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COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

Ad Hoc Preparatory Working Group of Senior Officials
“Environment for Europe”

Fourth meeting
Geneva, 30–31 May 2007

REPORT OF THE FOURTH MEETING

Introduction

1. The fourth meeting of the Ad Hoc Preparatory Working Group of Senior Officials (WGSO) for the preparation of the Sixth Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe” (Belgrade Ministerial Conference), to be held in Belgrade from 10 to 12 October 2007, took place in Geneva on 30 and 31 May 2007¹. This report has been prepared by the secretariat in consultation with the Chairperson.

2. The meeting was attended by delegates from Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Moldova, Monaco, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, the United States and Uzbekistan. Representatives of the European Commission also attended.

¹ The originally scheduled meeting for 30 May–1 (a.m.) June 2007 started on 30 (a.m.) May and finalized its work by 31 (p.m.) May 2007.

3. Representatives from the following organizations and specialized agencies of the United Nations system participated: the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Health Organization's Regional Office for Europe (WHO/Europe) and the World Bank.

4. Representatives of the Energy Charter Secretariat, the European Environment Agency (EEA), the Secretariat of the Task Force for the Implementation of the Environmental Action Programme for Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) countries (EAP Task Force) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy (PEBLDS). and the Project Preparation Committee (PPC) also participated.

5. The following non-governmental organizations were represented: the Central and East European Working Group for the Enhancement of Biodiversity, the European ECO-Forum, the European Environmental Bureau, the European Chemical Industry Counsel, the NGO Network FORUM EfE07, the World Conservation Union, and Youth and Environment Europe.

6. Also represented were the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC-CEE), the Regional Environmental Centre for the Caucasus (REC-Caucasus), the Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia (CAREC), and the Regional Environmental Centre for the Russian Federation (REC-Russia).

7. The list of participants is available on the UNECE website (<http://www.unece.org/env/efe/wgso/Belgrade/WGSOMeetings.htm>).

8. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Miroslav Spasojevic (Serbia).

9. Following the decisions at the third meeting of the WGSO and the recommendations by the fifth meeting of the Executive Committee, the secretariat, in consultation with the Chairperson, and with input from the partners in the "Environment for Europe" process, had prepared or revised several documents to facilitate the WGSO work regarding the preparations for the Belgrade Ministerial Conference. All documents for the meeting are available on the UNECE website (<http://www.unece.org/env/efe/wgso/Belgrade/WGSOMeetings.htm>).

I. ADOPTION OF THE MEETING AGENDA

10. The Chair opened the meeting and the WGSO adopted the provisional agenda as set out in document ECE/CEP/AC.11/2007/1.

II. PROVISIONAL AGENDA FOR THE SIXTH MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE “ENVIRONMENT FOR EUROPE”

11. Following the request from the third meeting of the WGSO² and of the fourth meeting of the Executive Committee³, the secretariat in consultation with the Chairperson, prepared the draft provisional agenda for the Conference that was considered by the fifth meeting of the Committee⁴, and thereafter, with amendments reflecting the recommendations by the Committee, submitted to the fourth meeting of the WGSO (ECE/CEP/AC.11/2007/3). In addition, a paper with the tentative organization of work at the Conference⁵ was compiled on the basis of suggestions expressed by Governments, as well as of inputs by partners in the “Environment for Europe” process.

12. The proposed Category I documents that were revised by the authors taking into account the recommendations of the fifth meeting of the Executive Committee were submitted to the WGSO for further consideration and approval⁶. In addition, following the request by the Executive Committee, the list of proposed Category II documents⁷ was put before the meeting for approval and the drafts of these documents were made available to the WGSO for reference⁸.

13. The objectives of the WGSO under this agenda item and its sub-items (a) to (g) were to agree on the provisional agenda for the Conference, as well as on the proposed documents, in particular on the documents for action by Ministers, in order to ensure that their content and political messages warrant the attention of Ministers from the region.

(a) Review of the general outline of the provisional agenda

14. The UNECE secretariat presented the document with the provisional agenda for the Conference and the paper with the tentative organization of work at the Conference. In preparing the draft provisional agenda for the Conference, the secretariat had tried to develop a workable format for each session of the Conference while accommodating most of the proposed activities within the time allocated. The tentative paper on the organization of work was structured in accordance with the draft provisional agenda and included a tentative list of chairpersons and keynote speakers for each of the agenda items and sub-items on the basis of interest expressed by member States thus far.

