



Belgrade – 2007

“Environment for Europe”  
Conference



Friday, 12 October

# NEWSLETTER

Pan-European Coalition of Environmental Citizens Organisations

*Don't spit in the well – you may need to drink from it!*

## HAVE WE BUILT BRIDGES TO THE FUTURE OF THE EFE?

*By Anna Golubovska-Onisimova, MAMA-86, Ukraine*

The ECO-Forum Brussels Declaration called for a more efficient and effective process to be decided at Belgrade 2007, referring to procedural proposals that were not adopted at Kyiv-2003. After hard and sometimes frustrating discussions, the negotiators delivered a draft Ministerial Declaration chapter on the EfE Future with an agreed commitment to reform. The UN ECE Committee on Environmental Policy is invited to develop, by the end of 2008, “in consultations with EfE partners”, a plan for EfE reform concerning: format, focus and priorities of the process and Ministerial Conferences; performance and impact; more active engagement of all stakeholders, in particular the private sector; partnerships; full cost and resources allocation; secretariat arrangements.



One could decide that the suggested priorities of reform are finally giving a positive swing on the “to be or not to be” EfE song, following fundamental political changes in the region over the last decade, such as adaptation of the EU to its enlargement. But there are several uncertainties, which seriously question the purpose of the proposed reform.



ECO-Forum called for further strengthening of the process. Yes, the way it is proposed now, it might be strengthened, but two major concerns make us doubtful about this.

1. Since thematic areas are not addressed in the “Future” chapter, it is not completely clear what will happen to the pan-European SCP 10-year framework programme, PEBLDS, or another alarming priority – water and sanitation. Chapter II of the Declaration refers to the findings of the Belgrade assessment concerning lack of progress made in the region on targets to increase access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation by 2015, as well as a significant reduction in the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010. Both of these problems are directly related to unsustainable consumption and production patterns across the pan-European region. That is why ECO-Forum called for an endorsement of sustainable consumption and production (SCP) in Belgrade as being a major EfE cross-

cutting issue for many years ahead. Instead, we end up with vague language on SCP, and with shifting responsibilities for addressing this major regional challenge out of the UNECE. Hence it is possible that either on-going or new programmes probably will wait until UNECE endorses the EfE plan of reforms in 2009.

2. Will NGOs remain a true partner of a reformed EfE? The unique format of NGO involvement allowed NGOs to take part practically in all events, to submit proposals, interactively react in discussions. In other words, to participate at full scale through preparatory to Ministerial meetings. Now the Declaration says, "we will seek partnerships with civil society", but according to the text, that civil society includes the private sector. Reform will be delegated to the UNECE CEP, which has different rules on NGO participation compared with the special body that manages EfE - the Working Group of Senior Officials. In this light, the Declaration's language about reform to be prepared "in consultation with EfE partners" raises real concern, because it does not necessarily mean participation.

With these uncertainties we have to remain positive. We expect that NGOs will be fully involved in the reform of the EfE process and we are looking forward to the start of the consultations.

## THE MINISTERIAL DECLARATION: THE ENVIRONMENT AND POLITICS

*By John Hontelez, European Environmental Bureau*



This morning, the conference will adopt the Ministerial Declaration. This is most likely a formality, as the negotiations between the representatives of the Ministers finished on Tuesday afternoon, and the draft text has no brackets, meaning that no issues need to be resolved anymore. The European ECO-Forum has been taking part in the preparations for the Declaration from the start, meaning from February this year. Initially we could propose our own text suggestions, and they were reflected in drafts between brackets. Then the US Delegation forced the UNECE Secretariat to stop this practice, using the formalistic argument that only representatives of Ministers should be allowed to contribute to the text. This was an important setback, because now we had to convince delegations with our proposals before they even became visible. The US refuses to consider the EfE process as an innovative way on how to bring governments and civil society organizations closer together. That is why one cannot find this notion of innovation in the Declaration. Just two examples of how the US is looking at the Environment for Europe process and the role of NGOs.

