We, the Ministers and Heads of delegation of Parties to the UNECE MEAs and protocols invite South-Eastern European and Central Asian countries that are not Party to these instruments to continue progress in acceptance and implementation of those instruments, and invite donors to provide financial and technical support to assist those countries in developing national implementation plans and other tools for implementation.

10. We note with appreciation the first assessment of the status of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters in the UNECE region, prepared under the auspices of the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes. We invite the Meeting of Parties to the Convention to prepare the second assessment of transboundary waters for our next EfE Ministerial Conference.

11. The improvement of education for sustainable development is an important goal for all governments as reflected in the JPOI of WSSD and we welcome the efforts of all Governments to meet the objectives of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.

12. We, the Ministers and Heads of delegation of Governments that have adopted the UNECE Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), welcome the Statement on ESD made by their Ministers of Education and Environment, and the outcome of their joint session, and urge countries to further strengthen efforts for the implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD at all levels by the end of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. We also stress the importance of the ESD process as a prerequisite and framework for capacity-building

initiatives and multistakeholder partnerships in the region.

13. The loss of biodiversity remains an environmental challenge which all Governments of the UNECE region are committed to continue addressing and we reaffirm our commitment to the WSSD goal to significantly reduce the rate of loss of biological diversity by 2010.

14. We, the Ministers and Heads of delegation of States participating in the process of the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy (PEBLDS), note that since 2003, regional, subregional, national, subnational and local activities have been ongoing in various subregions to address the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity and the WSSD commitments, and the pan-European targets to halt the loss of biodiversity endorsed in Kiev 2003. While recognizing these achievements we also recognise the challenge that remains to achieve the 2010 Kiev objective. We, the Ministers and Heads of delegation of States participating in the PEBLDS process, reconfirm our commitment to work towards the achievement of the targets in the Kiev Resolution on Biodiversity and will continue to cooperate with PEBLDS and to support the implementation of the Pan-European Ecological Network as an important means for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in Europe. We are also committed to strengthening the integration of biodiversity and ecosystem service into relevant horizontal and sectoral policies. We, the Ministers and Heads of delegation of States participating in the PEBLDS process, endorse the Belgrade Statement on Biodiversity.

II. BUILDING CAPACITY AND PARTNERSHIPS

15. We recognize the importance of capacity-building as a cross-cutting priority area for environmental protection and the promotion of sustainable development in the region.

16. We recognize the role that the EfE process has played in including environmental NGOs in its various processes contributing to its transparent nature. We stress the need to engage all of civil society, including the private sector, in our efforts as we go forward. We call upon all stakeholders to strengthen the work in partnership to deliver further progress.

17. We acknowledge that the speed of progress varies across policy areas and realize that implementation remains the main problem. We especially wish to draw the attention to the fact that the UNECE region is not making sufficient progress with regard to increasing access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation by 2015 as well as to a significant reduction of the rate of loss of biodiversity by 2010 .

Water, including both rural and urban water supply and sanitation as well as integrated water resources management, should be one of the priority areas for action. Recognising that cooperation between riparian states on transboundary watercourses contributes to sustainable water management and mutual benefits, we encourage these states to promote such cooperation. Efficient and sustainable water use, protection of water sources and water quality are crucial for human health and sustainable development. We recognize the possibility of achieving real improvements through further work in new and existing partnerships, such as the EU Water Initiative and USAID water resource programmes in the region.

18. We note with interest various initiatives submitted to our Conference aimed at building capacities of countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia in various areas of environmental policy and management, including the guiding principles of effective environmental permitting systems and the initiative on strategic environmental assessment.

19. We note the achievements in South-Eastern European countries and encourage their further efforts towards efficient implementation of environmental legislation, capacity building of national and local institutions, cross-sectoral and broad stakeholder cooperation and increase in environmental investments.

