

# CONCLUSIONS OF THE CONFERENCE "ENVIRONMENT FOR EUROPE"

Dobris Castle  
Czech and Slovak Federal Republic June 21-23, 1991

## Part I. General Conclusions

1. The President of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic Mr. Vaclav Havel, the President of the Swiss Confederation Mr. Flavio Cotti, the environment Ministers of Albania, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, the USSR and representatives of Belorussia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldavia, and Ukraine, and Yugoslavia, and the Commissioner for Environment of the Commission of the European Communities met on June 21-23, 1991 at Dobris Castle for the conference "Environment for Europe". Also attending the meeting were representatives of the Council of Europe, the Centre for Our Common Future, the Conference on Security and Co-operation for Europe, the European Community, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the European Free Trade Association, the European Investment Bank, the European Parliament, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, the Nordic Investment Bank, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, the Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation, and the World Bank.

They discussed ways of further strengthening cooperation to protect and improve the environment, and of long term strategies toward a European

protection and restoration system and an environmental programme for Europe as suggested by the host country. They also discussed the relationship between ethics and environment and the search for values for environmentally sustainable development. The Conference reaffirmed the importance of the Stockholm Declaration of 1972, the Bergen Ministerial Declaration of 1990, and the Charter for a New Europe adopted by the Conference on Security and Co-operation for Europe in Paris in December 1990. The Conference marked another major step toward international and interregional environmental cooperation, following the meeting of ministers of central and eastern European countries, the EC and its Commissioner, and the representative of the EFTA held in Dublin in 1990, as well as the OECD Environment Ministers' Communique of January 1991 and the UN ECE Espoo Ministerial Statement of February 1991.

2. The Ministers and the Commissioner noted that although progress has been made in decreasing the levels of some traditional pollutants the problem of reversing past environmental degradation remains, and in many parts of Europe environmental deterioration is continuing. They reaffirmed the conclusions of the Bergen and Dublin Conferences concerning the necessity for the improved coordination and strengthening of national and international environmental programmes. They undertook to keep their environmental policies under constant review, particularly in light of the preparation and outcome of the UN Conference on Environment and Development in 1992.
  
3. They recognized that improving environmental protection involves, among others, the progress of scientific understanding and changes of human values and behaviour. They also noted that an important cause of environmental degradation is the failure to observe strong pollution control standards. Therefore, they urged the central and eastern European countries to set a timetable for the application of high environmental standards such as are in force or in preparation in the EC and EFTA region and to begin by evaluating the consequences of such a step and the technical and financial cooperation required for its implementation. They welcomed the increased attention being given to the principle of sustainable development and the use of economic instruments in environmental policy-making where feasible and appropriate. Environmental policy should be based especially on a precautionary approach and on the polluter pays principle, on sound democratic principles, as well as on dialogue between governments and all relevant groups in society on national, continental, and global scale. Non-governmental organizations should be integral partners in this dialogue.

## Part II: Specific Conclusions

4. The Ministers and the Commissioner recognized that many valuable contributions were being made to the development of environmental information relevant to the monitoring assessment of the state of the environment; for example that of the EC, UN ECE, UNEP, and other institutions of the UN, the OECD, the Council of Europe, and the EFTA countries have been noted, as well as the future work by the European Environment Agency. However, the situation is not considered to be satisfactory in this field and better coordination of these activities is needed. It is also desirable that these activities cover Europe as a whole.
5. As the result of the above observation the Ministers and the Commissioner stressed the need to improve the environmental information and monitoring system in Europe. They welcome the European Commission's proposal to provide information and assistance for the application of the CORINE methodology in other countries as a first step toward the integration of environmental information systems throughout Europe. A desirable outcome of this process would be, inter alia, a report describing the state of the environment in Europe. Such a report will be a basis for the effective implementation of environmental policies and strategies. It will also be a useful tool to inform the public and raise awareness about environmental problems. They also support the prompt establishment of the European Environment Agency as an institution of the EC open to other countries.
6. The Ministers and the Commissioner stressed the need to increase the exchange of information about and the coordination of environmental legislation and programme initiatives in their countries. They recognized the important contribution that relevant international organizations in close cooperation could make to help this process by organising seminars or workshops designed to meet the identified needs of individual countries.
7. They supported increased cooperation across Europe in the crucial field of environmental research as a basis for developing stronger environmental policies. They agreed to evaluate mechanisms and structures to improve the control and verification of the implementation of multilateral and international conventions in the field of environment.
8. The Ministers and the Commissioner particularly stressed that the ongoing discussion of human values and environmental ethics is of the utmost relevance, as lifestyle decisions substantially affect the environment. Public education and wide philosophical, cultural, and ethical endeavours in search of harmony between humankind and nature are the substantial means of environmental improvement.