The negotiators are proud that the text is half as long as the Kiev Ministerial Declaration. But for us it means it also has much less substance. From the beginning there was strong pressure, from the US but also from the European Union, to avoid that Belgrade would initiate new programmes, processes. It

was said this conference should be about delivery. And as far as the US was concerned, it also should be the last conference.

In the negotiations, one could identify five different directions. One is the US on its own, not taking part in most of the EfE activities, but nevertheless present to prevent that European countries would agree on new international and regional activities that would create pressure on the global level (such as agreement on an international legally binding instrument to control heavy metals), or create precedents (such as, in the past, the compliance procedure of the Aarhus Convention). Then there is the European Commission, supported by a number of the EU Member States, being of the opinion that EfE should move towards an assistance programme to the EECCA countries, while at the same time also considering the Ministerial Conferences as a political platform where wider issues can be discussed. They get opposition in particular from Russia, which is of the opinion that the process is mainly to be considered a political one, and not a tool for the EU to train EECCA countries. The fourth group is the majority of EECCA countries, which realize the EfE process can be very important for them to mobilize assistance (financial, knowledge, cooperation) for their domestic environmental agenda. And the fifth group, including Norway and Switzerland, and certainly also the ECO-Forum, who want this process to deliver both on the political and the practical level, and be a breeding ground for new pan-European as well as sub-regional initiatives to respond to the main challenges as described in the Belgrade State of the



## WHY ADDRESSING COMPETITIVENESS AND THE ENVIRONMENT?

**John Hontelez, European Environmental Bureau:**

Addressing the perceived contradiction between competitiveness and environment is essential for sustainable development. The paper on environmental policy and international competitiveness, developed for the Belgrade conference, is an excellent one, right on target. Its conclusion that ambitious environmental policies are improving competitiveness and weak environmental policies weaken competitiveness is the one we share completely.

The challenge to bring competitiveness and environment together is not only for low income countries. In Western Europe, and I believe in North America, it is no different. We see in fact a strong and even increasing pressure on politicians, coming from industry federations, to stop developing new environmental policies and to weaken existing ones, with global competitiveness as excuse. However, as this paper points out, there is a difference between competitiveness of individual companies and of countries as a whole. Competitiveness of a country is promoted through a clean environment, in many different ways. And competitiveness of a country is also helped by moving from old-fashioned, energy and resource-intensive production and consumption patterns towards clean and energy efficient production patterns. Focusing on the production and consumption patterns of tomorrow, which necessarily have to be sustainable, can also create, if one is fast enough, interesting new export markets.

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## DOUBLING EFFORTS OR MUTUAL SUPPORT? THE EFE AND THE EUROPEAN ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH PROCESSES



*Every EfE ministerial conference calls for strengthening the links between the “Environment for Europe” process and parallel processes, in particular, Environment and Health. **Sascha Gabizon**, Women in Europe for a Common Future, talks about co-operation of two processes.*

**Newsletter:** *Sascha, it has been a long story of talking about reducing the number of ministerial meetings and making them more effective. Do the EfE and the E&H processes have their clear identities?*

**Sascha:** The big difference is that the region covered by the E&H process does not include the USA and Canada. Another difference is that in the E&H process we have the same ministers of environment that are present

here in Belgrade, together with their colleagues from the health ministries. So if all ministers came to the ministerial we would have more than 100 ministers in the conference.

The E&H countries have committed to implementing a Children’s Environmental Health Action Plan, which has 4 priority goals: reducing health effects from Water and Sanitation, from indoor and outdoor air pollution, from accidents and from chemicals and radiation. Although we see similar themes, there is not much overlap. The E&H process is for the time being non-legally binding and focuses on helping countries to better monitor environmental health effects and share experience. However there is talk about a Children’s Environmental Health Convention.

