

Intervention

By John Hontelez, EEB, ECO-Forum,
at the Session on Ministerial Declaration, Belgrade, 12 October 2007

The European ECO-Forum has agreed this morning on its final statement to this conference. It summaries our relief that attempts to terminate the EfE were not successful, it expresses our commitment to the reform process, as well as our disappointments on the absence of necessary new initiatives and the absence of the strengthening of the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy.

The Environment for Europe Ministerial meetings, in our view, are to fulfil four functions:

- the launch of initiatives that bring concrete improvements in the environment in the pan-European region.
- Taking stock of the results of earlier initiatives
- Political debate and agreement about global environmental issues, to stimulate pan-European joint initiatives at the global level
- Networking, promotion of best practice, partnership building, discussions between stakeholders and officials.

This conference was a success for this networking function. It also triggered very important information about the state of the environment in the pan-european region, and in particular also about the institutional progress and constraints in the eastern parts of Europe. Many reports were discussed about the implementation of earlier EfE and other relevant initiatives. But what was missing was the determination to step up efforts, to go to the next level of commitment, prioritisation, environmental policy integration.

So we are not satisfied with the outcome.

This does not mean we lose confidence in EfE. There is no alternative. We have to make this process more effective, more European, more practical and at the same time more political. We as European Ecoforum, bringing together all the environmental organisations in the larger Europe that have interest in this process, will contribute in a constructive manner to the reform process, as well as to the EfE processes that are on their way, such as the Aarhus Convention, the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy, the work related to the Eastern part of the region, on Education for Sustainable Development. We hope that governments are as much willing as we are, so that we can make a real difference for the environment and for the people in this region.