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Economic Commission for Europe

Committee on Environmental Policy

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Item 4 (e) of the provisional agenda

Preparations for the Seventh “Environment for Europe”

Ministerial Conference: Conference outcomes

Draft Declaration of the Seventh “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference

Note by the secretariat*

Summary

Pursuant to a decision by Ministers at the Sixth “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference (Belgrade, 2007), the Seventh Ministerial Conference will be held from 21 to 23 September 2011 in Astana (Kazakhstan).

The Reform Plan of the “Environment for Europe” (EfE) process stipulates that Conference outcomes may include an agreed outcome of two pages on follow-up and further actions, strictly limited, in terms of scope, to the themes of the Conference.

The Committee on Environmental Policy, at its special session, is expected to establish a drafting group and agree on its composition and modalities of its work. To facilitate the work of the drafting group, following a request by the Committee at its seventeenth session, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe secretariat, in consultation with the Committee Chair, prepared a first draft of a ministerial declaration.

* The present document was submitted late due to the need to consult with partners.

1. We, the Ministers and Heads of delegation from ... countries in the region of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the Representative of the European Commission, met at Astana from 21 to 23 September 2011, in the seventh of a series of Ministerial Conferences held as part of the “Environment for Europe” (EfE) process.
2. We confirm our commitment to improve environmental protection and to promote sustainable development in the UNECE region. We reaffirm the important value of the EfE process as a unique pan-European forum for tackling environmental challenges and promoting broad horizontal environmental cooperation among countries in Europe, North America, the Caucasus and Central Asia, and as a pillar of sustainable development in the UNECE region. We are committed to the objectives and priorities of the EfE process as agreed in the EfE reform plan adopted by UNECE in 2009.
3. We recognize the crucial role of water in economic, social and environmental development. We are concerned that, although water quality has improved in the past 20 years in many subregions, there are numerous remaining pressures, and that progress has been weak regarding access to safe water and adequate sanitation, especially in rural areas in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. We are also concerned that many countries experience a continued decline of water-related ecosystems and their services, that climate change impacts on water resources are already visible and that the current institutional framework for water management is often not suited to face these challenges.
4. We call for the reform of the existing systems of water and environmental policies and promoting intersectoral cooperation, including through the National Policy Dialogues on Integrated Water Resources Management and Water Supply and Sanitation. We agree to fully implement principles of integrated water resources management, to adopt an ecosystem approach and to integrate ecosystem values in economic accounting. We stress the need to develop and upgrade monitoring and assessment systems for water and water-related ecosystems, especially in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia.
5. We encourage countries to ratify and implement the relevant UNECE multilateral environmental agreements, in particular the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) and its Protocol on Water and Health. We also call upon riparian countries to negotiate new and implement existing agreements on transboundary waters, to strengthen the institutional framework for cooperation, and jointly to develop strategies for adapting their water management to extreme events and climate change.
6. Additional financial resources for investments in water supply, more effective irrigation systems and sustainable sanitation need to be raised, among others, through appropriate yet affordable prices for water. We therefore call for a more systematic use of economic instruments, the provision of incentives for water efficiency, and the generation of revenues to finance water services.
7. We note with appreciation the Second Assessment of Transboundary Rivers, Lakes and Groundwaters in the UNECE Region, prepared under the auspices of the UNECE Water Convention. We invite the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention to prepare a thematically focused assessment of transboundary waters for our next EfE Ministerial Conference. .
8. We endorse the Astana Water Action and welcome the commitments made by countries and other actors in this regard. We call upon countries and other actors to implement their commitments, and the Astana Water Action in general and to report progress at our next EfE Ministerial Conference. In this connection, we welcome initiatives launched by interested countries and organizations during our conference aimed at improving water management and strengthening transboundary cooperation.

9. We stress the need to strengthen efforts for the transition to a green economy by stimulating green investment in various economic sectors, applying effective mixes of policy instruments to promote resource efficiency and supporting research, innovations, education and training to secure the achievement of a green, inclusive and competitive economy.
10. We agree to take the lead in the transition to a green economy and to make a substantive contribution to the discussions on green economy within the context of sustainable development and poverty alleviation at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development to take place in Rio de Janeiro from 4 to 6 June 2012. We invite UNECE to consider developing, in cooperation with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and other relevant international organizations, a road map for greening the economy in the UNECE region.
11. We welcome the achievements in the UNECE Environmental Performance Review (EPR) Programme. We invite UNECE, in its third cycle of EPRs, to focus on environmental governance and financing in a green economy context, countries' cooperation with the international community and environmental integration in priority sectors.
12. We note with appreciation the "Europe's Environment Assessment of Assessments" report prepared by the European Environment Agency (EEA), and invite all countries, as well as EEA, UNECE, UNEP and other relevant international organizations, to strengthen their efforts to develop a Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS). These efforts, together with strengthening capacities of countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia and South-Eastern Europe to observe and assess their environment, should establish a sustainable basis for regular Pan-European reporting on the state of the environment. We invite EEA to prepare a short Pan-European assessment report on the environment for our next EfE Ministerial Conference.
13. We note progress made by the Environmental Action Programme (EAP) Task Force and invite it to focus its future activities on economic and financial aspects of water management and on market incentives and policy reforms in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. We also call for strengthening the relationship between the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and Regional Environmental Centers in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia in the EAP implementation.
14. We endorse the "Green Bridge" Initiative that was adopted by the Sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific. We welcome the "Green Bridge" Partnership Programme developed under this Initiative and invite interested Governments, the private sector, international financial institutions and other stakeholders to join this Programme to promote an environmentally sustainable, equitable and prosperous future in both the European and the Asia and the Pacific regions.
15. We invite the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy to convene in 2013 a mid-term review to assess progress of the implementation of the outcome of the Astana Conference and to provide renewed impetus to the process.
16. We welcome the offer of the Government of to host the next EfE Ministerial Conference in 2015.
17. We express our gratitude to the Government of Kazakhstan for having hosted this Conference and we wish to thank it and the people of Kazakhstan for the warm hospitality that we have received.
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