**Newsletter:** *How could we strengthen co-operation between the two processes?*

**Sascha:** It would have been good to have had a report back from the E&H’s Inter-Ministerial Review (IMR) which took place in June this year in Vienna. There, member states reported on how far they are in the development of their national CEHAPs. WHO Europe received funding from EU DG SANCO to build capacity for national health ministries in 6 of the new EU member states to develop their national CEHAPs. What is important is that stakeholder involvement is a key component of the CEHAPs.

**Newsletter:** *How do you evaluate NGO participation in the two processes?*

**Sascha:** NGO participation in the E&H process started off by looking for inspiration from the EfE process. But in the last years, NGO participation in the E&H seems to have become even more participatory and more productive than in the EfE. One example is the CEHAPE award scheme organized by NGOs for good examples of CEHAP implementation by local and national governments, NGOs, hospitals and schools. 100 applications were received, of best practice to protect children's environmental health. 15 projects were awarded with a financial contribution, sponsored by the Austrian government. The award presentation was given a prominent place in the agenda of the IMR. The NGOs also are given space to report back from the preparatory meetings and probably most importantly, have a seat in the European Environment and Health Committee, which steers the process. The NGO report to the IMR was given in the form of a television news journal, which was said to be very inspiring.

**Newsletter:** *Do you see any common issues to be dealt with by both processes?*

**Sascha:** Absolutely. Where the E&H process identifies great health risks from environmental pollution, the EfE process should focus on developing policies to allow urgent preventive action. For example, the E&H process has identified that life-long health damage from only small doses of hazardous chemicals is a main threat to the health of our citizens. We need legislation in all the region for registering and authorizing chemicals, and the mandatory substitution of those that are carcinogenic, mutagenic, reprotoxic, bioaccumulative and neurotoxic. What we really need is a "REACH" legislation, as has just entered into force in the EU, for all the region. We can build on the work of UNEP with SAICM, but we should move faster.

We see also the need for cooperation on new emerging technologies, such as nanotechnology. These technologies should first have been tested on their long-term health and environmental effects, and the two processes should strengthen each other in developing legislation which implements this.

Finally, the EfE should really be visionary and see how environmental and health disasters can be avoided in the future. One area where it should focus on and receive support from the E&H process clearly is nuclear energy. The health risks of nuclear energy are so immense, and the health risks from uranium mining and radioactive waste disposal cannot be solved. Just for this reason the renewed push for nuclear energy is unethical, and the EfE should lead in policies which move the region out of nuclear and into sustainable energy.

## **SHOULD EFE BE INVOLVED IN GLOBAL PROCESS ON SUSTAINABLE CHEMICALS MANAGEMENT?**



*By Olga Speranskaya, Eco-Accord, Russia*

Chemicals have never been high on the agenda of EfE process. At the same time, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO), environmental contamination by extremely hazardous and toxic chemicals account for about 25-30% of "contributions" to human health problems. Some chemicals, such as persistent organic pollutants are very toxic and pose a high risk to humans and animals even in very small doses.

International actions are taken to meet the goal adopted at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in 2002 to achieve by 2020, "that chemicals are used and produced in ways that lead to the minimization of significant adverse effects on human health and the environment". One of the actions is the adoption of a Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM). SAICM is a process that covers agricultural and industrial chemicals, chemicals at all stages of their life cycle and all aspects of chemical safety: health, labour, social and environment. To achieve SAICM goal a global plan of actions was developed and adopted by governments.

EfE could definitely be involved in SAICM implementation at the regional level. Countries of the pan-European region and especially countries with economies in transition face very serious environmental and health problems associated with toxic chemicals. Huge amounts of obsolete pesticide stockpiles, contamination of soil, water and food products with hazardous substances, lack of public involvement into decision making on chemicals, lack of information exchange on

toxics, inadequate human and financial resources to deal with chemical issues are among the most severe problems faced by these states. Regional, national and international efforts are needed to address these and other numerous issues of toxic impact on human health and the environment in pan-Europe.

