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“Environment for Europe”
Conference

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NEWSLETTER

Pan-European Coalition of Environmental Citizens Organisations

*We may have all come on different ships, but we're in the same boat now.
by Martin Luther King Jr.*

THE EFE MUST GO ON!

By Victoria Elias, Chair of the European ECO-Forum Coordination Board

We meet in Belgrade for the 6th “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference. Surrounded by numerous bridges across the Danube and the Sava, governments, international organisations and NGOs are trying to build bridges to the future. However, in order to build bridges we need to be honest saying how is the process developing and how could we improve it.

16 years after the first conference, the EfE still remains relevant for the whole Pan-European region. Moreover, it continues to play an important role in development of specific programs, plans and strategies for improvement of environmental quality and policies in the region. Many initiatives, approved in the course of Ministerial Conferences and UN ECE preparatory meetings serve as models for other regions. The Aarhus Convention, three Kiev protocols, regular environmental assessment reports, a system of East-West partnerships, the Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development, the unique system of interaction with NGOs are the most important achievements of the process.

Notwithstanding obvious successes of the EfE, the environmental decline in the region continues. The majority of interim biodiversity conservation targets set at the Kiev Ministerial Conference have not been reached. There are serious doubts that the target of 2010 may be reached without substantial additional efforts. Even though many countries of the region, particularly EU member-states have made substantial efforts to ensure a maximal possible reduction of fossil fuel consumption and to enhance energy efficiency, economies in transition still lag behind in the sphere. The environmental pollution by hazardous chemicals continues to grow. Risks of adverse health impacts of toxic chemicals, industrial and radioactive contamination seriously affect all citizens of the Pan European region. Quality of air, water, soils and urban environments continues to decline in almost all areas.



We need to improve the efficiency of the process, even though there are serious obstacles for improvement. We face insufficient political will to achieve specific results in some countries and in the regional context. We see the lack of necessary co-operation between different ministries and agencies at the national level. We have to cope with inadequate financing of EfE projects and programs.

PRTR PROTOCOL: RATIFICATION PROCESS GOING ON, WHILE NEGOTIATIONS ON RULES AND COMPLIANCE PROCEDURE DEPART FROM AARHUS CONVENTION

The Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers to the Aarhus Convention was adopted in Kiev and by now has been ratified by 5 countries. What are the perspectives for its entry into force and what is going on with the development of compliance procedure under the Protocol?

Serhiy Vykhryst, Public Participation Campaign of the European ECO-Forum:

There is a clear intension of a number of countries to hold the first MOP of PRTR Protocol in 2008, back-to-back with the Aarhus Convention MOP, as suggested by the Protocol. However, despite all promises we are still far from 16 ratifications, although we can expect some progress by the beginning of 2008.

Many countries are working on PRTRs, and it is a positive trend that many PRTRs now use electronic tools. The general trend here is that the EU countries first create their PRTRs and later ratify the Protocol, while EECCA countries first ratify and then work on developing PRTRs.

John Hontelez, EEB, ECO-Forum's Public Participation Campaign Chair:

In the negotiations about the Rules of Procedure and Compliance Review Mechanism (CRM) for the PRTR Protocol we face an alarming position of the EU. The European Environmental Bureau wrote a letter to the Environment Ministers of EU member states informing them of the EU position in these negotiations. While the Protocol is a result of the Aarhus Convention, and while both the Protocol itself and the conclusions of the Meeting of Parties of the Convention stipulate that the Protocol should follow as closely as possible the governance practice established by the Aarhus Convention, currently the EU is presenting a coordinated

position which is rather different and problematic for environmental NGOs.

In particular, there is a strong resistance to give environmental NGOs the same role in the implementation of the PRTR Protocol as they have in the Aarhus Convention. Instead of using the Aarhus Convention as a model, as was agreed earlier, the EU coordination now seems to find more important to look at another Protocol, under another UNECE Convention, on Water and Health.

Serhiy Vykhryst, Public Participation Campaign of the European ECO-Forum:

Many delegations initially spoke in favor of a stronger PRTR CRM in comparison with the Aarhus Convention one, so that PRTR compliance body would have more powers between the MOPs. This did not come true. Moreover, under the pressure of the EU member states, the draft CRM places NGO rights of nominating candidates to the PRTR Compliance Committee under the scrutiny of

the Parties. In the discussion on the PRTR Rules of Procedure, the EU blocks the participation of NGOs in the Bureau. It is very discouraging that the countries involved in PRTR negotiations disregard the Article 3.7 of the Aarhus Convention which calls on the Parties to promote the application of Convention's principles in other forums.