² ECE/CEP/AC.11/2006/9.

³ ECE/CEP/AC.11/EXECOM/2006/3.

⁴ ECE/CEP/AC.11/EXECOM/2007/1.

⁵ Information Paper No.1/Rev.1.

⁶ See documents ECE/CEP/AC.11/2007/7–19 and CRP.3, and documents through the Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) – ECE/CEP/2007/4–9.

⁷ Since the month of March 2007, when the list was compiled, some changes occurred in titles of some documents, while the preparation of some other documents was cancelled altogether due to the unavailability of recourses. Therefore, the updated list of proposed Category II documents was provided in the Information Paper No. 2.

⁸ Working Papers WGSO-4/2007/1 – WGSO-4/2007-28 and those submitted through the CEP – CRP.1 and CRP.2.

15. The WGSO considered and approved the provisional agenda for the Conference with the following changes: (a) the title “Parallel Sessions” would be replaced with “Special Sessions”, while the titles of the sub-sessions on Education for Sustainable Development and on Biodiversity would reflect the participating parties of these processes; and (b) the first sub-session on Partnerships would have stronger focus on the environmental financing issues and give a more prominent role to the participating international financial institutions (IFIs). The secretariat was requested to finalize the document with the provisional agenda for the Conference in line with the above. The final document will be made available at the fifth meeting of the WGSO (Geneva, 30 August 2007).

16. The WGSO considered the paper with the tentative organization of work at the Conference and requested the secretariat to update it and prepare a document for the next meeting of the WGSO. The deadline of 1 July 2007 was set for expressions of interest in chairing a session or delivering a keynote address in accordance with the provisional agenda of the Conference. The secretariat will open the list of speakers for short interventions during the Conference as of 3 September 2007.

(b) Assessment and implementation

17. The representative of the EEA informed the WGSO about the status of preparations of the Belgrade Assessment. The draft of the assessment had been made available through the EEA CIRCA portal for comments. For the first time, the assessment had also been opened for comments by the public (some 2,500 comments had been received). The assessment would also be available in the Russian language. The executive summary of the assessment was under preparation and was made available on the CIRCA portal for comments. The EEA was planning to launch the assessment at the Conference jointly with the OECD and UNDP.

18. The Chair of the CEP informed the WGSO on the outcomes of the fourteenth session of the CEP (29 May 2007) relevant to the session on assessment and implementation. The CEP had considered the proposed documents of Categories I and II and approved them for submission to the Conference through the WGSO after revision of these documents in the light of the comments made by the CEP.

19. The WGSO agreed that the proposed documents of Categories I and II for this session be amended as required and submitted to the Conference.

(c) Education for sustainable development

20. The representative of Greece informed the WGSO about progress in preparing the session on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). The Bureau of the UNECE Steering Committee on ESD, at its fourth meeting (19 February 2007) had approved the final format of the session on ESD and finalized the draft Ministerial statement on ESD on the basis of comments received from Governments. The Bureau had also approved the organization of work for this session.

21. The draft Ministerial statement on ESD was made available to the WGSO, as well as the draft of the background document for this session. The collection of good practices in ESD prepared jointly with the United Nations Economic, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is being made available on a dedicated website (<http://www.unecce.org/env/esd/GoodPractices>), as well as on a CD-ROM and as a hard copy at the Conference.

22. The documents proposed for this session will be finalized and submitted to the Conference.

(d) Biodiversity

23. The representatives of PEBLDS and of the European ECO-Forum informed the WGSO on the preparations for the Round table on Biodiversity. The WGSO considered the proposed documents of Categories I and II for this session. Some members of the WGSO commented on the lack of a provision for the extension of the PEBLDS mandate after the Conference in the draft statement on Biodiversity. The PEBLDS suggested that such a provision be included in the paragraph dedicated to biodiversity in the draft Ministerial Declaration.

24. The documents proposed for this session will be finalized and submitted to the Conference.

(e) Capacity-building

25. The WGSO considered the format, the substantive content and the organization of work for this session. Representatives of the OECD/EAP Task Force, CAREC and REC-CEE informed the WGSO on the preparations of documents of Categories I and II for this session.

26. Some concerns were voiced regarding the description of the situation in the EECCA countries included in the summary of the Category I document on progress in implementing the EECCA Environmental Strategy. It was agreed to revise the summary to accommodate the comments received.