SAICM instruments such as the Quick Start Programme (QSP), which aims to support activities in developing countries and countries with economies in transition, can assist the Pan-European region in addressing chemicals problems. In turn, the EfE process known for developing successful public participation and other instruments can provide global efforts with unique regional experience. Pan-European activities in developing a Pollutant Release and Transfer Register (PRTR) Protocol, protocols on POPs and heavy metals can already be regarded as a great contribution to global work aimed at reducing the negative impact of toxic chemicals on human health and the environment.

## WHERE ARE WE ON THE ROAD TO RIGA?

*In June 2008, Latvia will host the Third Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention (MOP-3), the most significant achievement of the "Environment for Europe" process. Mara Silina and Serhiy Vykhryst from Public Participation Campaign of the European ECO-Forum evaluate the state of preparatory activities towards MOP-3 in Riga.*



**Newsletter:** *Are governments doing well in their preparations for Riga?*

**Serhiy:** You know that governments have to prepare their National Implementation Reports (NIRs) by mid-December 2007. Last time, before MOP-2 in Almaty, all Parties to the Aarhus Convention managed to submit their NIRs. So far we do not see the same level of discipline: about 20 countries are not following the reporting Guidance developed by the Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee. We hope that sooner or later all Parties will report, although there might be late submissions.

**Newsletter:** *What are NGOs doing? Will there be alternative reports?*

**Mara:** One thing among many that we as Environmental Citizens' Organisations are involved (or are willing to be involved) is the preparation of the NIRs. There are a number of countries (Austria, Germany, Estonia) where NGOs became involved in the reporting process from the very beginning. Quite often NGOs were the ones to remind the government of the need to prepare these reports. Since we have so many countries that are not very active in NIR development, and some countries have failed to involve NGOs from the very beginning, there are initiatives to develop alternative reports. However, our general position is that we have to secure active and meaningful NGO participation in national reporting before we go for alternative reports. We also plan to prepare and agree on our position (statement/declaration) in the up-coming European ECO-Forum Strategy Meeting on the Aarhus Convention at the end of this year. Of course, more things are to come and information about them will be posted on our website: <http://www.participate.org> and distributed widely using electronic information tools.

**Newsletter:** *When do you expect the Almaty amendment on GMOs to enter into force?*

**Serhiy:** So far, four countries have ratified it. There is an ambiguity in Art.14 of the Convention with regard to how many ratifications are necessary for an amendment to enter into force. At the Working Group of the Parties there was general understanding that the Riga MOP-3 should clarify the issue so that this and future amendments could enter into force at the earliest stage.

**Newsletter:** *The MOP will adopt the long-term strategic plan for the Convention. What are its major strengths?*

**Mara:** The biggest advantage of the long-term strategic plan (LTSP) for the Aarhus Convention is that it takes up issues which were either left out from the body of Convention or unfinished by the time that the Convention was adopted and signed, in 1998. The LTSP sets three main strategic goals for the future: firstly, full implementation of the Convention and its PRTR Protocol; second, increase of the impact of the Convention and the Protocol and, last but not least, further

developments of the Convention provisions and principles. The LTSP should ensure that, among other things, the range of information available to public is widened, the scope of public participation in decisions on GMOs expands beyond site-specific activities and the placing on the market of GMOs, and that provisions of the Aarhus Convention related to public participation in the preparation of plans, programmes and policies, as well as legislation, are developed further. It also should lead to the extension of the range of members of the public and environmental NGOs who have access to administrative and judicial procedures as a general rule.