IMPLEMENTATION IS THE CORE CHALLENGE FOR THE ESD STRATEGY

The UN ECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development is one of the major positive outcomes of the Kiev Conference. What are the challenges that UNECE countries are facing in the ESD process?



Victoria Elias, Chair of the European ECO-Forum Coordination Board:

The major challenge is, of course, implementation. The countries have already appointed responsible officials in charge of developing national ESD

action plans. The Strategy was translated into national languages of the countries and disseminated among stakeholders. Some countries have already established intersectoral ESD Councils at the national level. The indicators for assessment of implementation were developed and approved.

One of the major difficulties is to ensure interaction and efficient mechanisms for co-

operation between environmental and education ministries in all countries. It is also very important to overcome the inadequate understanding of the concept of ESD among officials and to resist attempts to reduce all ESD objectives to environmental education and awareness raising. Another challenge is to ensure stakeholders participation in implementation.

At the international level, a major obstacle for the Strategy implementation is associated with the US position, which seeks to exclude ESD from the

sphere of competence of UN ECE Committee on Environmental Policy and from the EfE process. In addition, the US blocks adequate (budgetary) funding of ESD Strategy implementation. Such situation makes the future of the Strategy implementation and associated long-term plans completely dependent on provision of extra-budgetary funds and commitments of several countries to voluntary support the ESD process in the region and in the UNECE CSD framework.

MAKE SPAC A FACT: A CALL FOR LEADERSHIP IN THE UNECE

By Jeffrey Barber, Integrative Strategies Forum, ECO-Forum SPAC Issue Group

During the 2007 conference of the Environment for Europe process, governments of the industrialized countries, in partnership with civil society and the private sector, have a unique opportunity to provide the region with a new tool aimed at helping achieve the “overarching objective” of sustainable production and consumption (SPAC). Many of us have been eagerly looking forward to the meeting in Belgrade as a time when the UNECE governments would finally commit to “make SPAC a fact.”

Recently, however, things seem to be falling behind.

The Swedish proposal for a Pan-European Framework on Sustainable Production and Consumption raised hopes for the kind of leadership by the industrialized countries called for 15 years ago at Rio. This call was highlighted at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), in its 10-year review of progress since Rio, which pointed out that instead of improving, social and environmental trends had worsened since Rio, this due to increasing production and consumption.

In order to reverse these trends, the WSSD called for a 10-year framework of programmes to support regional and national initiatives promoting sustainable production and consumption. Many assumed the five UN regional commissions, including the UNECE, would play leading roles as part of that framework.

Thus, when the 2003 Environment for Europe Ministerial Declaration said “we underline the importance of the shift towards sustainable production and consumption patterns and encourage regions, sub-regions and countries,” we assumed the UNECE governments were offering to do their part. UNEP and EEA made valuable contribution in its study of SCP in EECCA and SEE

regions. Yet the EfE process so far has failed to deliver the goods.

With the Belgrade Conference our hopes were raised by the original proposal from Sweden and amendment from Ukraine calling for “a Pan-Regional collaborative framework and subregional frameworks” which “could be part of the Marrakech process.” Many of us looked at this proposal as a sign the ECE was finally putting words into action.

Instead of contributing constructive ideas on how the Swedish proposal might be realized, critics steadily chipped away at it, driven by fears of a huge and expensive bureaucratic machine imposing a strait-jacket of constraints on business and consumers. What is left after criticism and compromise is text referring to “the need to consider the development of an initiative within the Marrakech Process.” Ironically, rather than helping clarify the idea and how the ECE might support efforts to achieve sustainable production and consumption in the region, it has made its role even more ambiguous.

Now we face the question of the “Future of Environment for Europe.” We might instead ask what the EfE offers to improve our future? If UNECE leaders cannot demonstrate leadership in addressing the root causes of our environmental problems, why should other regions make this effort? If it is “too expensive” for the most affluent countries to change their unsustainable production and consumption patterns, how can we expect poorer countries to change theirs? Is this the message the UNECE wants to send?

Shouldn't we instead send the message that the industrialized countries are taking the necessary steps to “make SPAC a fact?”