9. The Ministers and the Commissioner endorsed the development and implementation of regional, sub-regional, and water basin programmes based on bilateral as well as multilateral agreements for the protection of the environment, such as those which are the subject of the UN ECE Draft Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, and especially those related to the Baltic, Black, northern, and Mediterranean Seas. They welcomed the launching of the first regional programmes relating to the Danube Basin, the Black Triangle of Poland, the Federal Republic of Germany, and the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, the Alpine Region, the Carpathian Region, Lapland, and the Kola Peninsula . and underlined the importance of well-coordinated international efforts in support of such programmes, such as by the Pentagonale and the Nordic Council. They requested relevant countries and international organizations to participate in and support this work; they also recognized the important role of non-government environmental organizations.
10. The Ministers and the Commissioner reaffirmed the Ministerial Declaration of the Second World Climate Conference of November 6-7, 1990, and agreed that it was essential for all participants at the present meeting to engage actively in the ongoing negotiations towards a global Convention on Climate Change. They underlined the potential of economic instruments in this field and the need to avoid economic distortions.
11. Governments which have not yet ratified the Vienna Convention and the Montreal Protocol on ozone-depleting substances and the amendments to the Protocol agreed in London in June 1990 are urged to do so as soon as possible. Governments are also urged to participate fully in the next review of the Protocol and to consider in 1992 to accelerate further the timetables for phasing out ozone depleting substances. In so far as countries might find it difficult to meet their financial obligations under the Protocol, consideration will be given to accommodating their situation in the context of bilateral cooperation.
12. The Ministers and the Commissioner recognized the urgent need to confront global environmental problems - in particular biodiversity, climate change, and the protection of the ozone layer - and the importance of regional, national, and local efforts in this area. They agreed to intensify their collaboration on the protection of nature, particularly of forests and biotopes, and to aim for consensus on common concerns regarding the negotiations for the International Convention on Biodiversity and in the discussions on the guiding principles and instruments for the conservation and sustainable development of forests now taking place within the framework of UNCED.

13. The Ministers and the Commissioner expressed their support for the ongoing work, within the framework of the UN ECE, on the development of additional international agreements to further reduce sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxide emissions, as well as adoption of a protocol on VOC emissions which is to be ready for signature in Geneva on November 19, 1991, and on a convention on transboundary effects of industrial accidents. They urged the early implementation of these conventions and protocols, as appropriate, and the rapid completion of ongoing work.
14. The Ministers and the Commissioner also stressed the urgent need to continue research and development of transportation systems that are environmentally sound and that respect the need to protect the urban environment, human health, and nature taking into account the specific problems of the peripheral countries.
15. They welcomed the initiative to develop an European Energy Charter. Such a charter should give attention to the relationship between environment and energy production, transmission, consumption, and safety aspects, with special attention to Energy Efficiency 2000 of the UN ECE.
16. The Ministers and the Commissioner appreciated the way in which international financial institutions, including the World Bank, the EIB, the EBRD, the NIB, and the Council of Europe Social Development Fund have taken up the challenge of integrating environmental concerns into their investment activities, both in specific projects and through the early assessment of the environmental impact of major projects. They welcomed the strong environmental stance taken by the recently established European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. As all major long-term economic plans and investment decisions may have considerable impact on the environment in central and eastern European countries, environment ministries should be involved in these decisions. The Global Environment Facility could play an important role in this respect.
17. The Ministers and the Commissioner emphasised the importance of participation by a well-informed population in the decision-making processes on environmental matters or on matters that may have a significant effect on the environment. They noted the initiative of the Norwegian and the Netherlands governments to elaborate a document on environmental rights and obligations, which interested countries may submit to the UNCED preparatory process. They welcomed the opportunity provided by the Netherlands government for discussing this document at the UN ECE ad hoc meeting at The Hague during the first week of July 1991.

