



Environment for Europe



Sixth Ministerial Conference



Belgrade, Serbia, 10-12 October 2007

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe - Government of Serbia

EfE Newsletter No. 1

“Environment for Europe”: Building Bridges to the Future

A little bit of history

Since its beginnings in 1991 with the first Ministerial Conference in Dobris Castle near Prague, the “Environment for Europe” process has developed into a unique partnership of the UNECE member states, organizations of the United Nations system represented in the region, other intergovernmental organizations, regional environment centres, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders.

The basic objectives of the process to harmonize environmental policies, improve environmental quality and

“Environment for Europe”: From Dobris to Belgrade

- ♦ *First Ministerial Conference, 21-23 June 1991, Dobris Castle, Czech Republic*
- ♦ *Second Ministerial Conference, 28-30 April 1993, Lucerne, Switzerland*
- ♦ *Third Ministerial Conference, 23-25 October 1995, Sofia, Bulgaria*
- ♦ *Fourth Ministerial Conference, 23-25 June 1998, Aarhus, Denmark*
- ♦ *Fifth Ministerial Conference, 21-23 May 2003, Kiev, Ukraine*
- ♦ *Sixth Ministerial Conference, 10-12 October 2007, Belgrade, Serbia*

ensure peace, stability and sustainable development throughout the continent are as relevant today as they were 16 years ago. There is an urgent need

for further integration of environmental considerations into all sectoral policies, so that economic growth follows principles of sustainable development.

The Sixth Ministerial Conference - The Belgrade Conference

The Sixth Ministerial Conference ‘Environment for Europe’, to be held at the Sava Centre in Belgrade on 10-12 October 2007, will be a major political event bringing together key environmental players of the UNECE region. Approximately 1,500 participants are expected to attend, including delegates from UNECE member States and the European Commission, representatives of the United Nations organizations, other intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, financial institutions and the private sector.

The Conference will evaluate progress in implementing agreed commitments and will examine difficulties in implementation and their root causes. It will cover subregional issues and assess the need for additional measures in a number of areas such as



environmental policy and international competitiveness, partnerships, sustainable production and consumption patterns and energy efficiency. It will also consider the future institutional set-up and substantive priorities of the “Environment for Europe” process. While the Ministerial Conferences remain an important political platform for helping all UNECE member countries to further develop their cooperation in the

fields of environment and sustainable development, in recent years the focus of the work has shifted from the new EU member countries to the countries of South-Eastern Europe (SEE) and Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA). As the various subregions of UNECE are increasingly facing different challenges, the Belgrade Conference may also consider how the differences between subregions can be reflected in the future process.

Major outcomes

The major outcomes of the Conference are expected to be a Ministerial Declaration and a chair’s summary of the deliberations and conclusions. It was decided that the Ministerial Declaration will focus on a limited number of issues of strategic importance for the future of the “Environment for Europe” process and on any follow-up initiatives that the region’s environment ministers may decide upon.

Preparations for the Belgrade Conference

The Working Group of Senior Officials (WGSO) and its Executive Committee (EXECOM), established in 2005 to oversee the Conference preparations, have respectively met three times (WGSO) and five times (EXECOM) since October 2005. The discussions



have focused on the agenda of the Conference, the documentation, the major outcomes (including the Ministerial Declaration) and other organizational issues.

Tangible progress has occurred in the following areas:

Conference agenda

The most recent meeting of the EXECOM (on 14-15 February 2007) reviewed and discussed the first draft agenda. The Conference is expected to have the following sessions: Evaluation and Implementation, Capacity-building (including subregional perspectives of EECCA and SEE), Partnerships and the Way Forward. Environment and education ministers will hold a special joint session to discuss the implementation of the UNECE Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development. A roundtable of NGOs and ministers will review the implementation of the Kiev Resolution on Biodiversity.

The secretariat will further refine the draft agenda to reflect comments and suggestions by EXECOM members. The fourth meeting of the WGSO will consider the revised draft and provide further guidance for finalizing the agenda.

Documents

Documents for the Conference fall into three categories: Category I documents are for possible actions by ministers; Category II documents are informational and analytical documents of direct relevance to the Conference agenda; and Category III documents are other documents related to the agenda. Documents in the first two categories

are submitted through the WGSO to the Conference, while Category III documents are submitted directly to the Conference.

The Category I documents include two flagship publications. *Europe's Environment: The Fourth Assessment* (the Belgrade report), prepared by the European Environment Agency, will present the current status of the environment in Europe, key trends and major achievements and challenges. *Progress in Environmental Management in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and*

Central Asia (working title), prepared by the OCED EAP Task Force, will assess progress in achieving the objectives of the EECCA Environment Strategy.

The fifth meeting of the EXECOM reviewed the drafts of the proposed Category I documents and provided comments for their further revision. The fourth meeting of the WGSO will review the final drafts of the Category I documents with a view to approving them. The list and drafts of Category II documents will be considered at the upcoming meeting of the WGSO.