20. We recognise that our region needs to address the urgent challenge of climate change. We call on all parties to actively and constructively participate in the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Indonesia in December 2007 with a view to achieving a comprehensive post 2012 agreement (post-Kyoto agreement) that should include all major emitters which should be completed by the end of 2009. We note with interest the Belgrade Initiative *Enhancing regional cooperation of interested South-Eastern European countries in the field of climate change*, and their recognition of the need for the development of their Climate Change Framework Action Plan (CCFAP) to support implementation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), particularly its Nairobi Work Programme. The establishment of a sub-regional virtual climate change-related center in Belgrade would provide a means to develop and implement programmes and projects under the subregional CCFAPs designed for interested countries of South-Eastern Europe, as well as to strengthen international partnerships that foster exchanges of experience and expertise in the fields of climate research and observation, education, public awareness raising and capacity-building.

21. We recognize the need for further integrating policies on climate change, the environment, sustainable development and energy in the region. We call for further efforts to improve energy efficiency in order to meet environmental and sustainable energy objectives. We welcome the project on *Financing Energy Efficiency Investments for Climate Change Mitigation* and we will consider participating as public-sector investors in the energy efficiency investment fund, which is being created through the Energy Efficiency 21 Project. For increasing energy efficiency, we, the Ministers and Heads of delegation of state Parties to the Kyoto Protocol also recognise the importance of using flexibility mechanisms of the Kyoto Protocol.

22. We welcome the mountain partnerships within and between the Alps, the Carpathians, the South-Eastern European mountain region, the Caucasus and the mountain regions of Central Asia. We recognize the benefits from the existing legally binding instruments for the protection and sustainable development of the mountain regions like the Alpine and the Carpathian Convention, and welcome the initiative of South-Eastern European and Caucasian countries to develop such instruments. We encourage the international Global Mountain Partnership to promote and foster exchanges of experience and expertise with other mountain regions in the world.

23. We welcome the efforts of Central Asian countries in achieving the sustainable development goals on the multisectoral and long-term base and in implementation of the Central Asian Initiative on Sustainable Development and invite participation and support of international partners in its implementation, where appropriate in cooperation with the Central Asian Regional Environmental Centre (CAREC).

24. We call for development of national programmes, strategies and implementation plans, subregional and regional partnerships, involving stakeholders, in order to promote sustainable use of resources and sustainable consumption and production (SCP) patterns with regard to, where appropriate, the delinking of economic growth and environmental degradation through improving efficiency and sustainability in the use of resources and production processes and reducing resource degradation, pollution and waste, and to reduce negative environmental and social impacts. We support the inclusion of the 10 year framework of programmes on SCP patterns within the CSD working cycle, the implementation and follow-up of sustainable consumption and production, by

disseminating best practices and promoting the work by cleaner production centres and the Regional Environmental Centres (RECs), and the need to consider the development of a pan-European initiative within the Marrakech process involving partners other than the UNECE and, therefore, invite UNEP to explore this proposal as part of its SCP work.

25. We recognize the need to improve the management of chemicals in countries of the region and to take care of old legacies including when chemicals have become waste. We support the implementation of the SAICM (Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management) and partnerships to reduce environmental pollution from heavy metals and recognise the other on-going work in the United Nations on chemicals and heavy metals.

26. We emphasize that the goal of international competitiveness of domestic industry is not in contradiction with the objective of achieving sustainable development and of decoupling national economic growth from environmental pressures. Achieving this will, inter alia, require adequate design of environmental policy instruments to ensure cost-effectiveness and incentives for stimulating the development and diffusion of energy-efficient technologies as well as capitalizing on the potential to trade and market environment goods and services. We note that international cooperation in the design and implementation of environmental policies may play a very useful role both in promoting a high level of environmental protection and in levelling the playing field. We are committed to participate in the process on globalization and environment launched under UNEP at the 24th Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum in order to promote gains of globalization for the benefit of the environment.

27. We reconfirm our recognition of the important interlinkages between trade and environment policies and stress our commitment to strengthen the mutual supportiveness of these two policy areas and to minimize the potential for conflict between them as a contribution to the transition towards sustainable development.

28. We recognize that adequate funding is necessary for environmental improvement. Insufficient institutional capacity hinders the exploitation of emerging opportunities. We welcome a strong commitment of all involved countries in the UNECE region to support effective use of financial resources from all sources including domestic budgets and donor support, where available, to strengthen institutional capacities at national and local levels, and to promote the effective use of these resources for the preparation of feasible, cost-effective and action-oriented environment programmes, anchored in their general development plans, poverty reduction strategies and United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks, as appropriate. We welcome better cooperation of donors' activities and, as appropriate, synergies amongst institutions and programmes.

