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**OUTCOME OF THE SIXTH MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE
“ENVIRONMENT FOR EUROPE”:
THE “ENVIRONMENT FOR EUROPE” PROCESS –
ASSESSMENT AND THE WAY FORWARD**

Note by secretariat¹

Summary

Following the decision of the ministers at the Sixth Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe” (10–12 October 2007, Belgrade) reflected in the Belgrade Ministerial Declaration to reform the “Environment for Europe” process, UNECE member States have been invited by the Bureau of the Committee on Environmental Policy to share their views with regards to the issues referred to in paragraph 38 of the Declaration (ECE/BELGRADE.CONF/2007/8).

The present document is a compilation of the views received from the member States by 29 February 2008. The views submitted by the member States and stakeholders are available online at: <http://www.unece.org/env/efe/EfEreform/reformEfEmain.htm>

The Committee on Environmental Policy is invited to discuss the views expressed in this compilation document as well as the views of member States and stakeholders that could not be included in the document.

¹ Document is submitted on the above date due to the on-going consultations with the member States.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. At the Sixth Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe” (Belgrade, 10–12 October 2007), the ministers agreed to undertake a reform of the “Environment for Europe” (EfE) process in order to ensure that the process remains relevant and valuable, and to strengthen its effectiveness as a mechanism for improving environmental quality and the lives of people across the region.
2. As stated in the Belgrade Ministerial Declaration, the reform should focus on, although may not be limited to, the following aspects:
 - (a) The format, focus and priorities of the process and Ministerial Conferences;
 - (b) Evaluating the performance and impact of the process;
 - (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;
 - (e) Leveraging external contributions of expertise, manpower and resources;
 - (f) Assessing ways and means to promote more effectively the UNECE region-wide dimension of environmental cooperation;
 - (g) The full cost of the process and the effective allocation of available resources;
 - (h) Future secretariat arrangements.
3. In order to address the above issues in depth and with due consideration, the ministers invited the Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) to develop, by the end of 2008 in consultation with EfE partners, a plan for EfE reform so that it could be endorsed at the political level by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) at its next session in spring 2009.
4. The ministers further decided that the next EfE Ministerial Conference would be organized on the basis of the agreed reform.
5. The Bureau of the CEP, at its meeting on 30 January 2008, discussed a possible outline for preparation of the EfE reform plan and agreed that a compilation document reflecting the views of member States was needed as a basis for discussion of reform at the fifteenth CEP session.
6. The Bureau approved a questionnaire based on paragraph 38 of the Belgrade Ministerial Declaration and requested that the UNECE secretariat circulate it to the member States to solicit their views and, on the basis of their responses, compile a document for consideration by the fifteenth CEP session.
7. The current document is based on the comments provided by 14 member States, namely Armenia, Belgium, Canada, the Czech Republic, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Moldova, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and Switzerland.

8. Late responses will not be integrated in this paper but will be circulated to the CEP without translation.

II. OVERVIEW

9. All the member States that submitted their opinions considered the EfE process to be a value-added forum for pan-European discussions on environmental policy that provided political guidance for improved environmental protection. The EfE process was also called a unique partnership of member States in the UNECE region that provided a multilateral and multi-stakeholder platform for broad environmental cooperation, the sharing of information and lessons learned, as well as capacity-building.

10. Several member States mentioned that the active involvement of all interested stakeholders had been a strong asset of the EfE process since its very beginning, and that this should be even more actively promoted in the future, i.e. through the private-public partnerships.

11. The EfE process was also viewed as a tool both for developing environmental policy in the UNECE member States and demonstrating the costs of inaction in the region.

12. A general conclusion made by all member States that have responded was that a pan-European wide forum should be maintained. It should not be limited to subregions, but should be kept open to accommodate all issues of importance to the pan-European region, including cross-cutting issues. Follow-up to the decisions taken at the Ministerial Conferences should be monitored in a more systematic manner.

