

Oslo, 14.02.2008

Comments from the Norwegian Ministry of Environment concerning the reform of the Environment for Europe process.

We think that the main output from a Ministerial Conference has to be a Ministerial Declaration. Without a Ministerial Declaration we don't see how a Ministerial Conference could attract Ministers to participate. Ministers want to decide not just exchanging views.

The preparation for a Ministerial Conference including the negotiation of a Ministerial Declaration should be part of the responsibility of CEP. To establish a separate ad hoc Working Group of Senior Officials (WGSO) and an Executive committee (EXECOM) outside the CEP to deal with these questions seems unnecessary bureaucratic. A question for discussion is, however, when the host country should take over the responsibility for chairing the negotiation of the declaration.

We guess that neither of the delegates who took part in the negotiation process of the Belgrade Ministerial Declaration was satisfied with the progress made before the final meeting in Belgrade. There are, of course, many reasons for the lack of progress, and we also think much could be done to improve the process. However, one important reason was the lack of willingness to compromise. It seems that we need short time constraint before compromises can be obtained. Therefore, it might be a good idea to start the work with the declaration closer to the Ministerial Conference and by this save both time and resources.

The pile of documents to the Belgrade Conference was enormous, and probably most of the delegates were not able to read and digest more than a little part of it. In our view the production and distribution of these documents have not been a very effective use of time and resources, and to the next Ministerial Conference the aim should be to considerably reduce the number and pages of the documents.

Our last remark is on the Belgrade Conference itself. Our overall impression is that the programme for the Conference was too heavy for the time available and that it left too little time for discussion. We think that the solution is not to extend the time for the conference, but to have fewer issues on the agenda.