

Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference
(8–10 June 2016, Batumi, Georgia, Sheraton Hotel)

High-level meeting of Education and Environment Ministries

Wednesday, 8 June 2016, 4.30–6 p.m.
Batumi, Georgia, Sheraton Hotel

Agenda item 3. Towards a new society: 10 years of education for sustainable development

INTERVENTION OF ECO-FORUM

Dear ministers, ladies and gentlemen,

In my short intervention I would like to remind you about the history. In 1991 I was a member of the small organizational team of the first conference in Dobříš and cooperated with Josef Vavroušek for several years.

First ideas of the EfE process were initiated as far back as 1968 when Josef Vavroušek participated in a student expedition to deliver medical aid to Lambaréne, traveling by truck through whole Africa. He had the opportunity to see this continent from the inside which inspired him - as a technician - with ideas of sustainable development and also to ideas of promoting human values. Vavroušek developed philosophical insight into systemic issues of SD and these deep, complex and overarching thoughts were an important impulse for rethinking educational discourse in the following years.

Education is definitely a very important part of the path to SD from a practical point of view, and plays an important role in policies on all levels - most of the 169 targets of SDGs require education as a tool for realization. In the past decade, it has been recognized as a driving force for sustainability by international organizations like UNESCO UN ECE among others. Bottom-up initiatives are core elements of these processes, and numerous networks of higher education institutions, NGOs, and other stakeholders to support transition in different fields of education have been established. Consequently, civil society actors and governments share the same interest in promoting sustainability in and through education, and thus need to support each other. We as NGOs are already working hard on the implementation of SDGs among others through educational innovation, and offer the results of our work to governments. However, the challenge facing many organizations and associations (including UN ECE and of course NGOs) are the unsustainable and dwindling financial resources for these activities, despite the current climate of economic growth.

Besides practical results, NGOs provide critical reflection on the field of education for sustainable development (and others). In some cases, they have recognized the considerable gap between what has been reported by state administration particularly at international level, and everyday reality. ESD processes which have only started are still

not supported by adequate mechanisms especially for assessment - hence systemic implementation of ESD principles at national level is still only declarative or in fact missing.

Cooperation among different social actors is often stressed as a prerequisite for successful ESD. As a member of the academic community I have to mention the importance of cooperation between NGOs and the academic sector. There are many good examples of cooperation between universities - for example the European wide project "University educators for sustainable development" where 54 universities and NGOs participate on the development of competences of university educators. This project was launched by the COPERNICUS Alliance European Network on Higher Education for SD which will work on the implementation of the project results in long term.

There is another important message from our discussions - educational materials funded by public money should be publicly accessible with open access licensing. All steps in promoting open science and civic science are welcomed.

Dear ministers, ladies and gentlemen, let me once more express the support of the European Ecoforum to the work being achieved at this Conference and beyond and we look forward to seeing you in the Czech Republic at the next EfE.