AGRICULTURAL AND OTHER NATURAL DIVERSITY IN EECCA

By Liliانا Josan, ECO-Forum Biodiversity Issue Group, BIOTICA Ecological Society



Nowadays it is already obvious that National Strategies and Action Plans for protection and sustainable use of biological diversity are poorly implemented in the countries of EECCA subregion with respect to practical actions. In the agrobiodiversity sphere, it could be discussed, but it is absolutely clear, that there are no countries that have fulfilled their obligations in relation to Kiev Resolution on Biodiversity, stipulated for 2006. Unfortunately, the aims and priorities written down in those documents are not practically reflected in the tasks and actions of state programmes on rural and agriculture development, and conservational component is weak and little efficient in agrarian and land legislation. It seems that agrobiodiversity is left out of the real focus of decision-makers in politics and economics in the countries of subregion in spite of the fact that countries joined CBD and other nature protection agreements.

In countries where High Natural Value Farmlands (HNVF) are large, HNMF play direct important role for food and economic security. In those countries, where HNMF are little remains of wildlife, they keep the key significance for survival and spreading of organisms vitally important for agricultural ecosystem sustainability, and for artificial agrosystems stabilization and degraded lands' restoration. In all countries of the subregion, HNMFs present main territories used for prevailing in subregion free or semi-free maintenances of agricultural animals, or are the most sustainable and productive ecosystems remainders, used for grazing and haying, among degraded areas. They are the most efficient components of landscapes on the large, especially south part of subregion, that hold back soil erosion development and fertility decrease, surface washing and irretrievable losses from transfer of organic soil matter into streams and seas.

In conditions of weak and uneven economical development, HNMF provide poor people with the most significant life resources. In case of correct legal and economic management, their use could be inexhaustible, efficient and reducing social tensions.

HNMFs are conserved on the background of serious total degradation of farmlands of the analogous ecosystems. Degradation is stronger in poorer countries and regions within the large countries while relative improvements in socio-

economic situation lead to partial normalization. Besides socio-economical causes, deficit of the state legislative and standard regulation is the important factor in all these countries, e.g. legislative regulation of pasture-use is absent.

The unregulated use of natural resources in HNV farmlands becomes more intense in the countries with historically high birthrates, on the background of rural effused poverty and literacy decrease. Traditional skills are mainly lost or ignored.

Legal and illegal felling of the most valuable and ripe plots affected all types of natural wood, shrubby and savanna-like ecosystems, even flood-lands forests in water-protective zones. Imperfection and sometimes anti-ecological character of a legislative base (e.g. lack of sustainable forestry indicators) influences negatively on forest enclaves and large areas. Shadow forest exploitation linked with corruption affects strongly forestlands, destroying remainders of the old-growth forests and large-sized trees crucially important for many rare species. At the same time the European and North American Forest Legal Enforcement and Governance Process is sleeping down after ministerial conference in 2005.

Short-term interests prevail because of general instability in rural economy, traditional neglecting of long-term planning and undeveloped ecologically sensitive markets.

Integrated river basin management is developing in papers mainly, facing the opposite interests while the water biodiversity resources are exhausting in many regions.

In general, threat for region's biodiversity is that vast areas could significantly reduce the importance of reservoir of populations and species, many of which are included in the international and national Red Lists, while other probably are not even described. This reservoir stopped to be inexhaustible for a long time ago.

It is absolutely clear that further development in prevailing direction will result even in bigger degradation. That is why new actions are necessary together with following the existing in Europe experience of economic motivation for protection of HNMF that relates to social and economic groups, and to protected areas. However, the simple imitation of the EU incentives and compensations may have the opposite action.

ETHICAL VALUES BELONG TO THE EFE PROCESS: WHY AND HOW?

by Mikuláš Huba, Society for Sustainable Living (Slovak Republic) and Jiří Dlouhý, Charles University Environment Center (Czech Republic)



Brussels NGOs Declaration (March 2007) demanded to return “sustainability values”, introduced by Josef Vavroušek, during the first Dobříš conference, back to the EfE agenda. It stressed among others their importance for transition to sustainable production and consumption patterns. The other reasons for the return of ethical values compatible with sustainable way of living back to the EfE agenda are:

-to reflect the real importance of these issues for individual as well as social behaviour, that which is extremely relevant to solving environmental and/or sustainability issues.

- to compensate, at least partially, the imbalance between pragmatically and ethically (or values) oriented approaches. The present situation is that the second of the above- mentioned categories is almost absolutely overshadowed by the first one, and marginalized.

- to continue in the process which was started during the Dobříš 1st Pan-European environmental ministerial conference in 1991, and in the frame of NGO activities was expressed in an excellent way in the Luzern NGOs' Memorandum in 1993.

