



Statement by State Secretary Åsa-Britt Karlsson, Swedish Ministry of the Environment, 12 October 2007, Belgrade

Future of the Environment for Europe Process

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First I would like to thank the Government of Serbia for excellent organisation of this important Conference in the beautiful city of Belgrade.

Mr. Chairman, the Environment for Europe process has been a success so far. It has been important in the efforts to improve the environmental situation in the Central and Eastern European countries. It has been a driving force in setting up national administrations and legislation. It has built a system of environmental review which helps countries identify problems and possibilities and gives incentives for action. It has been a forum for mutual understanding and constructive debate between different regions, seen by the EECCA strategy at the last conference where real commitment was shown.

Environment for Europe has increased the engagement from the EU, the OECD and other international organizations for the environmental problems of the region.

Furthermore the Environment for Europe process has been the starting point for new environmental processes and conventions such as the Århus convention and the Education for Sustainable Development process , in which my government has played a leading role.

Mr. Chairman, Sweden is committed to the EfE process as it is the major instrument for strengthening environmental capacity throughout the EECCA region. We also believe that several important activities have been started that have to continue until implementation is assured and stable. Implementation and enforcement of what has already been agreed, including Conventions and the EECCA strategy should be core in the coming years. At the same time it is important to cover new issues especially those related to sustainable consumption and production and to find the best means of handling these issues. Co-operation with civil society should be improved.

Mr. Chairman, in conclusion:

Follow-up of earlier commitments and implementation is key in the future of the process. The process should also have a possibility to address emerging issues, when Environment for Europe is appropriate for that. Sector integration and dialogue should be called for. Climate change, waste, chemicals, security and health issues as well as the environmental effects of rapid urbanisation need to be tackled. The same applies to trans-boundary issues mainly regarding water resources. A change in behaviour that could lead to more sustainable consumption and production patterns in the region is needed.

The future of the process should be needs-driven and focussed on results. We need a process that can enable a prioritization of environmental issues in national and international policies; strengthen environmental legislation and administration; identify new needs; facilitate the ratification, compliance and enforcement of MEA's; improve coordination between donors, organizations and countries; better use of different bodies for different tasks, including REC's while still basing the work on the strong and competent existing secretariats as the OECD EAP Task Force.

I see this process more as an aid for our national and regional environmental objectives than as an end in itself. It is very useful for achieving clear political results. As long as it does, it is clearly worthwhile.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.