

6th Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe"

Belgrade, 10-12 October 2007

Item 7. The future of the process

Friday, 12 October 2007

09:30-12.30

**Key note address by Prof. Francisco Nunes Correia, Portuguese Minister
of Environment, Spatial Planning and Regional Development
on behalf of the European Union¹**

Dear Chairman, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the honour and the pleasure to take the floor on behalf of the European Union.

The Belgrade Conference is a decisive moment for the future of the Environment for Europe process. The Conference gives us the opportunity to reflect on the achievements of the process - without ignoring the challenges that remain - and agree on what we envisage the future to be.

Through the years the Environment for Europe Process has provided an important and valuable multilateral political framework for improving environmental policies and conditions, as well as for bridging gaps and building bridges between countries by strengthening cooperation in the UNECE region, thus contributing to peace and stability.

¹ The present document is a scanned copy of a statement received on 12 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.

The Environment for Europe Process plays a unique role as a Pan-European forum and as a multi-stakeholder platform for a broad horizontal environmental cooperation. It has also been instrumental to advance the objectives of sustainable development in the Pan European region, by enhancing the implementation of and the compliance with multilateral environmental agreements, broadening horizontal environmental cooperation, providing political guidance towards environmental protection and capacity building, creating bilateral and multilateral partnerships and promoting information exchanges.

The EU has been proud to play a key part in this process and remains committed to supporting further reform and environmental improvements in the region.

The Ministerial Declaration which we, the Ministers and Heads of Delegation, will adopt here today clearly expresses our joint commitment to continue the Environment for Europe Process. The EU came to this Conference with one main target to ensure the continuation of a reformed Environment for Europe Process in a way that takes better into account the new political, economic and social landscape in the region and a reinforced commitment from all countries to improving environmental conditions and quality of life in the region.

We cannot ignore the changes that have occurred in the last decades, in particular since we last met in Kiev, in 2003; nor should the EfE process ignore them. Since then the European Union has enlarged to 27 members, accession and pre-accession processes have been established between the EU and South-Eastern European states as well as special bilateral partnerships and mechanisms with Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia.

Mr. Chairman, we believe that the political dimension of the Environment for Europe Process should be kept open for all interested countries of the UNECE region and to all major environmental and sustainable development issues for which the process can provide an added value and that are not entirely addressed by existing instruments, processes or programmes.

The definition of future priorities and an approach based on specific needs should also reflect different realities and development patterns of countries and sub-regions.

There have been clear examples of where the EfE process has added value and supported reform, and we heard about those in the past few days. However, many of our goals and ambitions, defined at the Kiev Conference, regarding environmental reform in the region are yet to be fully met. We should focus our efforts in overcoming these gaps. The wider ratification and the implementation of existing UNECE Multilateral Environmental Agreements as well as continuing the elaboration and implementation of the recommendations of the Environmental Performance Reviews must be further pursued with robust monitoring of progress.

Promoting an increased use of renewable energy to change the current unsustainable energy production and consumption patterns and contribute to overall greenhouse gas emissions reductions; strengthening action at all levels on sound management and disposal of hazardous chemicals to reduce negative environmental impacts are only some of the crucial challenges we still face and need to address in a more adequate manner.

Focussing on strict priorities and enhancing a more effective use of resources is also essential for a successful future. Promoting a better coordination of donors' activities and building stronger synergies between programmes, strategies and other tools aimed at providing assistance to the Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia countries and, as appropriate, to the South Eastern European countries, are of extreme importance. The EfE process also needs to be responsive to the changing patterns of donors' support and cooperation in the region, including the opportunities to include environmental issues in national economic/development plans and poverty reduction strategies.

But the challenges facing the Environment for Europe process are not only of a thematic nature. The reform also requires institutional changes so that the process is continued in a leaner and more effective manner.

Again, the Ministerial Declaration we are going to adopt today provides clear political guidance on the way forward and marks the beginning of this joint effort of reforming and reshaping.

Today the Declaration assigns to us, the Environment Ministers and Heads of Delegation in the UNECE region, an important task and responsibility in following up the reform of this Process and bringing the reform rapidly to a successful conclusion.

The EU remains committed to the future EfE process. We, therefore, invite our partners in the region to embrace this opportunity for change and reform.

Mr. Chairman, we would like to congratulate you and your collaborators for all your efforts in the preparation for this Conference and for leading us to a successful outcome. Allow me also to thank, through you, the Government and people of Serbia for their warm hospitality.