III. FORMAT, FOCUS AND PRIORITIES OF THE PROCESS AND MINISTERIAL CONFERENCES

Format

13. Many member States considered the Ministerial Conferences to be a guiding forum for demonstrating the political will needed for a better implementation of environmental protection policies. It was stressed that such conferences afforded needed visibility to selected environmental issues at both the international and national levels.

14. The Ministerial Conferences were also considered useful for promoting the visibility of activities of different stakeholders (e.g. Governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), financing institutions). It was further underlined that political decisions were often needed to facilitate policy formulation and implementation at the national level.

15. Ministerial Conferences were also found to be important for the development and implementation of the multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), both those of a regional and a global nature.

16. While most member States are in favour of keeping the four- to five-year periodicity of the Conferences, several expressed the opinion that in the interim it would be useful to have some mid-term political assessments, possibly on a high level. Such assessments could also be

done on a subregional basis, and could evaluate the progress made in implementing the commitments made at the Ministerial Conferences.

17. In the view of some member States, the Ministerial Conferences' design could be improved. Some proposed making stronger use of certain forms of interactive dialogue such as those used by the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) or the World Health Organization (WHO) for their Ministerial "Environment and Health" Conferences. These combine, inter alia, round-table discussions, ministerial panel sessions and official sessions with major groups.

18. Some member States noted that well-attended side-events provided interesting insights into important new and emerging issues; these could be taken into account in the future.

Focus and priorities

19. Many member States were in favour of having fewer subjects on the agenda so as to allow more time for interactive discussion. The whole duration of the Conference should not be extended.

20. It was mentioned that the implementation of the recommendations of the Environmental Performance Reviews (EPRs) should be promoted and further enhanced to tackle environmental disparities in the reviewed countries. Evaluation of such implementation might be taken up during mid-term political assessments on a subregional basis.

21. High priority should be given to further efforts in environmental monitoring and reporting, as prerequisites for all levels of decision-making.

22. While some member States were in favour of having more globally related issues on the Ministerial Conferences' agenda, others believed that duplication of work by both global and regional environmental agreements and other multilateral organizations should be avoided. They proposed giving more emphasis to UNECE legally binding and "soft law" instruments, and promoting the acceleration of ratification and implementation of existing MEAs. In their view, concrete steps should be taken to increase effectiveness of capacity-building; to address cases of non-compliance; to integrate the environmental dimension into sectoral policies; and to further promote research activities.

23. At the same time, some member States proposed promoting synergies among agreements by seeking cooperation with other relevant international organizations and regional and global conventions, which would allow for a more intensive exchange of experience gained and lessons learned. It was suggested that EfE reform should take into account the ongoing deliberations on the improvement of International Environmental Governance (IEG).

24. Among the issues that were proposed for possible consideration in the framework of the EfE Conferences were:

- (a) Economic competitiveness and environmental improvements;
- (b) Consumption and production patterns;

- (c) Education for sustainable development;
- (d) Energy efficiency and sustainable energy;
- (e) Climate change;
- (f) Desertification;
- (g) Environment and security;
- (h) Chemicals and heavy metals;
- (i) Transboundary cooperation;
- (j) Water and sanitation;
- (k) Land protection and biodiversity;
- (l) Biofuels.

25. Some member States believed that the EfE process should focus more intensively on the needs and commitments of the countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA). Several member States asserted that the process should be more flexible in terms of reacting to possible changes in the needs of countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia, and it should take better account of the willingness to cooperate on the part of these countries.

26. Some member States also mentioned that future activities should facilitate vertical and horizontal cooperation (i.e. among different levels within a government and between different ministries at the national level). There was also a need to promote dialogue with other member States, by inviting all relevant ministries to join in the process of environmental policy formulation.

Preparatory process

27. Although some member States believed that the substantive achievements reached at the Conferences justified the two-year duration of the preparatory work, some felt that the preparatory process should be shortened.

28. It was proposed that, in general, fewer meetings should take place, e.g. preparatory meetings could be held back-to-back. Several countries expressed the opinion that the work of the Working Group of Senior Officials (WGSO) was partially duplicating the activities of CEP. The suggestion was therefore made to give to the CEP a more prominent role in the preparatory process, even making it a preparatory body.