**Newsletter:** *How are the Parties doing in promoting Aarhus principles in other international forums? Is the convention expanding its influence?*

**Serhiy:** Article 3(7) of the Aarhus Convention requests the Parties to promote Aarhus principles in other international forums dealing with environmental matters. The Task Force on Public Participation in International Forums has finalized its consultation process. The next meeting of the Task Force will review the feedback from governments and NGOs. It is clear already that Almaty Guidelines have made a difference and have had some positive impact on MEAs. However we expected more efforts in this field from the Parties rather than from the Convention bodies. Obviously, we are just at the beginning of the PPIF process. It should be continued and further strengthened.

**Newsletter:** *Thank you both, and let's make sure all of us use the remaining 8 months to prepare timely and effectively in order to make Riga-2008 a milestone for strengthening the Convention!*

## MEANWHILE: PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN RUSSIA IS FADING, NO AARHUS CONVENTION SHIELD

By Alexander Karpov, Expertise Center ECOM, Russia



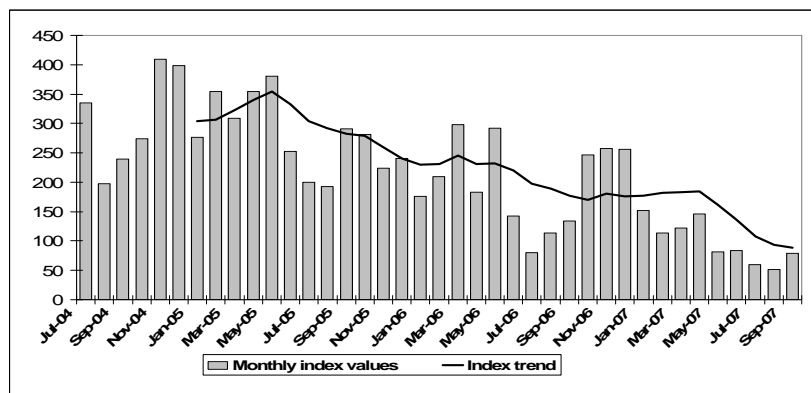
Through the harsh debate over Russia's ratification of the Aarhus Convention in the late 1990s, one of the most popular arguments was about its "excessiveness". According to governmental and NGO opponents, Russia had all the legal provisions in place; second, demands under the Convention were "weaker" and could water down the stricter rules of national procedures. Now it's time to check this argument against reality.

These last years have witnessed the dramatic decline of the "participatory" part of legislation in Russia. A law on access to information was never adopted. The Urban Code had lost paragraphs about proclaiming citizens' rights, and public hearings on land use and spatial planning became more of a formality, than of real consultations. Finally, the demand for obligatory environmental review of projects and plans was dropped, undermining the basis for access to participation and information. While there is clear political willingness for deteriorating legal requirements, no shield is provided through international agreements (Russia did not ratify Espoo Convention either).

As a result, public participation is gradually approaching "zero" level, as people learn how they are becoming disempowered. This trend can be followed through the Index of Public Participation Development, which reflects the level of public interest in various participatory opportunities and procedures.

The Aarhus Convention, above all, is a kind of "insurance voucher" against negative change in governmental policy. Unfortunately, 146 million Russian citizens are not insured!

(More about the Index of Public Participation Development at the web-site of ECOM: [www.ecom-info.spb.ru](http://www.ecom-info.spb.ru))



## HALTING BIODIVERSITY LOSS BY 2010: A KEY ROLE FOR LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

*By Annika Vogt, Biodiversity Policy Officer, Countdown 2010 Secretariat*



The loss of biodiversity is a matter of fact: between 1970 and 2000, species abundance has declined by 40% and the current extinction rate is 100 to 1,000 times higher than the natural extinction rate. Time and life keeps ticking away. After decades of discussions and decisions at the international level that did not lead to the necessary results – to halt the loss of biodiversity – it's time to acknowledge the crucial role local and regional authorities play in nature conservation. As of 2007, the Earth's population is mostly urban. It is the first year that, globally, there are more people living in cities than in rural areas. Because of the high population density in metropolitan areas, high pressure is being put on biodiversity; cities increasingly influence the environment through ecosystems damages, coastal pollution, and climate change. At the same time, people's wellbeing in cities depend to a great extend on the availability of ecosystem services such as recreation options and water supply through parks and healthy rivers.

