

28 February 2008<sup>1</sup>

## **Executive summary**

**of the Analysis of responses to the European ECO-Forum  
Questionnaire on main directions of the “Environment for  
Europe” process reform**

**Ad-hoc initiative to contribute into the preparation of the 15<sup>th</sup> Session of the  
UN ECE CEP (21-23 April 2008)**

**Prepared by the EfE Reform Issue Group of the European ECO-Forum**

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## INTRODUCTION

**In Belgrade, the European ECO Forum emphasized three main themes** to become priorities for the Environment for Europe (EfE) process in the next period. These are: **Sustainable Production and Consumption** as a **cross-cutting issue** for the next decade with the **Working Group as a coordination means; Biodiversity** and **Integrated Water Resources Management and Access to Drinking Water and Sanitation**.

These priority issues are important but there are many other issues of an equal importance for the EfE future. The European ECO Forum is continuously pressing for efficiency of the EfE process. To follow the EfE reform and actively participate in it, in Belgrade, the European ECO Forum established a **new EfE Reform Issue Group**. The Group started to work already and conducted the **ad-hoc survey** as a first step to consolidate ECOs vision on main directions of the reform. The Questionnaire was sent out to the members in mid-December 2007. The Analysis of responses reflects views of 33 member organizations **representing countries of EECCA** (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Ukraine), the **European Union** (Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Germany, Netherlands, Finland, Latvia, Norway, UK) and **SEE** (Serbia, Macedonia). It is important to note that the respondents also included European regional umbrella organizations such as EEB and WECF, representing views of ECOs from many European countries. In the current document we provide the summary of the analysis of their responses.

## MAIN FINDINGS

**1. Sharing the view on the initial goal of the EfE process, more than a half of respondents** described the main goal as “dedication to the work on regional environmental issues, common understanding, harmonisation and coordination of environmental policies between countries of the region (bridging East and West), development and implementation of unified approaches to the environment protection in Europe, encouraging joint efforts in solutions of global problems, providing a platform (mechanism) for Ministers' cooperation for environment protection and sustainable development in the region thus contributing to wider peace and security”. **One fifth of the total number** of respondents emphasised that public participation promotion in the environmental decision making was an important part of the initial goal. Only some respondents think that the initial goal was to help CEE, NIS and Southern Europe with environmental problems solution.

**2. The majority of respondents agree that the initial goal of the EfE process should NOT be changed. One fourth** of these explained their opinion with a statement that the initial goal has not yet been achieved and focus on the implementation is needed, while the EfE process should be adjusted to a new situation, namely the EU enlargement. It could be best summarised as: **“larger European region still needs a political process that drives environmental and sustainable development initiatives, promotes cooperation between countries and offers regional frameworks where individual action is more difficult to achieve”**. The comments were mainly highlighting the need for a more result-oriented arrangement. Several options of a new possible goal mainly concerned shaping of a more unified policy and standards for the Pan-European region, where common but differentiated responsibilities of countries are defined. It was also suggested that river basin management concept would form a basis for such policy.

**3. The majority** of respondents think that **EfE has brought concrete advantages for their work in protecting the environment in their countries**, a few doubted that and one respondent disagreed. **One fourth** of respondents mentioned the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs) as a major advantage. For example, it was

highlighted that the Public Participation in International Forums (PPIF) helped to promote participation in other 4 UNECE Conventions, the Water Convention, in particular, thus giving many opportunities for the NGO participation in water related processes at Pan-European level such as Danube ICPDR, Water dialogues etc. Other examples included improvements in national policies (through CEE EAP, EPRs, ESD Strategy) and strengthening the NGOs role in a dialogue with national governments.

**4. The majority agree that the EfE process has strengthened the environmental agenda in other parts of the larger European area,** one respondent disagreed and several answered “somewhat strengthened”. Comments included an assumption that the process helped mainly to the EECCA with new policies and standards adopted. However, others said that it was relevant for Western Europe and Central and Eastern Europe too, even though it was more visible in low income countries. It was also stressed that public participation was strengthened in the whole region, while funding for public participation remains insufficient.

**5. The majority of respondents disagreed that the enlargement of the EU, and its neighbourhood policy, have made the EfE process less relevant.** Comments were made on the European Union intention to focus EfE entirely on the non-EU region. It was mentioned that the EU “is not at all enthusiastic to have a public platform where pan-European policies are discussed that is so open and unstructured, compared with the EU procedures”. Many comments highlighted that the European Neighbourhood Policy is not specifically focused on the environment, and its environment pillar so far is very weak, thus the ENP can not replace the East-West dimension of the EfE process. Some respondents called the ENP a “principally SKEW” partnership, that is less effective therefore and much dependant on national staff in the ENP countries (thus, corruption sensitive). Contrary to that, **EfE is the only regional forum on environment and sustainable development where countries of Europe can share their views on equal footing** and which allows to take into the account the full range of views and circumstances, also from NGOs and different stakeholders.