27. Regarding the Category I document on the implementation of the Central Asian Initiative (CAI), CAREC informed that a meeting of the Central Asian environment Ministers scheduled on 21 June would consider the document with the objective to endorse it. WGSO suggested that information on the envisaged financing of the identified priority areas be included in the document. In this regard, CAREC informed the WGSO that a similar approach to the one used in the implementation of the EECCA Environmental Strategy, namely through concluding partnerships, was envisaged for the implementation of the CAI.

28. The WGSO agreed that the proposed documents of Categories I and II for this session be amended as required, and submitted to the Conference.

(f) Partnerships

29. The WGSO considered the format, the substantive content and the organization of work for this session. Regarding the first sub-session on environmental policy and international competitiveness and finance, the WGSO requested the secretariat to amend the format of this sub-session to strengthen its focus on environmental finance and give a stronger role to the IFIs.

30. Concerning the Category I document on the protection and sustainable development of mountain regions, the representative of Kyrgyzstan commented on the lack of more detailed information and data on the Central Asian mountain regions, and proposed to provide relevant information, with assistance of CAREC to UNEP, for updating the document before submitting it to the Conference. The representative of France also proposed providing information related to the impact of climate change in the Alps for updating the document.

31. Regarding the Category I document on partnerships with the private sector, the representative of the United States informed the WGSO that the document was being prepared with support from the UNEP Regional Office for North America (RONA) and other partners, and would be submitted to the secretariat by 1 July 2007.

32. The representative of Sweden informed the WGSO about the preparations of the Category I and II documents on Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP). In considering the Category I document on SCP, the WGSO suggested amending it in order to reflect the consumers associations and the business sector in the recommendations.

33. The WGSO commented on the Category I document on the public-private partnership for reduced air pollution from vehicles through no-lead and low-sulphur fuels and requested that its authors revise the document to reflect the comments received, as well as to ensure consistency in its English and Russian versions.

34. The WGSO also commented on the Category I document on delivering energy efficiency prepared by the Energy Charter Secretariat. Several Governments questioned the need of a separate statement on energy efficiency while others pointed at contradictions between figures presented in the executive summary of the document and other energy related documents submitted for consideration of the WGSO. The WGSO requested the Energy Charter Secretariat to re-draft the executive summary document taking into account the comments received and submit it to the secretariat. The fifth meeting of the WGSO would consider the document and decide whether it would be submitted to the Conference as a Category I document.

35. The WGSO agreed that the proposed documents of Categories I and II for this session be amended as required, and submitted to the Conference. The proposed Category I document on energy efficiency prepared by the Energy Charter Secretariat and the Category I document on partnerships with the private sector to be prepared by the United States with support from RONA would be submitted to the next meeting of the WGSO for consideration and decision.

36. The WGSO agreed on the deadline of 1 July 2007 for submitting all revised Category I documents to the secretariat.

(g) Compilation of summaries

37. Following the decision by the WGSO and the recommendation by the Executive Committee, the two compilations of summaries of Category I and II documents⁹ prepared by the secretariat on the basis of inputs of authors, were submitted to the WGSO for consideration.

38. The WGSO commented on the overall compilation and suggested to regroup some of the summaries in the compilation to make it more user-friendly, as well as to amend some of the summaries in accordance with the earlier comments on the respective documents. In addition, the issue of financial implications and a possible cost-benefit analysis was brought up as a suggested addition to the recommendations of each summary. The WGSO agreed that it would not be possible to apply this approach to all recommendations given the general nature of some recommendations. The WGSO decided to leave the inclusion of such information to the discretion of the authors.

39. The WGSO set the deadline of 1 July 2007 for submission of the revised summaries, as relevant, to the secretariat in order to finalize the two compilations for the Conference.

**III. THE DRAFT MINISTERIAL DECLARATION AND THE FUTURE OF THE
“ENVIRONMENT FOR EUROPE” PROCESS**

40. The WGSO, at its second meeting, agreed to have a short Ministerial Declaration and a Chair’s Summary as the Conference’s major outcomes. The WGSO also agreed that the Declaration should focus on a limited number of issues to be identified in accordance with the Conference agenda. At its third meeting the WGSO approved the framework of the Ministerial Declaration and established an open-ended Drafting Group for preparing the Declaration. In accordance with the decisions by the first meeting of the Drafting Group and taking into account the additional comments received thereafter, as well as the comments received from this meeting, a first draft of the Ministerial Declaration will be prepared by the secretariat for the second meeting of the Drafting Group (2–3 July 2007).

