

OUTLINE OF THE “ENVIRONMENT FOR EUROPE” PROCESS REFORM PLAN¹

Prepared by the secretariat in consultation with the CEP Bureau

Introduction

1. The Sixth Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe” (Belgrade, 10–12 October 2007) recognized the important value of the “Environment for Europe” (EfE) process as a unique Pan-European forum for tackling the environmental challenges, and promoting broad horizontal environmental cooperation, as a pillar of sustainable development in the region. The EfE process was considered as an important framework for bilateral and multilateral cooperation in the UNECE region. The added value of the EfE process in its close links with other regional and sub-regional initiatives and processes that helps to integrate environmental and sectoral policies was recognized.
2. The Ministers in Belgrade agreed that the EfE process that had been started in 1991 needed to be reformed. The purpose of the reform was to ensure that it remained appropriate for, and fully aligned with, the needs of the UNECE region and the evolving political and economic landscape as well as the environmental priorities of the region.
3. The Belgrade Ministerial Declaration stated that the reform should focus on, although may not be limited to, the following aspects:
 - (a) The format, focus and priorities of the process and Ministerial Conferences;
 - (b) Evaluating the performance and impact of the process;
 - (c) Attracting the broader interest and more active engagement of all stakeholders, in particular the private sector;
 - (d) Expanding the use of partnerships as vehicles for improving implementation;
 - (e) Leveraging external contributions of expertise, manpower and resources;
 - (f) Assessing ways and means to promote more effectively the UNECE region-wide dimension of environmental cooperation;
 - (g) The full cost of the process and the effective allocation of available resources;
 - (h) Future secretariat arrangements.
4. In order to address the above issues in depth and with due consideration, the Ministers invited the Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) to develop, in consultation with EfE partners, a plan for EfE reform so that it could be endorsed at the political level by the UNECE in spring 2009.
5. The Ministers further decided that the next EfE Ministerial Conference would be organized on the basis of the agreed reform.

¹ The draft outline of the EfE reform plan is prepared at the request by the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP), based on the decisions taken by the Sixth Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe” (Belgrade, 10–12 October 2007), and reflects the discussion held at the fifteenth session of the CEP (Geneva, 21-23 April 2008) on possible elements of the EfE reform plan.

MAIN ELEMENTS OF THE REFORM PLAN

6. The EfE process in the future might be based on general principles and agreements on the operational modalities, as follows:

I. General principles

7. The Ministers in Belgrade agreed that the EfE process should:

- (a) Keep its UNECE region-wide dimension and be open for all interested countries of the region;
- (b) Engage all stakeholders, including the private sector, to strengthen the work in partnership;
- (c) Maintain close links with other regional and sub-regional initiatives, and focus on specific needs that are not entirely addressed by other cooperative frameworks, instruments or processes in the region and its sub-regions;
- (d) Concentrate on results-based, action-oriented activities;
- (e) Be kept open to issues on which the process can provide added value;
- (f) Use delivery as a major criterion of its effectiveness. The CEP should regularly consider and assess progress achieved under the process.

8. A broad consensus emerged from the fifteenth session of the CEP, to complement the above principles with the following ones:

- (a) The ministerial level of the Conferences would be maintained;
- (b) Ministers other than those of the environment would be involved to promote policy integration;
- (c) Specific mechanisms for attracting high-level participants including those from the private sector would be developed;
- (d) A limited number of priorities would be addressed by each Conference;
- (e) Ways and means would be considered to support more sub-regional activities;
- (f) Effective coordination between the regional and sub-regional partners in the region would be enhanced;
- (g) Mechanisms to link the activities under the EfE with global processes and to strengthen cooperation with relevant global international organizations would be explored;
- (h) An effective communication strategy would be further developed covering, inter alia, holding special events for journalists, circulation of electronic newsletters and maintaining a dedicated web-site;
- (i) The outcome documents, whatever their form, would be focused and action-oriented
- (j) Carbon neutrality of the Conferences would be ensured.

