

First preliminary views on the reform of the process “Environment for Europe” Position of the Czech Republic

a) The format, focus and priorities of the process and Ministerial Conferences

The process “Environment for Europe” (EfE process) is a unique pan-European forum for a broad horizontal environmental cooperation, sharing information and lessons learnt and for providing guidance towards environmental protection as a pillar of sustainable development in the UNECE region. It has still a positive impact on developing dialogue among the EU, the countries of South Eastern Europe (SEE countries), countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA countries) and countries in North America. Indeed, the dialogue on a high political level is essential to strengthen bilateral and multilateral cooperation in implementation of environmental policies and support of sustainable development throughout the UNECE region. It contributes to strengthening stability and thus bridges gaps between countries. The dialogue may also improve environmental decision-making and raise public awareness of environmental issues.

The future EfE process should remain an essential partnership involving the member States within the UNECE region, NGOs, the private sector and other relevant partners. This unique multi-stakeholder partnership has been permanently strengthening joint efforts leading to convergence of environmental standards and further support environmental democracy in the region. The UN ECE region assembling major donor countries should share, in line with the principle of common but differentiated responsibility, positive outputs of the EfE process with other regions and interested countries. Transfer of methods and tools for better implementation of environmental policies, in particular to developing countries, could enhance a convergence of environmental standards at the regional as well as at the global level and thus secure conditions for peace and security.

The Czech Republic is also fully aware of the necessity to focus the EfE process on a limited number of environmental issues. The duplication of work by both global and regional environmental agreements and other multilateral organizations should be avoided. It seems preferable to focus future work on streamlining the implementation of the existing UNECE legally binding and soft instruments. Particular emphasis should be placed on accelerating the ratification and implementation of existing multilateral environmental agreements. Concrete steps should be taken to:

- increase effectiveness of capacity building
- develop adequate mechanisms addressing cases of non-compliance and
- further promote development of research activities.
- promote synergies among agreements (promoting synergies or seeking these synergies with other relevant regional and global conventions and international organizations would allow more intensive exchange of experience gained and best lessons learnt).

Additionally, the contributions to the Programme of Environmental Performance Reviews should be promoted. The tailor-made recommendations of the EPR programme significantly contribute to tackle environmental disparities in countries with economies in transition. The high priority should be also given to further efforts in environmental monitoring and reporting that is the prerequisite for all levels of decision-making.

New instruments can only be developed in the line of agreed needs and priorities of the EfE process, followed by the evaluation of existing instruments and the provision of capacities and funds that ensure proper implementation of the new ones. Addressing cross-cutting issues and close links of the EfE process with other ministerial processes would promote integration of environmental and sectoral policies.

The EfE process should be kept open for all new emerging pan – European issues for which it can provide an added value and where any duplicity of work is to be avoided. It should also be more responsive to sub-regional and national needs, taking into account the diversity, in particular, in EECCA countries.

The reform of the EfE process should also take into account the ongoing deliberations on improvement of the International Environmental Governance (IEG). As an integral part of the UNECE activities the reform should contribute to the system wide coherence within the UN.

The preparatory process leading up to a ministerial conference should be rationalized. Stronger involvement of the Committee on Environmental Policy into the preparatory part may avoid any future overlaps concerning the preparation of ministerial conferences. The Committee, as the intergovernmental body, would be given a new mandate for coordinating preparation of ministerial conferences as well as for providing mid – term assessments of progress in the implementation. Following that a five-year Programme of Work could be developed, containing clearly defined themes to be discussed within the next ministerial conference. The host country should be actively involved in preparatory meeting, e.g chairing the EfE segment within the CEP meetings under the support of the UNECE secretariat. Duration of the preparatory process should not exceed two years, reasonable time for that seems to be one and half year. To enhance attractiveness of ministerial conferences, the agenda for the ministerial conference would have to be more focused. The way of the organization of the conference could also raise both the engagement of Ministers and other EfE partners such as the private sector and business in the EfE process. Apart from the plenary session where the suggested themes are presented, we would propose interactive discussions to be held. The aim of discussions would be an exchange of views on the suggested themes to identify practical options for making decisions. The chair would provide a summary of the contributions, including recommendations of steps to be taken, reported in the plenary. The outcomes of the conference would be both negotiated and non-negotiated. The periodicity of every four to five years for conferences could be kept.

b) Evaluating the performance and impact of the process

Despite some doubts concerning the future, there is much evidence that the process has become an effective tool in promoting environmental issues. Through the process important legal and soft instruments were developed and adopted (e.g, Protocol on Persistent Organic Pollutants, Protocol on Heavy Metals, Aarhus Convention, Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment, Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers, EECCA Environment Strategy, etc.). The process supported the introduction of the Environmental Performance Reviews (EPRs) and set up a tradition of pan – European assessment report on state of the environment. It established an EAP Task Force and Project Preparation Committee. Multilateral environmental agreements developed under the EfE process have positively influenced the EU legislation and still considerably complement environmental legal frameworks of many countries in the UNECE region.

In 1991, as the EfE process was initiated by Josef Vavroušek, the Czechoslovak Environment Minister, Central – Eastern European region had been going through the transition at all levels. The Environmental Action Programme for Central and Eastern Europe launched by the EfE helped to raise environmental standards. It provided us with guidance for launching national development plans and financial strategies that enabled to harmonize the national legislation with the *acquis communautaire* and was thus the first step for joining the EU and the OECD.