**6. The vast majority disagree, that the EfE process should exclusively focus on assisting the EECCA countries in developing environmental practices.** However, some of these also think that the EECCA focus should be an important part of EfE but **Europe as a whole has to tackle systemic issues**, in particular the need to achieve **sustainable production and consumption patterns**.

**7. The vast majority of respondents think that the involvement of Ministers in the EfE process is essential.** Some of these stressed the importance to involve **other Ministers as well**. Only **very few** agree that the EfE can become a technical process and some others think that it could be combined. In their comments respondents stressed that **EfE is essentially a political platform for voluntary cooperation between governments, and without the involvement of the Ministers it will lose any political relevance, no new initiative will be taken**. Some respondents called for a stronger countries’ leadership in the process, others proposed to enhance the political level up to the Prime Ministers’ to boost the political will for stronger environmental policy in countries.

**8. More than a half of respondents said that no mobilisation of environmental organisations in the EfE process will continue if the process will be reduced to a technical one. Comments emphasized that NGOs participation is a major advantage of the current EfE set-up.** In a technical process NGOs participation will probably remain, but its nature will be changed crucially, dependent on certain technical assistance programmes, donors, coordinators and executors. With a general doubt about whether NGOs will be still active in “technical” EfE, some respondents stressed how important it is to keep NGOs committed to the process, because **“environmental NGOs is a shelter for independent experts working for society benefit**, without whom whole Nature protection battle doesn’t make sense, especially policy dialogue”.

9. a.) **The majority agree that Sustainable Production and Consumption should be the overarching theme (crosscutting issue) of the EfE for the next decade**, few disagreed and few thought that it is only relevant for the next Conference. **None of respondents thinks that the EfE doesn't need an overarching issue.** Some suggested that prevention of conflicts related to natural resources and the environmental rights could be another overarching issue.

b.) **Majority of respondents agree that the EfE should be oriented towards global commitments on sustainable development, meaning that the 2010 biodiversity targets and 2015 drinking water and sanitation targets** should be among main priorities for the EfE for the next Conference. Several of these respondents highlighted biodiversity as less prioritised today in Europe comparatively with water, thus requiring more attention. Some disagree, sometimes because "EfE could make better environmental policy than Global commitments".

c.) **More than a half** supported suggestion that the **number of prioritized issues should be limited for the period between conferences while not hampering the volume of ongoing work on already adopted programmes and activities within EfE Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs).** Some disagreed or were not sure. In their comments respondents suggested that EfE should be kept as a comprehensive framework flexible enough to tackle new issues and problems arising.

d.) Answering to the question "If you agree with a need for overarching theme and limited number of prioritized issues, **which ONE issue of regional significance would you add** to the SPAC, Biodiversity and Water & Sanitation? Why?", respondents listed a variety of specific issues. The most frequent answers included environmental rights, prevention of conflicts for natural resources, chemicals and education for sustainable development. At the same time, it was suggested that **SPAC could include many issues**, such as ecological industrial innovation, waste and resource management, public procurement, product-policy, GMO-free agriculture, etc. **So, after a general framework has been adopted, this could be implemented with legally binding agreements that integrate environmental objectives into transport, agriculture and energy policies.**

10. **In order to make the process more effective**, respondents suggested different measures, which could be broken up into several groups: **a.) strengthening political significance and countries leadership**, inter alia, to increase political level of conferences to the Prime Ministers'; **b.) strengthening legally binding regional framework**, e.g. to adopt a charter on sustainable production and consumption patterns which would have not only solemn political objectives but includes a set of instruments, including financial transfers and initiatives for legally binding rules on waste and resources treatment, etc.; **c.) improving structure and coordination mode**, including, inter alia, more clear mandates for implementing bodies and partners of the process, more frequent Ministerial meetings, arrangements for better stakeholders cooperation, better communication within the process; **d.) strengthen the implementation**, including establishment of national EfE platforms (inter-governmental panels), to introduce regular indicators-based effectiveness reviews, to support ECOs permanent monitoring process, to widen public participation; **e.) a more sustainable financial support scheme** to be defined, covering increase in human resources and better funding for ECOs participation.

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