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BATUMI, 8–10 June 2016



Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference

**Batumi, Georgia
8–10 June 2016**

**Report of the Eighth Environment for Europe
Ministerial Conference**



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Report of the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference

I. Introduction

1. The Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference was held from 8 to 10 June 2016 in Batumi, Georgia.

A. Attendance

2. The Conference was attended by delegates from 44 member States of the United Economic Commission for Europe (ECE): Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, United States of America and Uzbekistan.

3. From the United Nations System, representatives of ECE, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, the United Nations Office for Project Services and the World Health Organization (WHO) attended.

4. Representatives of the Executive Committee of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea, the Global Water Partnership, the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe, the Nordic Council of Ministers, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Scientific Information Center of the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination in Central Asia were present.

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5. Representatives of the European Union, including the Council of the European Union, the European Commission, the Delegation of the European Union to Georgia and the European Environment Agency (EEA), also attended.
6. Representatives from Regional Environmental Centres for Central and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Republic of Moldova took part in the meeting.
7. Representatives of financial institutions, including the Asian Development Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the European Investment Bank, the KfW Development Bank and the World Bank, participated.
8. Many other organizations and major groups, including academia, business, local authorities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were also represented.
9. ECE provided the Conference secretariat.

B. Organizational matters¹

10. The Conference was a paperless event for which the host country provided notebooks. Documents of the Conference were posted on the Conference's website.²
11. The European ECO Forum organized and coordinated the participation of NGO representatives. Daily highlights on the work of the Conference was provided by the International Institute for Sustainable Development.³ The Environment for Europe partners organized 7 exhibitions and 33 side events on issues related to the themes of the Conference.
12. The Conference opened with a sand art show on the themes of green economy and clean air. The Prime Minister of Georgia gave an opening address. The Chair of Government of the Autonomous Republic of Ajara welcomed participants to Batumi. The Chair of the Conference, the Minister of Environment and Natural Resource Protection of Georgia, introduced the issues of greening the economy and cleaning the air as the main themes of the Conference. The Ambassador of the Czech Republic in Georgia gave an address entitled "From Dobříš to Batumi: 25 years of pan-European cooperation", and expressed the interest of the Czech Republic in hosting the next conference. Keynote addresses were delivered by the ECE Executive Secretary and the Deputy Executive Director of UNEP.
13. Participants adopted the Conference agenda (ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/1).

¹ The Conference discussions and their results are detailed in a Chair's summary (ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/2/Add.3) and a co-Chairs' summary of the High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries (ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/2/Add.4). To avoid duplication, the present report gives only a brief outline of the Conference sessions.

² Including a list of participants, presentations, keynote addresses and interventions. See www.unece.org/eHnvironmental-policy/environment-for-europe/efe-conferences/batumi-conference/welcome.

³ See www.iisd.ca/unece/efe8/.

II. The environment dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

A. Multilateral environmental agreements, mechanisms, policies and institutions supporting the 2030 Agenda

14. The Conference Chair chaired a session on the environment dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development — moving forward in the pan-European region. The ECE Executive Secretary and the UNEP Deputy Executive Director co-moderated the discussion. Ministers and other heads of delegation of member States, the European Commission, European ECO Forum, the Global Forest Coalition, OECD and the Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe — the discussants — participated in an interactive discussion organized in a “talk show” format. Supporting the discussion were two documents prepared by the secretariat: the final report on the implementation of the Astana Water Action (ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/10); and a mapping of the Environment subprogramme processes and activities that support countries in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/INF/1).

15. The discussants reflected upon the potential role of the multilateral environmental agreements, environmental performance reviews, the Environmental Action Programme Task Force, Regional Environmental Centres and other instruments in supporting and enhancing countries’ efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) and achieve its Sustainable Development Goals. The discussants addressed the Goals in a crosscutting manner as well as by clustering several Goals.

16. Participants shared good examples and reiterated their commitments to the various instruments, thereby inspiring, enabling and encouraging all countries to make progress, as well as identified where further support might be needed or new directions could be explored. The session concluded with the celebration of 20 years of successful implementation of the ECE Environmental Performance Review Programme.

B. Keeping the pan-European environment under review

17. A session on keeping the pan-European environment under review, chaired by the Conference Chair, was organized in two parts: considering progress achieved in establishing the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS); and launching the pan-European regional assessment of the Sixth Global Environment Outlook. A report on progress in establishing SEIS in support of regular reporting in the pan-European region (ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/8) and a summary of key findings and policy messages of the pan-European regional assessment (ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/9) had been prepared to facilitate the discussion.

18. The Minister of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of Belarus addressed the Conference on the topic “from Astana to Batumi: developing SEIS across the pan-European region”, followed by the Executive Director of EEA, who presented “the EEA and milestones in the European Union and European neighbourhood implementation of SEIS”. Delegates watched a video screening with testimonials on SEIS. Also, testimonials were presented as follows:

(a) SEIS in support of air quality, by the Director General of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management of Austria;

(b) SEIS in support of green economy, by the State Secretary of Environment of the Republic of Moldova;

(c) SEIS opportunities, challenges and priorities on the road towards 2030, including monitoring of Sustainable Development Goals, by the Head of the Informational and Analytical Centre for Environmental Protection of Kazakhstan;

(d) SEIS in support of the 2030 Agenda and national reporting on Sustainable Development Goals, by a Senior Policy Adviser of the United States.

