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Redner/innen	PSt Michael Müller ¹
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

I was very interested to read the report produced by the European Environment Agency (EEA), whose main findings have been presented here. Overall, the conclusion which we have to draw is that the progress being achieved in the countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) is sobering, to say the least. I cannot comment on the report in detail here; I would simply like to mention what I see as the most serious deficits:

- water management and water supply generally,
- the energy sector and climate protection,
- rural exodus and depopulation, and problems in urban areas.

In short, we have little cause to celebrate the success of our process.

Opinions about the reasons for this are likely to diverge widely, according to one's standpoint and perspective. In my view, however, one thing is absolutely clear: in many countries in this region, environmental policy still does not have the status that it deserves. Of course it is difficult for countries which only reappeared on the map around 15 years ago to give environmental protection the importance that the "Environment for Europe" process aims to achieve. State-building has undoubtedly absorbed most of the energies and resources, with little left over for environmental measures. And the economic recovery of entire regions is not a process which can take place overnight. As a German, I know what I am talking about. Nonetheless, we must be clear that economic recovery is impossible unless environmental protection is also a focus of government action. This is not yet happening to an adequate extent, as the examples contained in the report show.

The "Environment for Europe" process has been in place since 1991 - in other words, for just over 16 years.

It cannot replace measures by the countries themselves; it can only support them. A healthier environment is not "delivered" by third parties; it must be achieved through efforts of one's own. That is a lesson that can be learned from developments in Western Europe. There too, improvements in environmental quality had to be fought for, step by step, and the battle has still not been won - the difficult negotiations on measures to avert climate catastrophe illustrate this only too clearly.

¹ The present document is a scanned copy of a statement received on 10 October 2007 during the Sixth Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe" (Belgrade, 10-12 October 2007). The document has not been formally processed by the UNECE.

Progress has been very slow, and that is why some people have now concluded that the process has failed and should be shelved. I certainly do not share this view, but I am pleased that the continuation of the process is being discussed as a key issue at this conference.

The report on the state of the environment holds up a mirror for all of us. We must now learn lessons from what we see. If this were the only task of this conference, that alone would be worth all the effort. I hope that in future too, reports on the state of the environment will be produced from a pan-European perspective and that we will have regular opportunities to discuss the progress that they measure.

My conclusions are as follows: we need stronger regionalisation of the process, closer monitoring of the process by ECE bodies, simplification of the procedures (indicators are a useful aid here), and improvements in the planning mechanisms in the regions concerned in order to achieve greater transparency as to whether progress has been made or not.