II. Preparatory process

9. Materializing the above-mentioned principles calls for streamlining and improving the preparatory process for the Conferences. In this spirit, the following measures could be taken:

(a) Preparations for the Conference would start 18 months in advance. To help identifying a limited number of priorities for the Conference, the substance of a pan-European assessment report would have to be ready by that time;

(b) Out of these 18 months, six will be dedicated to review the key environmental gaps and challenges identified in the assessment and, on this basis, to select the priority topics to be addressed at the Conference. The remaining twelve months would be used for substantive preparatory work related to these topics ;

(c) CEP would act as the convening body for the preparatory process. To maintain the open nature of the preparatory process and the engagement of all stakeholders, the preparations for the Conferences would be discussed by CEP, at its special sessions. The latter would follow the rules and procedures that were applied in the past by the Ad Hoc Working Group of Senior Officials. The CEP, at its special sessions, would consider and approve the official documents for submission to the Conference. Special sessions would be scheduled back-to-back with regular CEP sessions, if appropriate. The CEP Bureau, extended to include major partners, would serve the same role as the Executive Committee for the previous Conferences;

or, alternatively,

The Ad Hoc Working Group of Senior Officials would continue to serve as the convening body for the preparatory process. When appropriate, WGSO meetings would be scheduled back-to-back with the CEP sessions. WGSO would, as in the past, consider and approve official documents for submission to the Conference. The Executive Committee would continue to serve as the Bureau of the WGSO;

(d) Particular efforts would be made to involve private sector' representatives in the preparatory process, including identifying priority issues;

(e) To reduce the amount of documents produced for the Conference, only one official document per selected topic would be prepared by the UNECE, in close cooperation with the EfE partners. In case of absence of in-house expertise in the UNECE on a given subject, another EfE partner would take the lead for preparing the document. The official substantive documentation would thus comprise the pan-European assessment and these issues specific reports;

(f) Interested UNECE member States, EfE partners and other stakeholders could produce other documents featuring their activities and initiatives related to the EfE process that would be circulated as background documents;

(g) The preparatory process would be serviced by the UNECE secretariat;

(h) For the preparatory process of the Conference and the Conference itself the necessary extra-budgetary financial resources would have to continue to be provided to UNECE to supplement the UN core budget resources;

(i) The host country should assume relevant financial commitments.

III. Format of the Conference

10. The periodicity, duration and the organization of discussions at the Conference would be as follows:
- (a) The periodicity of the Conferences would be 4 to 5 years with each Conference lasting for 2,5-3 days;
 - (b) Based on the previous experience, the Conference would start with an opening event. The host country would be given an opportunity to organize additional events highlighting its special features outside the official Conference agenda;
 - (c) The discussions at the Conference would be arranged in an interactive manner and combine various types of sessions, e.g. plenary sessions, roundtables, moderated panel discussions, with a limited number of main speakers from different stakeholders (UNECE member States, EfE partners and major groups, including the private sector). When possible, sessions could be run in parallel;
 - (d) The Conference could be structured around the following main clusters (all of them focusing on the agreed priorities):
 - (i) plenary sessions for the presentation and discussion of the priority topics;
 - (ii) sessions on on-going cooperation and partnerships in the UNECE region and its sub-regions with different stakeholders, including the private sector;
 - (iii) sessions dedicated to announcing new partnerships and initiatives by stakeholders;
 - (iv) a brief concluding session with the presentation (and adoption, if appropriate) of the main outcomes of the Conference;
 - (e) To address issues relevant to the agenda of the Conference in more detail, side-events would be organised by interested UNECE member States, EfE partners and stakeholders;
 - (f) To attract the attention of the private sector, opportunities would be provided for the organization of promotional events such as poster exhibitions, trade fairs, roundtables and environmental award initiatives.

IV. Outcomes

11. Conference outcomes might include:
- (a) Chair's summary;
 - (b) Statements (decisions) by interested Ministers on specific subjects and/or for specific subregions;
 - (c) A possible negotiated outcome, in which case it would be strictly limited to items included in the agenda of the Conference;
 - (d) Soft law documents (e.g. guidelines, recommendations, action plans and strategies);
 - (e) Adoption or decision to start negotiations of new legally binding regional or sub-regional agreements, if relevant;
 - (f) Announcement of pledges by individual stakeholders;
 - (g) Announcement of new initiatives and public-private partnerships launched.