

Reform of the UNECE "Environment for Europe" Process

Comments from Greece

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As acknowledged by many countries in the UNECE region, the EfE process is an important and useful pan-European framework for broad horizontal environmental cooperation from which both EU and non-EU countries can benefit. For the process to remain relevant and valuable in the future, we consider important the following important issues:

- a. Format, focus and priorities of the process and Ministerial Conferences
 - The political focus should remain Paneuropean-wide, with active involvement of all interested stakeholders, which constitutes a strong asset of the process since its very beginning. Emphasis on sub-regional level should maintain a balanced and result-oriented approach, with the activities more effectively coordinated in order to avoid duplication with the work of other international organizations.
 - The future work in the framework of the EfE-process should focus on transboundary cooperation and issues of great relevance for the UNECE-region, such as water and sanitation, land protection and biodiversity, climate change and energy efficiency, education for sustainable development, capacity building, integration of environmental dimension into sectoral policies.
 - Monitoring and assessment reports on the environment –current state, trends and challenges – remain valuable for the whole region, as well as the contribution to Environmental Performances Reviews and the assessment of implementation and effectiveness of legally binding international instruments as well as soft instruments and partnerships launched under the EfE process.
 - The implementation and preparatory phases should have equal share of the period between successive Ministerial meetings, for which a 4-year frequency is considered optimal. Maintaining a periodicity contributes further to the continuity and the monitoring of the process.
 - Main outputs of the Conference could be the Ministerial Declaration (product of negotiation) and the Chair Summary (non-negotiable text).
- b. Evaluating the performance and impact of the process
 - The added value of the EfE process is a continuous pan-european effort for convergence of environmental policies and goals, setting high environmental standards and coordinating the implementation of regional strategies, initiatives, and programmes, avoiding thus duplication of activities and contributing to better allocation of available resources.
 - An important challenge for the process is to transpose the Ministerial decisions into concrete actions and commitments at national and/or sub-regional level. To this end, the process should be more responsive to sub-regional conditions and needs and more open to active cooperation with other sectors.

- Another important challenge for the EfE is to develop further environmental democracy in the region by raising public environmental awareness and involvement in environmental decision-making, strengthening environmental education within the context of education for sustainable development and enhancing cooperation with the civil society.
 - Evaluation and monitoring of the EfE should be a continuous process, within the programme of work of a specific committee or body of the UNECE – possibly CEP –, which could also provide mid-term assessments and reviews of the progress achieved.
- c. Future secretariat arrangements and effective allocation of available resources
- The EfE process could be further simplified and streamlined. To avoid duplication of work between WGSO and CEP, the preparation of ministerial meetings could be coordinated by the CEP, adopting a broader participation format, and arranging for intergovernmental meetings back-to-back with other working group meetings.
 - Given the quality of work and valuable experience of the UNECE Secretariat, we consider appropriate the secretariat functions of the EfE process to remain under the UNECE.