19. The ECE Executive Secretary and the UNEP Regional Director together launched the pan-European regional assessment (ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/INF/14). The Global Environment Outlook Regional Coordinator presented the key findings. Subsequently, the key findings were considered in a panel discussion moderated by the Minister of Environment, Waters and Forests of Romania with the participation of the Minister of Environmental and Nature Protection of Croatia, who identified areas requiring more information to support informed action and decision-making, and the State Secretary of Environment of Slovakia, who detailed how Slovakia would use the assessment findings. Several government and civil society representatives intervened from the floor.

20. Delegations reiterated their commitment to establishing a regular process of environmental assessment based on SEIS, also as an efficient tool to advance the 2030 Agenda.

III. Ten years of education for sustainable development

21. A segment on education for sustainable development, co-chaired by the Minister of Education and Science and Minister of Environment and Natural Resources Protection of Georgia, was organized in the form of the High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries.

22. Keynote addresses on the importance of education for sustainable development in building a new society and the successful contribution of the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development in that regard, were delivered by the Minister of Education and Culture of Cyprus, the Minister for the Environment of the Netherlands, UNESCO Assistant Director General for Education (via a video message) and the ECE Executive Secretary.

23. The Chair of the ECE Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development presented the third evaluation report of the Strategy (ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/INF/17), highlighting the key findings.

24. Delegates considered progress made in the implementation of the Strategy during the first 10 years. Several government and civil society representatives intervened from the floor. The High-level Meeting adopted the Batumi Ministerial Statement on Education for Sustainable Development (ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/2/Add.2) and the framework for the future implementation of the Strategy (ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/11). In addition, the Georgian delegation announced the country's intention to discuss with the international community the possibility of developing a new binding agreement on education for sustainable development.

IV. Greening the economy in the pan-European region

25. A session on greening the economy in the pan-European region, chaired by the Swiss State Secretary for the Environment, was organized in the form of a plenary meeting followed by two parallel round-table discussions. An official substantive document on greening the economy in the pan-European region had been prepared by the secretariat jointly with UNEP and in consultation with partners (ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/4) to

facilitate the discussion, in addition to information documents prepared by the secretariat and partners.

26. Keynote addresses were given by: Bertrand Piccard, Swiss aviation pioneer, Solar Impulse pilot and UNEP Goodwill Ambassador, by audiovisual link; the Secretary General of the Club of Rome; the Minister of Environment, Waters and Forests of Romania; and the Minister of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of Belarus. The delegates watched a video providing testimonials on green economy.

27. The Conference endorsed the Pan-European Strategic Framework for Greening the Economy (ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/6) presented by the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Environment of Portugal, on behalf of the Chair of the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy. The Conference launched the Batumi Initiative on Green Economy (BIG-E) (ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/13), which remained open for joining, in a festive ceremony. A list of possible green economy actions (ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/INF/21) had been prepared to serve as an inspiration for interested stakeholders in preparing their voluntary commitments for the BIG-E. The plenary concluded with a video from the European ECO Forum highlighting green economy issues.

28. Participants in the parallel round tables discussed the same agreed issues related to greening the economy. The first round-table discussion was co-moderated by the Minister of Environment and Nature Protection of Croatia and the ECE Executive Secretary; the second was co-moderated by the Minister of Environment, Waters and Forests of Romania and the UNEP Regional Director.

V. Improving air quality for a better environment and human health

29. A session on improving air quality for a better environment and human health, chaired by the Minister of Environment of Lithuania, was organized in a similar manner to the green economy session. To facilitate the work, the secretariat in consultation with partners had prepared a substantive document on improving air quality for a better environment and human health (ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/5). In addition, the work was supported by a summary for policymakers of a scientific assessment report prepared under the ECE Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution (ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/12) and seven messages on air pollution for ministers (ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/INF/2). Participants watched a sand art video on the theme of improving air quality for a better environment and human health.

30. Keynote addresses were given by the Minister of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of Belarus, the Deputy Mayor of Tbilisi and the Director of the WHO Regional Office for Europe.

31. The Conference endorsed the Batumi Action for Cleaner Air (ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/7) presented by the Environment Ambassador of Sweden. The Conference and children from Batumi launched the initiative, which remained open for joining, in a festive ceremony.

32. Participants in parallel round tables discussed the same agreed issues related to improving the air quality. The first round table was co-moderated by the President of the German Environment Agency and the Director of Environment of OECD; the second was co-moderated by the Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources of Ukraine and the UNEP Regional Director.

33. On the last day of the Conference, the Chairs of the two thematic sessions reported the main findings of the discussions to the plenary.

VI. Other initiatives, agreements, pledges or policy tools related to Conference themes

34. The ECE Executive Secretary signed the Joint Statement in support of the Efforts on Reforestation and Afforestation in the Aral Sea Basin between ECE and the Executive Committee of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea.

VII. Adoption of the Conference outcomes

35. The Chair of the Conference presented the draft Ministerial Declaration submitted to the Conference by the Committee on Environmental Policy. The Ministerial Declaration: “Greener, cleaner, smarter!” was adopted by acclamation (ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/2/Add.1). A number of delegations intervened from the floor.

VIII. Closure of the Conference

36. The Chair of the Conference presented the Chair’s summary of the Conference. The ECE Executive Secretary made closing remarks. The Chair thanked delegates for their fruitful and constructive work and expressed confidence that the commitments made would contribute to improving the environment and to implementing the 2030 Agenda. The Chair thanked the interpreters for their work and closed the Conference.

37. The Conference thanked the Committee on Environmental Policy for its excellent preparation of the event. It also thanked the ECE secretariat for a successful and smooth organization of the Conference. In particular, the Conference expressed its gratitude to the Government of Georgia for having hosted the event, and for the warm hospitality extended.