29. Several member States believed that making EfE a permanent item on the CEP agenda would allow for a more timely discussion of developments in the region and would give input to the process. The CEP was also considered as a good possible platform for conducting mid-term assessments between Ministerial Conferences.

30. The role and responsibility of the host country in the preparatory process was addressed by some member States as a possible question for discussion.

Documentation

31. The majority of the member States believed that the amount of documentation submitted to the Ministerial Conference should be reduced and that the documents should be more focused. One member State noted, however, that while the amount of documentation generated for the Ministerial Conferences was very large, virtually all the studies, reviews and analyses found their way to the respective interest groups and individuals concerned, and were used extensively by a broad range of stakeholders.

32. The compilation of summaries provided for the Belgrade Conference was considered a good experience that should be further promoted.

33. Most of the member States were in favour of having a negotiated outcome – a Ministerial Declaration – as well as a non-negotiated outcome – a Chair's Summary. This formula was used for the first time at the Belgrade Conference, and the resulting experience was good.

IV. PERFORMANCE AND IMPACT OF THE PROCESS

34. Many member States acknowledged that the EfE process served as an important and useful pan-European framework for broad horizontal environmental cooperation, from which all UNECE member States could benefit.

35. Many member States reiterated that the EfE process had taken a number of important decisions, among which the establishment of the Environmental Action Programme for Central and Eastern Europe Task Force (EAP TF) and the Project Preparation Committee (PPC), the creation of new Regional Environmental Centers (RECs) for countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia, the introduction of the EPR programme, and the set-up of pan-European assessment reports on the state of the environment were only a few.

36. It was also mentioned that through the EfE process important legal and “soft law” instruments had been developed and adopted. Some member States noted that the MEAs developed under the process had positively influenced European Union (EU) legislation, and had in crucial areas supported the legal frameworks of many countries in the UNECE region.

37. Several member States considered that sectoral assessments such as the report on transboundary waters for the UNECE region presented in Belgrade were unique sources of information and political evaluation. They believed that a more in-depth view into air pollution trends in the region would be a relevant issue for the future.

38. Some member States noted that the EAP TF helped raise environmental standards and had provided guidance for launching national development plans and financial strategies. This in turn had assisted new EU member States in harmonizing national legislation with the *acquis communautaire*, and was thus a first step for them vis-à-vis joining the EU and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

39. At the same time, other member States felt that implementation of certain decisions taken at the Ministerial Conferences was lacking. In particular, they referred to the EECCA Environment Strategy.

40. Member States from Eastern Europe and Caucasus mentioned that the policy tools and legal instruments developed in the framework of the EfE process had greatly contributed to the preparation of appropriate national legislation and had complemented and promoted environmental governance by strengthening national environmental institutions and policy instruments. In some member States, the use of tools and mechanisms developed under the EfE process had led to an upgrading of existing environmental governmental bodies and had contributed to strengthening their institutional capacities. However, despite the progress achieved, there was still a need for a region-wide mechanism to exchange information and good practices in areas of common interest and to facilitate dialogue and cooperation with donors.

41. Many member States thought that the UNECE region, comprising major donor countries, should share positive outputs of the EfE process with other regions and interested countries. Several member States felt that transfer of knowledge and tools for better implementation of environmental policies, in particular to developing countries, could enhance the convergence of environmental standards at the regional as well as at the global level, and thus also support peace and security.

V. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

42. All member States noted that the EfE process was a unique partnership of stakeholders and that this was one of its strongest assets. This particular feature of the process should remain, and where possible, be strengthened.

43. Many member States shared the view that the interest and engagement of stakeholders was closely connected to the issues under consideration. To promote better and deeper stakeholder involvement and encourage engagement of the private sector to the EfE process, it would therefore be important to bring forward issues of common interest.

44. Several member States noted that the private sector could more effectively contribute to implementing environmental policies through promoting application of clean and environmentally friendly technologies. Better integration of environmental policies into other sectoral policies could also encourage private-sector participation, e.g. with respect to environmental financing and investment schemes.

