



SIXTH MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE
“ENVIRONMENT FOR EUROPE”

BELGRADE, SERBIA
10-12 October 2007

**BIODIVERSITY FOR EUROPE NOW! – EUROPEAN ECO-FORUM’S
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PAN-EUROPEAN COOPERATION**

submitted by

the European ECO-Forum

through the Ad Hoc Working Group of Senior Officials

BACKGROUND DOCUMENT



UNITED NATIONS

Biodiversity for Europe now!

European ECO Forum's recommendations for Pan-European cooperation

Introduction

1. The Environment for Europe process has been an important platform for policy development in the Pan-European region since its launch in 1991. With the endorsement of the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy (PEBLDS) at the Third Ministerial Conference in 1995, biodiversity has become a major issue of the process, underpinning the importance of biodiversity and ecosystems in sustaining social and economic processes. The participating Pan-European states also committed to achieving nine targets for halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010, which are set out in the Kyiv Resolution on Biodiversity endorsed in 2003. This unique Pan-European cooperation and the strong commitments of the Kyiv outcomes created a great momentum around the 2010 target to halt biodiversity loss.

2. However, three years before the 2010 deadline it is time to evaluate the past cooperation and identify the strengths and weaknesses of the process. This is also justified by the preliminary findings of the EEA report, which show that biodiversity in the Pan-European region is likely to decline further. Therefore, urgent additional actions are required and strengthening PEBLDS is a necessary means to achieve the 2010 target.

Pan-European cooperation in the past – what was it enough for?

3. Without any doubt there is a niche for Pan-European cooperation in the field of biodiversity. Even though the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) provides a platform for biodiversity policy forming on global level, it is not able to sufficiently accommodate the differing regional priorities, and it does not provide appropriate support for the implementation either. This very well justified the development of PEBLDS, which was meant to be the “regional arm of implementation to the CBD”. Since 1995 there is still no other forum existing on Pan-European level for policy development and implementation. PEBLDS continues to be a unique platform, and so as the whole Environment for Europe process, from which it derived.

4. It also has to be acknowledged that during the twelve years fairly strong commitments have been developed under PEBLDS, which have had the potential to unite and focus Pan-European efforts. After the first action plan and the following work programmes, the actions were further sharpened by the Kyiv Resolution on Biodiversity, which set out nine targets in seven fields.

5. Implementing the Kyiv Resolution and the other PEBLDS objectives requires sufficient political will both on the level of the relevant ministry and the government as a whole. While the insufficient political weight of ministries of environment within the government is a general impediment of this in all countries, the low profile of PEBLDS

did not help building necessary political support in many countries, even in the ministries of environment either.

6. This is partly due to the fact that PEBLDS does not mean legally binding commitments opposite to the CBD or other conventions. Thus CBD receives political priority over PEBLDS in many cases and the limited capacities do not enable taking effective measures also in other fields. This is true, even if PEBLDS is intended to be the regional arm of CBD and all commitments are related (in)directly to the articles, programmes of work, the Strategic Plan of the CBD or other decisions of the Conference of the Parties (COPs).

7. The profile of PEBLDS is even lower in EU Member States, where the non-compliance with the legally binding EU obligations can not only damage the image of the country, but it can also have serious financial-legal consequences. Thus EU commitments receive most of the political attention and absorb huge capacities of implementation.

8. EU biodiversity policies, developed in line with the commitments of the European Community being a Party to the CBD, identified the EU's own strategic way for implementing the Convention on EU level. The Communication on the 2010 target published by the European Commission in May 2006 also identified national obligations for the MSs. As a consequence Pan-European level cooperation is overshadowed by EU policies and programmes, even if they do not amount to the implementation of the agreed priorities of the whole region, i.e. the PEBLDS and the Kyiv Resolution.

9. The lack of financial mechanism for PEBLDS is undoubtedly an important weakness of the process, which could be partly due to the low profile of PEBLDS as a policy forum and the lack of publicity of the ongoing activities in the countries. At the same time financing international activities under PEBLDS is only prioritised in a few donor countries.

10. In addition to the PEBLDS work programmes and the Environment for Europe conferences, PEBLDS has also developed a unique way of preparation for CBD COP meetings. The Biodiversity for Europe conferences are organised a few weeks before COPs, which result in joint non-binding positions reflecting the regional peculiarities and priorities. Even though the EU has its own institutionalised preparation mechanism, for non-EU countries this is the only opportunity for regional consultations. Acknowledging the need for such regional preparation, it should be also realised that this regional consultation mechanism has not substantially supported the follow up and implementation of the endorsed COP decisions on Pan-European level.

11. Considering the implementation of the Kyiv targets, there are still severe shortcomings in implementation on Pan-European level because of the above reasons. However, some clear successes can be also reported, when the commitment of some countries and organisations, as well as funds provided by committed donor countries have been crucial. These fields of Pan-European progress include the Pan-European Ecological Network, the identification of High Nature Value farmlands, the involvement of private sector into financing, communication and partnerships, and the development of biodiversity indicators.

12. The top-down approach has been a main characteristic of cooperation in the past, which however could not encourage appropriate involvement of sub-national and national level stakeholders in most cases. It can be asserted that most national and sub-national NGOs have been ignorant and not interested in the policy process of PEBLDS due to this top-down approach and its legally non-binding nature. Considering that NGOs are important drivers of progress in environmental field through their active involvement, their capacities offered and watchdog role of the processes, this staying away of NGOs from PEBLDS has also contributed to losing momentum in the last years.