18. The Ministers and the Commissioner welcomed the start of the Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe in Budapest. They stressed the importance of its role as initiator of public awareness and of dialogue, and encouraged further support for its activities. In light of new developments it might extend its activities to other countries.

### Part III. Basic guidelines for an all-European cooperation strategy

19. As different capabilities for coping with environmental problems in different parts of Europe were recognized as a major obstacle to a more integral and efficient approach to environmental improvement on a continental scale, the Ministers and the Commissioner stressed the need for more collaborative strategies between western, central, and eastern European countries as the most urgent task. They agreed to the following principles regarding this cooperation:
- a) Increasing transboundary impacts from pollution have led to greater environmental interdependence among European states and hence the need for intensified cooperation.
  - b) The transition of eastern and central European countries from centrally planned to democratic political systems and market-oriented economies is promising, but should also be accompanied by appropriate environmental protection policies and measures. Advantage must therefore be taken of the transition to market economies and the restructuring of these economies to introduce ecological aspects into this process from the very beginning.
  - c) Economic and financial assistance must promote the integration of environmental considerations into the process of restructuring central and eastern European economies and should lead to a high level of environmental protection throughout the continent. Projects of economic assistance, joint ventures, and other forms of western cooperation in central and eastern European countries should be screened with regard to possible negative impacts as well as possible profit for the environment.
  - d) Urgent assistance is needed to improve environmentally-related health conditions in ecological disaster areas in the central and eastern European region.
  - e) Each country should bear responsibility for global environmental problems. Their respective levels of economic development should be taken into account in responding to them.

20. The Ministers and the Commissioner recognised the high level of priority attributed by the governments of central and eastern Europe to the improvement of their environmental situation from the very beginning of the transition process, despite acute economic difficulties. They welcome the new climate of understanding and cooperation in Europe, which may make resources available for the protection of the environment.
  
21. The Ministers and the Commissioner considered that the process of economic reconstruction should not lead to further damage to the environment in central and eastern European countries. They welcomed the development of the assistance from the international donor community (bilaterally and by the G-24<sup>3</sup>, European Community, and multilateral financial institutions) to central and eastern European countries for environmental protection as well as recent initiatives which have been taken, in particular the Business Charter for Sustainable Development, to help ensure investment activity which is consistent with and encourages environmentally sound development. They invited the business community to further develop such initiatives by elaborating a Code of Conduct for enterprises operating or investing in central and eastern European countries. In this context they welcomed the Conference on Environment, Industry and Guiding Principles on Investment Decisions in central and eastern Europe to be held in November, 1991 in Budapest and encouraged the business community to subscribe to this initiative.
  
22. The Ministers and the Commissioner stressed that the aim of environmental protection and improvement would best be served by democratic political systems with free market economies where governments set high environmental standards and appropriate economic and fiscal instruments, and where industry provides the economic growth and the investment necessary to meet those standards. They noted the importance of providing clear signals to industry to foster clean growth. They also stressed that they should not wait until economic growth has occurred before addressing environmental problems and establishing high environmental standards.

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<sup>3</sup>The Group of 24 (G-24) is the OECD member countries.

23. The Ministers and the Commissioner considered the G-24 Environment Sector Strategy for assistance to eastern and central Europe, and agreed on the usefulness of this strategy for effective G-24 cooperation with the governments of that region. This Environment Strategy should continue to be reviewed, adapted, and strengthened on the basis of dialogue between all the parties concerned taking into account further information and data. These countries are also encouraged to seek full membership or to participate in relevant international environmental activities and organizations. The Ministers and the Commissioner agreed that every encouragement should be given to central and eastern European countries to work together where collective action would be more efficient than individual measures and they noted that improved coordination among these countries would also contribute to improved international coordination; they welcomed environmental activities of the Pentagonale and supported its decision to include neighbouring countries in specific initiatives.
24. The Ministers and the Commissioner also recognised the important role of non-governmental organisations in the continuation of international dialogue on environmental matters. In this context, they took note of the results of the NGO conference held at Prestavky concurrently with the Dobris Conference, and will consider these results in their future work. They welcomed the initiative of the Assises of the Confederation, which took place in Prague on June 13-14, 1991, for the improvement of cooperation in Europe. They noted that this non-governmental meeting underlined environment as a major topic for this cooperation.
25. The Ministers and the Commissioner underlined the principle that pollution should be prevented at its source. The application of this principle would not only improve the environment but will also lead to major improvement of health conditions, in particular in those areas which are heavily polluted due to past failures to prevent pollution. They noted the efforts underway through the WHO European Regional Office to address health conditions related to environmental problems in central and eastern European countries. The principles and priorities set out in the European Charter on Environment and Health should guide actions to improve environmental conditions and thereby enhance the health and well-being of the people of those countries.
26. The Ministers and the Commissioner recognise the important interlinkages between trade and environment policies and welcomed the work being undertaken in various international fora to analyse the issues. They recognized that the liberalisation of trade could help the process of modernization and the improvement of the environmental performance of industries in central and eastern Europe. They also recognized that trade should not create unreasonable burdens on the environment, for example, through uncontrolled trade in waste.