45. All member States addressed the importance of civil society engagement in the EfE process, as civil society played an important role in raising environmental awareness, promoting access to information, public participation and justice, and designing and delivering environmental projects at the national and subregional levels. There was a general agreement that civil society participation should thus be further encouraged.

VI. USE OF PARTNERSHIPS

46. Most member States did not elaborate specifically on the issue of partnerships. Those who did, noted partnerships' usefulness vis-à-vis the process and an enhanced use of them as an important means for improving implementation. They suggested that partnerships should focus

on concrete projects, and that the exchange of information, experiences and good practices regarding partnerships with the private sector should be encouraged.

47. Some also noted that although useful, the partnership development process might be difficult, requiring much additional effort as well as increased investment.

VII. EXTERNAL CONTRIBUTIONS

48. Several member States noted that a more permanent structure for the EfE process might help leverage contributions by promoting greater attention to the process. It was suggested that more visibility of progress achieved in member States and activities currently under way in the framework of the process would be necessary to increase interest and contributions to the process as a whole.

49. Some members States suggested that further increasing cooperation with international financial institutions might provide additional resources. Considering an increased share of the host country contribution against total expenses of the Ministerial Conferences was also suggested.

50. Another proposal by the member States regarding how to raise sufficient extrabudgetary support for both the EfE process and the next Ministerial Conference was to make the Conference more of an opportunity for the private sector. This could be done by offering space for business activities (advertisement and promotion of innovative technologies) on the one hand, and for presentations of environmental projects on the other.

51. The proposal was made that these activities could be managed through side-events. Some stressed that in this case the Ministerial Conference could not only serve as a meeting of high-level representatives from the environmental sector, but could also be a platform for presenting the latest innovative projects and technologies. In this regard, enterprises as well as the main international financial institutions (IFIs) could take advantage of the high-profile meetings to find strategic partners in countries that lacking appropriate mechanisms. In particular, the main IFIs could gain further guidance regarding their actions in the environmental area, and at the same time, share their experience with environmental financing with other partners in the EfE process.

VIII. PROMOTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL COOPERATION

52. Several member States acknowledged that the EfE process had involved many important intergovernmental and international organizations and institutions, e.g. the EU, the European Commission, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the WHO Regional Office for Europe, the World Bank, OECD, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the European Environment Agency (EEA) and the Council of Europe. It was also generally recognized that cooperation between them and the EfE process had had many positive

impacts on improving environmental policies and their implementation throughout the UNECE region.

53. Some member States noted that cooperation with EEA had traditionally provided valuable contributions to Ministerial Conferences. The reports evaluating the state-of-the-environment in the pan-European region had revealed not only success stories but also possible areas for improvements.

54. It was further noted that more coordinated efforts by donors would be of great importance vis-à-vis contributing to cross-sectoral integration, and would increase the efficiency of the whole EfE process.

IX. COST OF THE PROCESS

55. To address the issue of the cost-efficiency of the EfE process, several member States raised the issue of availability of a comprehensive budget reflecting the process' full cost, including the preparatory meetings and the Ministerial Conferences themselves.

56. Some member States felt that clearly defined priorities for the process could contribute to using financial resources more effectively and that projects tailor-made for concrete subregional needs and conditions, but based on strategies and initiatives launched by the process, could be helpful for overall cost-efficiency.

57. Several member States also mentioned that better coordination of international technical assistance, according to clearly defined needs, could also make for more efficient use of available resources within the EfE process.

X. SECRETARIAT ARRANGEMENTS

58. All member States that have responded stressed that UNECE should continue to serve as the secretariat for the EfE process. It was mentioned that proposals to pass the secretariat functions to other organizations, e.g. the Council of Europe, missed the fact that the UNECE is the only body with a pan-European coverage dealing with broad environmental issues.

59. Member States further underlined that the experience of the UNECE secretariat, and the quality of its work had greatly contributed to the success of the EfE process.