13. The policy environment has also significantly changed since 1995. With the last rounds of enlargement the EU now covers almost half of the Pan-European countries, where EU biodiversity policies apply. At the same time vast amount of decisions have been formulated and unanimously endorsed at the CBD COPs. While biodiversity policies have been developing on global, Pan-European and EU level, they have not been able to adequately steer and harmonise national efforts that have added value on regional level, and most important shortcomings still lie in turning decisions into actions. This has been recognised at last CBD COPs and the reform process of PEBLDS, where participating states have called for more emphasis on implementation.

14. Lessons from the past and the changing environment thus call for a different way of cooperation in the future, where NGOs could and should have an important role to play, and give impetus for effective implementation on the ground.

ECO Forum's recommendations for the future

15. If we expect Pan-European biodiversity policies to turn into national and sub-national implementation while providing the added value of regional cooperation, then both the current focus and operation of the process have to be adapted. Pan-European cooperation needs to focus on implementation of CBD within a Pan-European framework, in line with regional priorities and national needs. This would mean that PEBLDS finally becomes what it was originally meant to be: the regional arm of implementation of CBD. This direction was also agreed upon by the PEBLDS Council, on its last meeting on 29-30 March, 2007 in Geneva.

16. At the same time the role of PEBLDS to develop common Pan-European positions for CBD COPs can be maintained and streamlined in the future through Pan-European preparatory meetings right before COPs. Continuing this role could be particularly important for EECCA countries and the region would not lose its Pan-European identity at CBD meetings. It would also build their capacities for promoting Pan-European regional interests at COPs.

17. Developing a bottom-up process, however, should not be realised on the expense of a strategic approach, which must be able to harmonise the various initiatives under overarching targets and build synergies among the issues on regional level. A common understanding of the root causes of biodiversity loss and the necessary changes in economic and social process needs to be developed, which can provide solid basis for effective joint actions in accordance with sustainability requirements.

18. The Strategic Plan of the CBD and the harmonised targets of the rolling work programme of PEBLDS¹ could determine the strategic targets, whereas the Kyiv targets have largely identified the thematic areas. This, however, does not necessarily exclude other issues where CBD decisions are made at COP meetings, if those decisions support the strategic targets of PEBLDS.

19. At the same time regular needs assessments of the participating countries should guide the process and ensure that meeting global commitments and national needs can give an added Pan-European value.

20. Hence PEBLDS would filtrate global CBD decisions through the Pan-European priorities and support their implementation, while reflecting upon national needs and realities. These three aspects should determine the agenda of Biodiversity for Europe conferences organised after COP meetings, as well as the fields of PEBLDS activities between COPs. Therefore they should be also the clear criteria for organising regional and sub-regional conferences and workshops on prioritised issues, developing common projects, arranging expert exchanges and sharing available resources, like existing methodologies and policy documents.

21. Sharing best practices and knowledge would be equally important from the East to the West and from the West to the East. Good solutions in the various different fields exist in the whole region, and PEBLDS can collect and share this expertise on regional level.

22. May the need arise, the PEBLDS Joint Secretariat might be requested to create an actively and continuously developing regional clearing house mechanism, which can serve the sharing of knowledge tailored to the Pan-European needs better than the CBD CHM. Such a regional mechanism should not only restrict to a passive internet based mechanism, but it should be actively used for supporting all activities within PEBLDS. The Joint Secretariat and PEBLDS members could use such a regional clearing house mechanism for gathering and feeding best practices and expertise into workshops, conferences and projects, as well as for collecting knowledge and experiences gained through PEBLDS activities and making available to other members through the mechanism.

23. By creating a platform for sharing best practices, knowledge and resources and for initiating joint activities, PEBLDS would help bringing together the demand and supply in terms of knowledge and funding. Namely an implementation oriented approach that

1 Goal 1: The PEBLDS is fulfilling its role as facilitator for European biodiversity issues, in close collaboration with other strategic frameworks, in particular the European Commission biodiversity strategy, as well as facilitating CBD implementation in the pan European region.

Goal 2: Participants in the PEBLDS process have improved financial, human, scientific, technical, and technological capacity to implement the PEBLDS and the CBD.

Goal 3: National biodiversity strategies and action plans and the integration of biodiversity and landscape concerns into relevant sectors serve as an effective framework for the implementation of the objectives of the PEBLDS and the CBD.

Goal 4: There is a better understanding of the importance of biodiversity, landscape, PEBLDS and of the CBD in the pan European region, and this has led to broader engagement across society in implementation.

reflects upon the needs of countries would also better support raising funds for joint activities. Bringing together donor and recipient countries at conferences and workshops, which can be the starting point for future projects and actions, could at the same time give opportunities for fundraising as well. The appropriate design of conferences and workshops in terms of agenda and working methods could also facilitate kicking off joint activities and raising funds for them. In addition to the fundraising opportunities of PEBLDS meetings, regular funding priorities of donor countries shall be also harmonised with the targets and ongoing activities of PEBLDS. However, in order to use international financial resources most effectively and transparently, coordination on Pan-European level is required. Besides international funding, each government shall also provide sufficient financial support for national activities under PEBLDS, which is absolutely crucial for implementation.

24. Such future cooperation in biodiversity would open up new possibilities for the involvement of NGOs and other stakeholders, which are generally much more interested in actions, not only in policy development. By this PEBLDS has the potential to become a multi-stakeholder platform which brings about changes on the ground for the conservation of the natural heritage of the Pan-European region and for sustaining ecosystem services for human livelihood.