

Item 2. Assessment and Implementation

Wednesday, 10 October 2007

10.00 a.m. -11.30 a.m.

Key note address by Portugal on behalf of the EU¹

Mr. Chairman, I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union.

Mr. Chairman, the EU would like to start by expressing its gratitude to the Government and people of Serbia for their warm hospitality and for organizing this Conference in the attractive city of Belgrade.

The EU is very much looking forward to a successful outcome, which will certainly reflect the fruitful negotiations of the past months and also the debates of the coming days.

Mr. Chairman, this Conference will also be important in fostering discussions and taking decisions concerning the future of this process. Coordination and streamlining of European Environmental processes and improvement of the Pan-European environment governance structures will be important elements in determining our future steps.

The 6th Ministerial Conference of the "Environment for Europe" process is happening five years after the Johannesburg Summit and offers us a unique opportunity to address a number of key issues in an integrated manner - issues that are deeply interrelated and where the involvement of all major actors is essential. They are at the centre of ensuring long-term sustainable development, in particular for fostering progress in poverty eradication and for achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Mr. Chairman, as you know, the Environment for Europe Process has been an important lever in the efforts to improve the environmental situation in the Central and Eastern European countries. The UNECE region has certainly made progress in the pursuit of environment protection. However, the rapid pace of change and some implementation deficits require the stepping up of

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efforts to address a variety of environmental pressures, from transboundary air and water pollution to chemicals control, land degradation, unsustainable consumption and production patterns and energy inefficiency. With a strengthened commitment to environmental protection from all countries involved in this process, the UNECE region will surely walk on a more sustainable path.

We would like to express our gratitude to the European Environment Agency for the preparation of the Forth Assessment Report on the State of Environment and we note with appreciation the Report "Policies for a Better Environment: Progress in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia" prepared by the EAP Task Force. The findings of both reports show the progress that has been made in the region, but also the areas where work must be further pursued and therefore deserve the uttermost attention in our deliberations for future work,

The EU would like to underline the importance of speeding up the ratification and implementation of multilateral environmental agreements and national environmental policies throughout the pan-European region. The Kiev Guidelines for Strengthening Compliance with and Implementation of MEA's in the ECE region are therefore a useful tool. Delivering results should be the priority goal of this Process. To this end, there is a clear need for a more effective implementation, but also for a more effective monitoring and follow-up of earlier commitments, as well as of a regular assessment of the state of the pan-European environment, using as much as possible the environmental performance reviews.

We would like to stress the importance we attach to education for sustainable development. Education is a prerequisite for promoting behavioural change and therefore plays a key role in facilitating the changes that are part of sustainable development. We strongly welcome the joint session on education for sustainable development during this Conference that will provide the opportunity to discuss the main concerns relating to the implementation of ESD, with a focus on the achievements, challenges and future steps for reaching the six objectives of the UNECE Strategy.

Another issue to be discussed during this Conference will be biodiversity which is today on the top of the EU political environmental agenda. The EU is deeply concerned by the continuing decline in biodiversity and ecosystem services and we strongly support the Belgrade Statement on biodiversity, which reaffirms our commitment to halt the loss of biodiversity by the year 2010, to the implementation of the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy where it can provide real added value to international and EU efforts aimed at achieving the 2010 targets.

Mr. Chairman, we will have the opportunity to discuss in the last session of this Conference the future of the Environment for Europe Process. Although not wishing to anticipate that discussion, we would like to stress already two main ideas:

- Progress in environmental protection in the UNECE region will rely on our joint ability to ensure a focussed and needs driven process after Belgrade;
- We should make the Environment for Europe Process into a valuable instrument for the future attainment of the principles and objectives of sustainable development - economic prosperity, social equity and environmental protection.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.