Major Achievements of the "Environment for Europe" Process

- ✦ *The state of Europe's environment is regularly assessed by the European Environment Agency in cooperation with partners, providing a sound basis for policy decisions.*
- ✦ *The process has been an important impetus and a political forum for the development and adoption of regional multilateral environmental agreements. Examples include the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (1998) and the adoption and signature of three Protocols to UNECE Conventions in 2003.*
- ✦ *The year 1993 saw the introduction of the Environmental Performance Review Programme for countries in transition, which has since been successfully implemented in 22 countries.*
- ✦ *The process has resulted in the adoption of soft law instruments like the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy and, more recently, the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development.*
- ✦ *The process has led to the adoption of the Environment Strategy for Countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia and the implementation of capacity-building activities to improve their mechanisms for collecting and processing environmental data and help them make these data available to the public.*
- ✦ *Several mechanisms have been put in place to help countries develop and implement their national environmental policies and to facilitate coordination between international financial institutions and donors wanting to invest in environmental protection in Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EAP Task Force, Project Preparation Committee).*
- ✦ *The process has brought strengthened partnerships and closer cooperation among all stakeholders (international organizations, non-governmental organizations, local authorities, business, trade unions, etc.).*

Ministerial Declaration

The open-ended Drafting Group for the Ministerial Declaration held its first meeting on 15-16 February 2007, back-to-back with the fifth meeting of the EXECOM. The meeting reviewed the proposed possible elements for the draft Declaration and provided comments and guidance. Further comments should be sent to the secretariat by 15 March 2007. The secretariat will prepare the first draft text for consideration at the second meeting of the Drafting Group.

Budget and communication activities

The preparatory process and the Conference depend on financial contributions from UNECE member countries. As of February 2007, the UNECE secretariat had received contributions from Austria, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Switzerland and the United Kingdom as well as interest of possible contribution expressed by the European

Commission and Finland. The Netherlands, Norway and Sweden had made contributions to the host country budget.

The UNECE secretariat will work with the host country and the partners to promote the Conference. Planned publicity products include an information kit, leaflets, posters, postcards, e-newsletters, video clips on the Conference, press releases and press briefings, and the like.

Representatives of the media should submit an accreditation form directly to the Belgrade secretariat by 1 September 2007. The host country will provide further information on media registration at <http://www.efebelgrade2007.org/>.

Side events and exhibitions

The Conference will provide opportunities to organize environment-related side events and exhibitions. Organizers of side events and exhibitions should contact the host country secretariat directly regarding the practical arrangements. The registration form for side events and exhibitions will be available at <http://www.efebelgrade2007.org/>.

UPCOMING MEETINGS IN 2007

- Fourth meeting of the WGSO, 30 May - 1 June, Geneva
- Sixth meeting of the EXECOM, 1 June, Geneva
- Second meeting of the Drafting Group for preparing the Ministerial Declaration, 2-3 July, Geneva
- Third meeting of the Drafting Group for preparing the Ministerial Declaration, 30-31 August, Geneva
- Fifth meeting of the WGSO (with finalization of the Ministerial Declaration, as required), Seventh meeting of the EXECOM (if necessary), 6-8 October, Belgrade
- Sixth Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe", 10-12 October, Belgrade

Next steps in the preparatory process

MAJOR DEADLINES

1 March 2007

- Submission to the UNECE secretariat of the final draft(s) of Category I document(s) if to be translated and reproduced by the Conference Services Division of the UN Office at Geneva
- Submission to the UNECE secretariat of the final title(s), nature and authors of Category II document(s)
- Submission to the UNECE secretariat of one-page summaries of Category I document(s) by filling in the circulated template

1 May 2007

- Submission to the UNECE secretariat of the final draft(s) of Category I document(s) in three languages (English, Russian and French) for posting on the official website of the WGSO and reproduction by the UN Office at Geneva
- Submission to the UNECE secretariat of one-page summaries of Category II document(s) by filling in the circulated template
- Submission to the UNECE secretariat of the final (to the extent possible) draft(s) of Category II document(s)
- Submission to the host country of the registration form for side events

1 July 2007

- Submission to the UNECE secretariat of completed Conference registration forms

1 September 2007

- Submission to the host country of media registrations

14 September 2007

- Translation, reproduction and delivery of sufficient numbers of copies of Category II documents to Belgrade and submission of electronic versions to the UNECE secretariat

The Sava Centre



The Sava Centre, where the Sixth Ministerial Conference will be held on 10-12 October 2007, is an international, cultural and conference centre located a five-minute drive from the city centre and 15 minutes from Belgrade Airport. Part of an architectural complex that also includes the Belgrade-Intercontinental Hotel, the Sava Centre has a main hall with 4,000 seats, 15 conference halls, an expert team of organizers of conference and cultural programmes, an exhibition space, up-to-date audio-visual equipment, a press centre and a large number of modernly equipped offices.

More information on the "Environment for Europe" process is available at <http://www.unece.org/env/efe/welcome.html>. More information on the Conference preparations is available at <http://www.unece.org/env/efe/wgso/Belgrade/welcome.html> and <http://www.efebelgrade2007.org/>. For inquiries, please contact efe@unece.org.