27. In this context it is vital that all countries which have not yet ratified the Basel Convention do so as soon as possible.
28. In view of the rich heritage of habitats and species in Europe, and taking into account the decline of habitats important for wildlife largely as a result of unsustainable development, the participants accepted responsibility to ensure that future development takes full account of nature conservation. They agreed to adopt a European perspective on nature conservation in order to protect habitats and species of European significance and to ensure an international approach to nature conservation issues such as migratory species.

#### Part IV: Follow-up activities

29. With a view to the improved efficiency of their actions in favour of the environment in central and eastern Europe, the Ministers and the Commissioner decided that the central and eastern European countries should be represented in future meetings of the G-24 working group on the environment where issues of common interest are discussed.
30. The Ministers and the Commissioner welcomed the invitation of the President of the Swiss Confederation, Federal Councillor Flavio Cotti, to convene a follow-up meeting in order to take up concrete proposals to be elaborated by a group of experts on the basis of the conclusions of this Conference, taking into account the proposals made by the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic and by the parallel conference of NGOs.
31. The Swiss Confederation will invite governments to nominate participants to a task force for a preliminary meeting. Thereupon, the group of experts will be convened. UN ECE will provide secretariat support for this preparatory process. The Senior Advisors to the UN ECE Governments for Environment and Water Problems might serve as the framework for both the follow-up and the preparatory process. The Commission of the European Communities will also assist as appropriate. Other relevant international organisations will be invited to contribute.

32. The Ministers and the Commissioner called for the preparation of a report describing the State of the Environment in Europe to be published before the end of 1993. In the preparation of this report the Commission of the European Communities in cooperation with the Economic Commission for Europe will call upon the assistance of a task force of individual European countries and relevant international organisations, including UNEP, OECD, Council of Europe and IUCN. Part of this work will be financially supported as the first regional project of the PHARE Programme.

The Ministers and the Commissioner underlined the need to develop an Environmental Programme for Europe in light of this report to serve as the framework for the better coordination of national and international efforts in Europe, focusing on central and eastern Europe. This should identify priorities for the repair and restoration of existing environmental damage and the prevention of future problems.

33. The Ministers and the Commissioner stressed the importance of continuing study and work in the appropriate fora on such issues as the following:
- Cost-effective reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in Europe;
  - Reallocation of resources to the protection of the environment which become available in the new climate of understanding and cooperation in Europe;
  - Improving education and training; the exchange of students, experts and scientists; and the flow of information to the public about environmental issues;
  - Ensuring compliance with multilateral agreements related to the environment;
  - Resolving environmental disputes between countries;
  - the organisation of seminars on legal and management issues related to the needs of individual countries;
  - Extending throughout Europe systems of nature protection;
  - Implications of a commitment by central and eastern European countries to attaining and ensuring the enforcement of high environmental standards.
34. The Ministers and the Commissioner expressed their concern about the need for the further improvement of the existing international organisations and for the need to further integrate the environmental dimension into the framework and activities of the United Nations system as a part of the process of preparation for UNCED.
35. The Ministers and the Commissioner recognised the importance of further discussions on human values and environmental ethics with a view to defining principles of environmental ethics, and encouraged the continuation of this dialogue, inter alia in the context of the new European Community environmental research programme.

36. The Ministers and the Commissioner expressed their deep appreciation to the Federal Committee for the Environment and the Czech and Slovak Federal Government for taking the initiative to convene this first all-European conference of ministers responsible for the environment and international organisations working in Europe.