There are mainly two reasons why efforts on halting the loss of biodiversity have to focus a lot more on the role regions, cities and municipalities play in nature conservation and achieving the 2010 biodiversity target: it's about implementation and communication opportunities. Firstly, especially regional governments and municipalities own and manage huge areas of land and forest – and therefore biodiversity. At the same time they often lack a coherent approach regarding nature conservation activities (biodiversity strategies and action plans) to tackle biodiversity loss as effectively as possible. However, since most biodiversity protection measures are finally being implemented at the local level it is crucial to provide these regions, cities and municipalities with the necessary information and the possibility to exchange best practices.

Besides that, the huge communication potential is obvious: with most people living in urban areas, the opportunity (and necessity) to communicate the challenge of biodiversity loss, its consequences and possible solutions starts at the local level. This is also where the contact between governmental institutions and citizens is the most direct and active – and where behavioural change and understanding can take place and develop more easily.

Acknowledging the important role of local and regional authorities, the Countdown 2010 Secretariat increasingly works with this target group via its "Local and Regional Authorities for Biodiversity 2010" project (LARA 2010). The project – carried out in collaboration with ECNC – European Center for Nature Conservation and ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability – aims at creating a network of committed European model regions which take the lead in effective local biodiversity action and inspire and motivate other authorities to follow the example and live up to their responsibilities. For more information go to [www.countdown2010.net](http://www.countdown2010.net)

## PAN-EUROPEAN ECOLOGICAL NETWORK: A BRIDGE TO A COMMON FUTURE OR A NEW BABYLONIAN TOWER?!

*By Nikolay Sobolev, Biodiversity Conservation Center*



The Pan-European Ecological Network (PEEN) should become the main, if not unique, concrete result of the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy. Due to and because of numerous historic and geographic circumstances, natural areas are unevenly distributed through the pan-European region. Precisely for this reason, PEEN is needed for maintaining the environmental integrity of the region and ensuring sustainability of ecosystem services in all its parts.

Although such logic is not hard to understand, we must view with anxiety the gradual decline in commitment in several countries to contribute to PEEN development. Why is this the case? I believe the real role of native biological diversity to ensure environmental stability is still not taken into



account by decision-makers. A lot of people, including many officials, still consider it possible to replace lost ecosystem services by modern technologies and new materials. Let's be clear: *de facto* we often support such "environmental romantics" when they speak about a "Love for Nature" when they are taking the opposite view to the use of natural resources. Sometimes we hear: "Sorry, we have to be... pragmatic!" In my opinion, the love of nature means a more most pragmatic view of nature, since only nature can provide us with necessary life conditions.

While implementing this approach, we must recognize that natural areas are a very important natural resource – namely, the very foundations of environmental stability. Nobody should ignore the lack of such a resource, but its shared use can make good mutual profit. PEEN is exactly the right tool to organise this in a sustainable manner. Indeed, if there are "financial donors" and "environmental donors" in pan-Europe, let's speak about uniting their capacities in a large pan-European investment project. Not grants and credits but investments should be a milestone for PEEN implementation.

What do we see now? Biodiversity conservation comes closer and closer to being thrown away in the EfE process. The Kyiv targets concerning PEEN are far from being reached. It may become too late to establish PEEN national segments in some countries. We cannot even be sure about the functioning of the Council of Europe's Committee of Experts for the Establishment of PEEN after 2009. As a result, we are likely to face one day spatially divided and functionally incoherent PEEN remnants. In order to avoid such a remake of the Babylonian tower history, we must retain PEEN in the EfE process, to ensure its pan-European coherence and necessary co-ordination with other environmental issues.