29. We commit to make optimal use of all available sources of environmental financing, including through innovating economic instruments and private sector engagement, such as payments for ecosystem services and the promotion of private financial investments for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, at the national and subnational levels, to support environmental improvement in countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia, and South-Eastern Europe.

30. Addressing common environmental problems offers opportunities for cooperation amongst governments diffusing tension and contributing to a greater cooperation and security. Environmental cooperation may contribute to peace-building processes and we note the work of the Environment and Security Initiative in participating countries, which should continue to aim at reducing environment-related security risks. We note the usefulness of independent environmental assessments in order to address and limit potential environmental damage.

31. We emphasize the importance of multistakeholder partnerships as a mechanism for advancing our objectives and implementing our commitments concerning the environment and sustainable development. To this end we welcome government and civil society commitments to partnerships at all levels. We call on UNECE, UNEP and other environmental organizations and MEAs of which we are members/parties to pursue action-oriented partnerships.

32. We reiterate our commitment to eliminate lead from petroleum and to take steps to significantly reduce the amount of sulphur in motor fuels, with roadmaps and appropriate timeline, in order to improve human health and the environment, including through participation in and support for, the UNEP Partnership for Clean Fuels and Vehicles.

III. THE WAY FORWARD

33. We consider the EfE process as an important framework for bilateral and multilateral cooperation in the UNECE region. The political dimension of the EfE process should be kept open for all interested countries of the UNECE region and to issues on which the process can provide added value. We are committed 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.

34. We will ensure that a future EfE process remains appropriate for and fully aligned with, the needs of the region and the evolving political and economic landscape as well as the environmental priorities of our region. We will maintain the UNECE region-wide dimension of the EfE process, promoting the exchange of experiences and best practices among participating countries.

35. We reaffirm our commitment to continue supporting the efforts of countries of the region to improve their environmental situation based on their specific needs, commitments and requests where those needs are not entirely addressed by other cooperative frameworks, instruments or processes in the region and its sub-regions.

36. We will actively seek partnerships with civil society, including the private sector, to reinforce our efforts and seek their experience and expertise in effecting change to improve environmental conditions in the region.

37. We agree to use delivery as a major criterion of the effectiveness of the EfE process. We reconfirm our commitment to following up on the various on-going processes, projects and initiatives launched under the EfE process and now implemented in the UNECE as well as other forums and institutions. Among our key areas of concern are:

(a) Strengthening environmental institutions and organizations, policy instruments and their implementation and capacity building;

(b) Continuing and strengthening environmental monitoring and assessment in the region;

(c) Transboundary and subregional issues in the UNECE region;

(d) New emerging issues of special relevance for the region not covered by other processes or instruments and subject to agreement by the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP).

38. We agree to undertake a reform of the EfE process in order to ensure that the process remains relevant and valuable, and to strengthen its effectiveness as a mechanism for improving environmental quality and the lives of people across the region. 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 vehicle 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.

In order to address these questions in depth and with due consideration, we invite the UNECE/CEP to develop by the end of 2008, in consultation with EfE partners, 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. Our next EfE Ministerial Conference will be organized on the basis of the agreed reform.

39. While awaiting the UNECE Commission's endorsement and our subsequent implementation of a meaningful reform of the EfE process, we:

- (a) Agree that the UNECE/CEP should regularly consider and assess progress achieved under the EfE process. We also invite UNECE to provide the secretariat for the preparation of the next EfE Conference;
- (b) Invite OECD to continue providing the EAP Task Force secretariat, but some of these functions should be gradually transferred to the RECs in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia, as their capacities allow, starting with sub-regional, country and project-oriented tasks;
- (c) Agree that the functions and activities of the Project Preparation Committee should be internalised within the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

40. We welcome the offer of the Government of Kazakhstan to host the next Conference in 2011.

41. We express our gratitude to the Government of Serbia for having hosted this Conference and we wish to thank it and the Serbian people for the warm hospitality that we have received.