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**Closing remarks**

**by**

**Mr. Christian Friis Bach**

**United Nations Under-Secretary-General**

**Executive Secretary**

**of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe**

**at the**

**4<sup>th</sup> Environment for Europe Conference**

**Batumi, Georgia, 10 June 2016**

Your Excellency, Chair of the Conference,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

If it rains during a wedding in my country, Denmark, it is a sign of good luck and a promise for a rich and bright future for the couple.

Environment for Europe is a kind of wedding, uniting us to protect the environment and our nature. And it has been raining here in Batumi. It has been raining a lot. I see this as a very good sign for a bright and rich future for the Environment for Europe, for the green economy, for clean air, and education for sustainable development and for all we agreed on. And the rain has also in a very practical way contributed to the success of this conference. We have had fewer participants on the beach and more in the rooms and side events. Thank you Batumi for sharing the rain of Batumi and for the spirit of Batumi.

Two and a half days usually isn't a long time; but these days are the culmination of five years of joint work following the Astana Conference in 2011. And it is, as I said in my opening speech, building on a historic vision created 25 years ago in the first Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference in Prague.

We remember:

- the vision and the dedication of our predecessors - with respect and admiration;
- the achievements and the highlights of the EfE process – with pride and appreciation;
- and the challenges and the obstacles on the way – with the sense of urgency and importance.

The achievements here in Batumi have been significant – they are tangible, solid, and concrete. This is what we strive for in UNECE. UNECE is not a talk shop, it is a workshop. I believe we will now be, indeed, greener, cleaner and smarter. And the results have been created in the spirit of the EfE process – we have not had tense negotiations throughout the night – but a constructive dialogue during the days up to the conference.

You decided, and agreed to:

- endorse the voluntary Pan-European Strategic Framework for Greening the Economy;
  - welcome, and adopt voluntary commitments under, the Batumi Initiative on Green Economy (BIG-E);
  - endorse the voluntary Batumi Action for Cleaner Air
  - invite countries and other stakeholders to implement the Batumi Action for Cleaner Air (BACA) in close cooperation with the ECE Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution;
  - acknowledge the important contribution of the ECE Environmental Performance Review Programme over the past 20 years;
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- welcome progress and push for more progress in developing the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS),
- launch the GEO-6 Assessment for the Pan-European region;
- acknowledge progress in implementing the Astana Water Action.

At the High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries you also adopted the Batumi Ministerial Statement on Education for Sustainable Development and the Framework for the Future Implementation of ESD in the UNECE region. And with all those decisions you have clearly committed to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). They will consolidate our cooperation on environment and sustainable development. The Environment for Europe process does not only have a role in translating these global goals into concrete policies, plans and actions, it can also play a key role in the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We have reenergized and revitalized the Environment for Europe process.

However, we will remember a lot more from Batumi than the decisions. While heading to Batumi, I had expectations. I expected the EfE process to be a valuable and flexible platform for regional cooperation. And now I have a clear feeling of accomplishment - and I hope this feeling is shared by many of you. My expectations were not just fulfilled – but fulfilled in style, with elegance; I believe these are right words to describe the spirit we have sensed here in Batumi.

I would like to mention a few factors that contributed to this successful merging of substance and form. I think one of them was the non-ordinary format of the Conference. The decision of the Committee on Environmental Policy to evolve the whole Conference in an unusual way, around interactive roundtables and highlighting celebrations, has been a daring one; it was matched with the innovative setup of the plenary room conceived by the host country secretariat and our secretariat: it worked brilliantly.

There never was a moment that one would describe as “boring”. Discussions were focused and conclusive; interventions – pointed and frank; plenary deliberations were supplemented by diverse and interesting and well-attended side-events. Live connection with Bertrand Piccard from another side of the globe gave a strong impetus to the sessions that followed. And of course the very special children that made our day yesterday – I really hope that our decisions will make their life better. We must not disappoint them.

Other key ingredients in the Batumi spirit have been the warm hospitality of Host Country; the unique Georgian culture and performance; excellent food – we will all remember the Khacaapuri - and of course Georgian wine (some of which we may still enjoy this afternoon at the invitation from our generous hosts).

Let me end by warmly thanking all involved:

- The Government of Georgia, and personally H.E. Prime-Minister Kvirikashvili, H.E. Minister Agulashvili, H.E. Minister and First Vice-Minister Murghulia, H.E. Minister Jejelava, for their crucial contributions to the success of the Batumi Conference;
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- The people of Georgia, including the wonderful citizens and children of Batumi, for their hospitality and friendliness,
- the Host Country Secretariat – for strong commitment and excellent cooperation;
- Staff and management of the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources’ Protection of Georgia for being responsive, capable, and friendly;
- Our strong partners amongst the international organizations. Let me especially emphasize the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), who have contributed substantially, the WHO, EEA, OECD, OSCE, FAO, UNDP, the Regional Environmental Centers. Thank you to them and all other international organizations present.
- Civil society — including European ECO-forum for mobilizing, all NGOs who have contributed, business, women, academia, and others that engaged in the preparation of Batumi.
- Security team of the Host Country, as well as our UN colleagues from the Department of Safety and Security - for their strict but remarkably efficient work;
- Technical and IT services and our interpreter teams – for a perfect job done in very pressing circumstances and for being both professional and flexible;
- Staff and volunteers in the airport, the hotels, the conference rooms – for their help as well as their smiles and sincere kindness;
- Media representatives – both Georgian and foreign – for highlighting our work;
- and of course the city of Batumi – also for lending its name to BIG-E, BACA, the Batumi Ministerial Declaration, the Batumi Ministerial Statement on ESD, and the Batumi decisions that will firmly put this beautiful city on the regional map of the EfE process.

It is important to recognize, and thank, the Committee of Environmental Policy and not least their outstanding Bureau but also the many other UNECE intergovernmental bodies that have prepared the conference, discussed and negotiated the outcomes and to all of you, distinguished delegates. Thank you for working hard, engaging, being together, being with us.

Last but not least – I would like to acknowledge hard work of my, and allow me here to use the word, *fantastic* UNECE colleagues who have been working extremely hard. I have good news – they finally can sleep tonight. 😊

Thank you Batumi for the rain of Batumi and for the spirit of Batumi.

Thank you for the perfect Batumi Conference!

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