- to attract an important and influential group of NGO activists from all parts of Europe who deal with deep ecology, ethical and values issues, to the “Environment for Europe” (EfE) process.

Thinks are interlinked: What should be the strategy for the future?

Education and media have a growing impact on, and responsibility for, spreading information and public awareness improvement, as well as on the value orientations of people. Values, attitudes, preferences and expectations influence the character of education, media, church, art and other generators of information, inspiration and public awareness. At the same time, values create the background for consumption and production patterns and conversely, the character of production and consumption influences all the behavioral culture of the population, including its value orientations. Our strategic aim for the future should be to support a good reflection of positive

values orientations by public awareness and at the same time to influence, in a positive way, the behavior of decision-makers, entrepreneurs and opinion-makers via cross-sectoral co-operation.

Recommendations for the near future

- to continue with all positive activities started yet and to highlight all positive examples/good practices.

- to promote and to facilitate a public debate on ethical values and principles.

- to put values related issues back to the ministerial agenda.

- to develop a set of relevant activities: research, conferences/seminars/workshops, presentations, mass-media activities, competitions etc., with the aim to highlight the importance of the topic.

- to deal with values related issues in relationship with such issues like the environmental awareness, human priorities/preferences/attitudes, and consumption.

- to preserve and increase social, cultural and economic diversity and possibility of lifestyle choices.

- to educate people about the consequences and impacts of their choices.

- to attract disciplines like axiology, philosophy, psychology, sociology, human ecology and others to deal more with these issues.

- to influence teachers, church, journalists, artists and others to deal more with values issues.

- to implement “ethical impact assessment”.

- to improve transparency, accountability, codes of conduct.

- to establish an Internet conference dealing with values for a sustainable future.

“In the period of increasing tensions between countries and people, we urge a return of human values in the sustainable development agenda...Ethics, like solidarity, equity and sufficiency are essential elements of our concept of sustainability” (ECO-Forum Brussels Declaration 2007).

For more information go to the website of European Eco-Forum's Values Issue Group: www.czp.cuni.cz/values



The Biodiversity Lounge is ready !!!

We invite all Biodiversity-minded people for resting, talking, relaxing and recharging the batteries in our Lounge. You will find interesting events, receptions every evening, a movie corner and – most importantly – nice people who are passionate about protecting our common natural heritage.

CEEWEB, ECNC, ECO-Forum, IUCN and the Countdown2010

Secretariat

A PAN-EUROPEAN YOUTH CALL TO THE MINISTERS OF ENVIRONMENT

Today's youth and the coming generations shall be the ones most affected by the dangers posed by environmental degradation and resource depletion. Therefore, we would like to urge the Ministers gathered in Belgrade to take the following points into consideration:

- We need a **new life style paradigm**: the life style adopted by people in so-called developed countries during the 20th century brought them a great degree of welfare and a high quality of life, but it depleted the resources of the whole planet. We have now understood that such a model is unfair and not sustainable: we are already consuming twice the resources that our planet has to offer. We have the technology and the ethical duty to change this development model.
- **Education for sustainable development** is crucial to create this new life style paradigm. We applaud the ministerial statement that resulted from the Kiev EfE conference. We believe that ESD is a fundamental tool for improving patterns of consumption and production and for conserving biodiversity.
- **Natural ecosystems** underlie the existence and development of our civilization as well as life on the Earth. The main reason for biodiversity loss is that most ecosystem services are not paid for by people. Biodiversity and ecosystem services are essential for human wellbeing.
- **Equity** is an important issue, which we would like to see discussed in this conference. The UNECE region encompasses countries whose living standards, development rates and life styles are extremely different. However, it is in the interest of the whole region to preserve biodiversity. It is our joint responsibility to achieve the 2010 target of halting biodiversity loss.
- **Intergenerational justice** must be a value to keep in mind. It is important that the current political class makes a commitment to preserve the environment for the sake of the coming generations. We need a shift of paradigm, from a merely economy-oriented view of the environment to an ethical view of the planet's resources – these are not "goods" that the current generation can decide to leave their children and grandchildren as an act of generosity, but they are rather a rich patrimony which must be protected and carefully used.
- **Youth is a source of renewable energy**. We do not ask that the Ministers gathered at the EfE conference solve all our problems, we just ask to be given the tools to work proactively for our own future; we ask to be heard and to be given the opportunity to show how much we care for our planet and what we are ready to do for it.

(Extracts from a Pan-European Youth Call developed following the discussion during the European ECO-Forum meeting in March 2007.)

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