41. The WGSO discussed the third part of the approved framework for the Declaration, namely the future of the “Environment for Europe” process, including the issue of the continuation of the process, its goals and future focus, and its institutional set-up and the cooperation with other processes.

⁹ ECE/CEP/AC.11/2007/4, ECE/CEP/AC.11/2007/4/Add.1 and ECE/CEP/AC.11/2007/5.

42. Regarding the future of the EAP Task Force, the representative of the Netherlands presented the draft note on “Transferring the EAP Task Force Secretariat responsibilities from OECD to the EECCA region: possible options” prepared by the Working Group established by the EAP Task Force. Three options for transferring the EAP Task Force secretariat functions from OECD to EECCA RECs were identified: (a) an immediate transfer of all responsibilities to EECCA RECs; (b) business as usual: OECD continues to serve as the EAP Task Force Secretariat; or (c) a step-by-step transfer, accompanied with further capacity-building and regular reviews to adjust the transition strategy. The representative from Moldova presented the consolidated view of the EECCA Governments involved in the preparation of the draft note and stressed that the transfer of functions was considered to be premature. Some members of the WGSO felt that a partial transfer of functions might be an appropriate solution.

43. The WGSO considered the various options for the future of the EAP Task Force and agreed that more work should be done on the possible options, with a major challenge being the provision of continuous financial support by the donor community to the OECD/EAP Task Force Secretariat. It was agreed that the Joint Bureau of the EAP Task Force and the PPC would hold a meeting on 4 July 2007, back-to-back to the second meeting of the Drafting Group, to work on a more concrete proposal for the future of the Task Force.

44. Concerning the future of the PPC, the representative of the PPC informed the WGSO on the proposed options that were discussed by the fifth joint meeting of the EAP Task Force and the PPC. It was stressed that the work of the PPC had entirely depended on the donors’ support and that a more stable institutional and financial basis is necessary for PPC work to continue sustainably. In order to achieve this, it was proposed that the PPC should be mainstreamed into the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) after Belgrade, subject to approval of EBRD management and Board of Directors. In addition to providing continued support to “Environment for Europe” countries for the promotion of environmental investments, this could also strengthen environmental profile of EBRD as well as its capacity to promote environmental sustainability across its operations.

45. Regarding the future of the “Environment for Europe” process, the WGSO decided that the process’ future framework, focus and set-up should be outlined in a document for discussion by Ministers at the Conference. The secretariat was requested to develop a first draft of this document for consideration by the second meeting of the Drafting Group. The WGSO agreed on a deadline of 15 June 2007 for submitting contributions on the future of the process to the secretariat.

IV. SIDE EVENTS AT THE CONFERENCE

46. The host country presented a paper with the list of proposed side events for the Conference¹⁰ and stressed that the biggest challenge was to accommodate all side events within

¹⁰ Information Paper No.3/Rev.1.

the desired time frame, one of the problems being the availability of rooms. The host country would continue its work on the organization of side events, including the allocation of time for the side events, in a balanced and efficient manner. The list of side events, including the venue and time, will be posted on the host country website.

V. THE STATUS OF PREPARATIONS BY THE HOST COUNTRY

47. The Chair informed the meeting that a new Government had recently been established following the elections in Serbia. The Chair also informed the meeting that the preparations for the Conference were progressing well.

48. One issue of concern was the availability of appropriate accommodation facilities in Belgrade, due to the recent closing for renovation of some hotels. The host country was looking into different possibilities to find efficient solutions for this problem.

49. The UNECE secretariat informed the WGSO about its mission to Belgrade to coordinate preparatory activities mostly related to logistics and communication with the host country secretariat. During the mission, the secretariat met with representatives of the Ministry of Environment, including the new Minister of Environmental Protection, who expressed his commitment and support for the Conference. Furthermore, meetings took place with the city authorities, the UNDP office in Belgrade and the SAVA Centre. The secretariat expressed both its appreciation for the well-organized and efficient preparations thus far, and the excellent facilities in the SAVA Centre.

50. The WGSO raised the issue of carbon-neutrality of the Conference. The secretariat would examine options to ensure the carbon-neutrality of the Conference and would report back to the fifth meeting of the WGSO.