As a EU member the Czech Republic still sees a potential for further development of the cooperation in the framework of the EfE process. Being traditionally considered a bridge between the West and the East the Czech Republic can share its rich experience from the transition period and at the same time be an active actor within the EU. The exchange of experience and best lessons learnt stimulates the dialogue within the EfE process, which could result in more concrete and more focused actions and the positive results of that are widely shown.

Preparatory process and organization of conferences are demanding tasks and no doubt there is a need for further improvement. Rules of procedures of all bodies involved into the preparation may facilitate adoption of documents provided for a conference. More flexibility of the UNECE secretariat is also required.

c) Attracting the broader interest and more active engagement of all stakeholders, in particular the private sector + d) Expanding the use of partnerships as vehicles for improving implementation

The EfE process involves a large amount of stakeholders. However, the Belgrade Conference has shown a need to attract more the private sector into the EfE process. The private sector could make implementing environmental policies more effective if it took an advantage of the opportunities for clean and environmentally friendly technologies. There is evidence that environmentally sound technologies can spur economic growth. Better integration of environmental policies into other sectoral policies may also attract the private sector to participate in environmental financing.

Moreover, broader interests of the industry and the business would be stimulated by the broad horizontal discussions that link environmental and socio-economic issues. The strengthening of East – West environmental cooperation through the process may enhance economic liberalization throughout the UNECE region.

Civil society plays an important role in raising environmental awareness, promoting access to information and justice and designing and delivering many projects. Developing communication tools of the EfE process may raise the environmental awareness of the public.

e) Leveraging external contributions of expertise, manpower and resources

The EfE process has involved many important intergovernmental and international organizations and institutions, e.g. EU, UNDP, UNEP, UNIDO, WHO/EURO, OECD, OSCE, EBRD, EEA, etc. Cooperation between them and the UNECE/EfE process has still many

positive impacts on improving environmental policies implementation within the UNECE region.

In particular, the European Environment Agency (EEA) has traditionally provided valuable contributions to ministerial conferences. The report evaluating the state of the environment in the whole pan-European region shows not only success stories but also indicates possible ways of improvements. First assessment of transboundary rivers, lakes and ground waters in the UNECE region that was presented at the Belgrade Conference could significantly contribute to further strengthening multilateral and bilateral cooperation within the UNECE Convention on the protection and use of transboundary watercourses and international lakes. This assessment should be introduced into the agenda of future ministerial conferences.

The EfE process can also benefit from scientific activities conducted in terms of multilateral environmental agreements, such as the UNECE Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution. These efforts can result in outreach activities and thus contribute to examine potential links relevant to the EfE process. Exchange of experience, methods and approaches through outreach can benefit regions and sub-regions within the UNECE facing similar problems.

The EfE process should be also linked to the activities of the World Health Organization/Regional Office for Europe in the area of environmental health as they are focused on important related issues, such as air pollution (outdoor, indoor, particularly PM) and water quality.

Before seeking new ways how to more exploit external resources it is recommended to assess the use of existing ones. Clearly defined priorities addressed by the EfE process could also contribute to using financial resources effectively. Tailor – made projects to concrete sub – regional needs and conditions but based on strategies and initiatives launched by the EfE process could be helpful for cost – effectiveness of the EfE process. Better coordination of international technical assistance that would be provided according to clearly defined needs could also improve effectiveness of available resources within the EfE process.

On the other hand, new emerging issues addressed by the EfE process may stimulate cooperation with the other relevant international organizations, and thus require further resources.

Further deepening of cooperation with international financial institutions would increase the proportion of external contribution. In this regard, especially the contributions of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the World Bank would be valuable for the activities covered by the EfE process while benefiting from the framework the EfE has developed so far.

f) Assessing ways and means to promote more effectively the UNECE region – wide dimension of environmental cooperation

Needs-driven and prioritized approach is to be the prerequisite for the future EfE process. Prioritization of activities would help to set real tasks that are achievable in line with

available capacities. More actions are still needed in air and soil protection, water and sanitation. Environmental governance in terms of strengthening environmental institutions and policy instruments is to be further promoted. Promoting links between environmental policy and economic prosperity and competitiveness could be also relevant to all UNECE members.

g) The full cost of the process and the effective allocation of available resources

Before evaluating the cost-effectiveness of resources spent on EfE Conferences, an overview of their usage would help to identify possible gaps and to adopt appropriate measures. Only visible results are the evidence of successful application of resources.

One possible way how to raise sufficient extra-budgetary support for both the EfE process and the next conference would be to render the conference an opportunity for private sector while offering space for business activities (advertisement and promotion of innovative technologies) on one hand and for presentations of environmental projects on the other hand. All these activities would be managed through side-events. Indeed, the ministerial conference would not only serve as a meeting of high-level representatives but would also offer a platform for presentation of the latest innovative projects and technologies. In this regard, firms and main international financial institutions could take advantage of this high-profile meeting to find strategic partners in countries that lack appropriate devices. In particular, main international financial institutions could gain further guidance towards their actions in the environmental area and at the same time, share experience of environmental financing with other partners of the EfE process.

On the other hand, the UNECE secretariat could set up prospective ideas how to make use of a number of meetings, organized within the UN ECE and aimed at strengthening the economic cooperation, to the presentation of activities addressed by the EfE process.

h) Future secretariat arrangements

Should the CEP is given a new mandate for coordinating the preparation of ministerial conferences; it may be wise that the secretariat functions would be performed by the existing UNECE secretariat.