## PECE INITIATIVE STRENGTHENS PARTNERSHIPS IN THE REGION

*In Belgrade, ministers have been discussing the importance of partnerships. Practical action-oriented partnerships will be key in delivering environmental improvements across the region. The Newsletter spoke to **James Young** of Partners for Environmental Cooperation in Europe (PECE) about their role in facilitating partnerships in Europe and the EECCA region.*

**Newsletter:** *What is the PECE initiative about?*

**James:** PECE brings together organisations with a wide range of skills and expertise, from the public sector, private sector and civil society, with the aim of contributing to sustainable development in the EECCA region. The PECE network currently comprises of around 150 organisations from the Europe and the EECCA region. This network helps partners to identify project opportunities and partners across the region, share good practice, publicise their activities, broker partnerships, and identify donors.

**Newsletter:** *How involved are the Private Sector in PECE?*

**James:** We have a range of private sector members, from small consultancies to large multinational organisations. Private sector partners have been involved and strongly represented on the PECE steering group, at PECE events, and in projects.



**Newsletter:** *How does PECE benefit EECCA and EU partners?*

**James:** *PECE helps to establish and strengthen links between EECCA and EU organisations, with the reciprocal sharing of skills, expertise, and knowledge. The value that PECE adds is bringing together organisations from different sectors that otherwise might not have worked together.*

**Newsletter:** *What has PECE actually achieved?*

**James:** In our first phase PECE facilitated more than 20 multi-stakeholder projects across the region. Through our projects, events and website we have raised awareness of partnership working across the region, facilitated new partnerships and projects, and created a resource of good practice and information. Our aim in our next phase is to maintain and expand a dynamic network that continues to promote and facilitate partnership working. We will be setting up web based learning groups, organising workshops and events focused on key issues in the EECCA region and Europe, and building the capacity of our members to deliver sustainable development.

**Newsletter:** *How could new partners get involved?*

**James:** They can e-mail [pece@lead.org](mailto:pece@lead.org) with their contact details and we will send them information about joining. They can also visit our website at [www.pece.co.uk](http://www.pece.co.uk)

## BUILDING BRIDGES TO THE FUTURE – WHERE ARE THE NATURAL FOUNDATIONS?

*Press release of the European ECO-Forum, CEEWEB, IUCN and Countdown 2010*

Since its inception, Biological Diversity has been a core issue in the Environment for Europe process. After agreeing a common strategy for the pan-European region (PEBLDS) in 1995, ministers of environment and heads of delegations participating in PEBLDS made a commitment to halt the loss of biodiversity by 2010.

The 2003 Kyiv Resolution provided the foundations of and necessary momentum for biodiversity conservation at the pan-European level. With less than 1,150 days left to reach the target, civil society is greatly concerned that this momentum is being lost and that governments do not demonstrate the required will or take the necessary actions to save biodiversity at national and pan-European levels.

The findings of the Countdown 2010 Readiness Assessment, which reviews pan-European progress also points in this direction. For instance, the report notes that with the exception of some areas, the majority of Kyiv commitments are poorly implemented. Nevertheless, close to 50% of the government and civil society representatives interviewed believe that the targets to a great extent can be reached.

Considering the huge challenges that we face, it is difficult to understand why biodiversity almost slipped off the official Belgrade Conference agenda. It remained thanks to the tremendous efforts of some countries and organizations to conduct a Biodiversity Stakeholders' Roundtable in a special session. The Roundtable provided a platform for an exchange among ministers, NGOs and other stakeholders; however, it is questionable if countries will undertake the substantial additional efforts that are necessary to reach the 2010 biodiversity target. We need to change fragmented institutional structures as well as our values and our sectoral approach to solving problems, redefine well-being and set new development goals for our society and economy.

We should use this crisis as an opportunity to cement the existing foundation and include Biodiversity more explicitly as a top priority for building new bridges for the future.



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