

**Final Statement by European ECO-Forum
at the 6th Ministerial Conference ‘Environment for Europe’
Belgrade, Serbia, 12 October 2007**

The 6th Environment for Europe Conference is almost over. Environmental citizens organisations took part in its preparations and the discussions at the official and side-events. We had major concerns about attempts, of a UNECE Member State that is not even part of the pan-European region to terminate the EfE process. We are relieved to see that this was not followed, and we have confidence that the reform process will be inspired by constructive intentions to make the process better on delivery. But rather than reform, what is needed is real political commitment to ensure follow up of any of the agreements made in the EfE process so far. Without governments that practice what they preach these conferences are still nice networking events, but are not delivering the changes in consumption and production patterns this region really needs.

We reiterate our belief that the EfE process is a unique regional platform for cooperation. This is the only platform where nations within the EU, EECCA and SEE regions can meet to address environmental issues of common value and importance on high political level. But meeting is not enough. Under the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, all countries that are part of the region should show real commitment, with regards to funding, exchange of practices, twinnings, strengthening of national and regional institutions, etc. But we are also convinced that without binding regional and international instruments, which will create level-playing fields in the region, put pressure on all governments, mobilise international organisations and funding, we cannot make real progress.

The conference was about delivery. We still see big differences between many speeches at the conference and the reality at home. The first condition is honesty. It is disappointing to see that, for political reasons, the Ministerial Declaration does not even reflect the results of a very important exercise done under the EfE, Environmental Performance Reviews in EECCA and SEE countries. We refer in particular to conclusions about failing institutions, lack of progress in areas such as waste management, biodiversity, soil protection and land-use, chemical safety, transport and energy efficiency.

At this conference we underlined three issues in particular that we wanted the EfE make progress on:

- Sustainable Production and Consumption
- Biodiversity
- Water

In all three areas we have been disappointed.

- There is no appetite for a pan-european strategy on sustainable production and consumption. We are convinced that such a strategy is necessary to ensure that this

region, with increasingly integrated economies, will in the future respect its ecological footprint and also will not put an unbearable burden on the global environment.

- The future of the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy is uncertain. We have heard many positive words, but no real binding commitment of the EfE governments to make this a real priority of their common work.
- , Ministers are satisfied with existing initiatives on water and sanitation, while it is clear that the Millenium Development Goals are not going to be achieved.

The European ECO-Forum stays on the position that new initiatives and legally binding instruments should be introduced after Belgrade where they can help to make progress. At the same time, to assess by delivery, we call for the monitoring of implementation targets through mid-term reports, assessments and the use of response indicators. We call for harder commitments from the countries participating in the process and warn against a EfE transformation into a purely technical mechanism for capacity building. EfE is a political process and should stay at the Ministerial level to ensure a permanent and strong environmental pillar of Europe's development.

Assuming that the proposed structural change will be aimed exclusively to the strengthening of the EfE process, we are of course concerned about those regions, sub-regions and countries where the environmental policy reform is especially difficult, e.g. countries in transition. The EECCA Environmental Strategy framework, other background documents and guidelines developed by EAP TF do provide intensive knowledge on how to make national environmental policies in countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia delivering improvement. However, more attention to national implementation should be given and we are not convinced that RECs are the solution. We are satisfied with current language of the declaration but propose to think harder on national implementation modalities which could include inter alia EfE implementation inter-ministerial panels with participation of different stakeholders, including NGOs and private sector.

We trust that NGOs as EfE partners will be fully involved in the reform of the EfE process and understand the language "consultation with EfE partners" as NGO participation in a manner we are used to in the EfE process so far.

So, we are looking forward for the consultations to start and for the EfE to continue, to deliver on its existing promises, and to take up urgent environmental issues for the entire pan-European region.