VI. THE “ENVIRONMENT FOR EUROPE” COMMUNICATION PLAN

51. The secretariat informed the WGSO on the progress in implementing communication activities in accordance with the communication plan for the Belgrade Conference (ECE/CEP/AC.11/2006/13), which had been adopted at the third meeting of the WGSO. The first electronic newsletter on the “Environment for Europe” process and the preparations for the Belgrade Ministerial Conference had been issued and widely distributed through email and the website. The second issue is planned for June 2007.

52. The WGSO took note of the information by the secretariat regarding preparation of a poster for the Conference, postcards, and information materials for children and for journalists. The issue of dissemination of these informational materials to the Conference participants and to a wider public was brought up. The WGSO was encouraged to provide the secretariat with more ideas on this subject.

53. The secretariat informed the meeting that a direct link to the Conference had been made available on the home page of the UNECE website to facilitate access to the relevant information

and documents. The WGSO took note of the information from the Swiss delegation regarding its contribution to the visibility of the process by designing a special website dedicated to the “Environment for Europe” process.

54. The host country and the UNECE are considering the proposal from the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) to provide its reporting and information dissemination services for the coverage of the Belgrade Conference.

VII. RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE CONFERENCE AND THE PREPARATORY PROCESS

55. Following the request by the WGSO and its Executive Committee to the UNECE secretariat and the host country to keep budget figures up to date as much as possible so that they reflect the incoming contributions, the UNECE and the host country secretariats circulated updated papers on the status of their respective budgets¹¹.

(a) Resource requirements to support participation in the Conference

56. The secretariat presented the paper on the revised provisional estimates of core resource requirements for the preparatory process and the Conference itself. The secretariat expressed its gratitude to the member States that had made contributions, namely Austria, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. While most of the core resources have been met, additional funds are needed to cover the participation in the Conference of the representatives from countries eligible for financial support, as well as of NGO representatives who are part of the national delegation from these countries, provided funds are available.

57. The representative of Finland informed the meeting that a contribution had been made to the UNECE earlier in 2007 and she would enquire the whereabouts of this contribution.

(b) Resource requirements at the national level to organize the Conference

58. The Chair, on behalf of Serbia, informed the meeting about the status of the host country budget. He specially thanked the donors (Sweden, the Netherlands and Norway) for their assistance in the host country’s preparations for the Conference. As there is still a financial gap, further contributions from donors would be much appreciated.

59. The representative of Hungary informed the WGSO of its intention to provide 15,000 Euros to the host country secretariat to support the preparatory activities, as well as to contribute to the preparation of some of the substantive activities for the Conference, such as the joint session on Education for Sustainable Development, the Round table on Biodiversity, and the Environment and Security Initiative.

¹¹ Information paper No. 4 and Information Paper No.5.

60. The representative of the European ECO-Forum thanked the countries that provided financial support to enable NGOs' participation in the Conference, namely the Governments of Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden.

VIII. SCHEDULE OF THE UPCOMING MEETINGS OF THE WORKING GROUP OF SENIOR OFFICIALS, THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE AND THE DRAFTING GROUP

61. The WGSO decided to hold an additional half-day meeting back-to-back to the third meeting of the Drafting Group on 30 (a.m.) August 2007 in order to consider pending issues related to the organization of the Conference and its provisional agenda, as well as to the future of the "Environment for Europe" process. The exact dates of the sixth meeting of the WGSO in Belgrade before the Conference would be confirmed at the fifth meeting of the WGSO, on the account of the progress achieved in drafting the Ministerial Declaration.

62. Following the decision by the first meeting of the Drafting Group for preparing the Ministerial Declaration, the second and third meetings of the Drafting Group are scheduled to be held in Geneva on 2 and 3 July 2007 and on 30 and 31 August 2007, respectively.

IX. OTHER BUSINESS

63. The Chair informed the WGSO that the information related to the participation in the Conference, including the Registration Form for the Conference, as well as about other relevant information is available on the UNECE and the host country websites. He reminded the WGSO that the deadline for the registration is 1 July 2007, and encouraged starting the registration procedure as soon as possible. In addition, the Chair brought to the attention of the WGSO the issue of the provision of offices for official delegations (e.g. delegation offices or meeting rooms) during the Conference, as requested. Interested delegations should get in touch with the host country secretariat as soon as possible in order to agree on relevant logistical, technical and other arrangements. The contact details are available on the website.

X. CLOSURE OF THE MEETING

64. The Chair thanked the WGSO for the constructive discussion and closed the meeting.
