

Keynote address to the 6th Ministerial Conference 'Environment for Europe'
By Victoria Elias,
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Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my honour and privilege to address the Conference on behalf the European ECO-Forum, the umbrella coalition of environmental NGOs in UNECE region.

The EfE process is a unique regional platform to cooperate on environmental issues and policies of common value.

ECO-Forum warmly welcomes the Belgrade Assessment report and the inclusive consultative process of its development, where we actively participated..

It provides baseline data to assess efficiency of the whole process and identify significant environmental problems of the region, decide on issues in focus, develop policies and allocate resources.

We stress the need to continue the work on the Pan-European State of the Environment reports in the EfE framework.

In the course of preparation of the Belgrade Conference, ECO-Forum made a review of the EFE process for 16 years and published 'Environment for Europe Implementation report'. We would like to draw your attention to this document, which is being disseminated here.

The key conclusion is that this process should continue since it has a great value for the whole UNECE region.

However, the efficiency of the process needs improvement. Let me mention among others such obstacles as:

- Insufficient political will to achieve specific results;
- Often, lack of mechanisms for implementation at national level;
- Insufficient and financing of a number of programmes,

So far, the EfE process has failed to make sustainable production and consumption an officially recognised "dominant objective" for the region.

The majority of interim biodiversity conservation targets set at the Kiev Ministerial Conference have not been reached. There are serious doubts that the target of 2010 may be reached without substantial additional efforts.

Targets for energy efficiency and development of renewable energy have not been set.

Reflecting on the Belgrade Assessment we call upon this Conference to agree upon the following priority initiatives:

Sustainable Production and Consumption is a cross-cutting issue and needs to be at the centre of the EFE. We call for the development of a multi-stakeholder Pan-European Task Force on Sustainable Production and Consumption. Such a Task Force can help avoid duplication and ensure effective coordination across the region.

Biodiversity should remain as an integral part of the EfE. The PEBLDS shall continue and be kept high on the EfE agenda because biodiversity is the basis for economic and social development and well-being. The next EfE conference in 2011 shall in particular focus on the progress made towards the 2010 target and take stock of the achievements.

Water should be one of the main issues on the EfE agenda. Integrated water resources management should form an essential part of environmental policy. National water policies should take due account of the issue of water and sanitation and also be considered in the climate change perspective. The EfE process should take the lead in supporting national governments in developing economic instruments of integrated water resources management including payments for ecosystem services. It should also facilitate international cooperation, building partnerships and assisting in transboundary water problems solution.

Decisions and initiatives of the EfE need to be transferred from the international level to national and local levels. On the national level, we call for inter-ministerial panels with the participation of NGOs to implement EfE commitments. Stronger communication of results to a broad audience will facilitate national EfE implementation mechanisms and improve the influence of environmental authorities.

On the EfE level, we call for the monitoring of implementatin of targets in between the EfE conferences through mid-term reports, assessments, the use of response indicators, etc.

Adequate level of financing of all elements of the EfE process remains an important precondition. Without that it will be impossible to achieve progress.

The European ECO-Forum calls for the continuation of the open and transparent character of the EfE process, with full involvement of environmental citizens organisations, at all levels.

And finally, we would like to thank the governments of Belgium, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, as well as the UNECE Secretariat and Fundacion Biodiversidad (Spain), for their financial support to our preparations and participation in the Belgrade Conference. We also express our gratitude to the Government of Serbia for the warm hospitality.