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Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference

Nicosia, 5–7 October 2022

Report of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference

Addendum

Co-Chairs' Summary of the Conference

I. Introduction

1. The Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Nicosia, 5–7 October 2022) was co-chaired by the Minister for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment of Cyprus and the Minister for Education, Sport and Youth of Cyprus.

2. The Conference was opened by the President of the Republic of Cyprus Mr. Nicos Anastasiades, who, in his welcoming address, emphasized the importance of the Conference for sustainable development in Europe and noted that the Conference was the first event of such magnitude to take place in the Mediterranean region. The selected themes of the Conference addressed major challenges. It was emphasized that infrastructure development should go hand-in-hand with the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The second theme of the Conference was circular economy in the tourism sector – a sector that should be developed with as little impact as possible on the environment, reducing energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions and waste. The Conference also dealt with another topic of paramount importance – education for sustainable development. All shared a common responsibility to work to achieve sustainable development in order to meet the needs of the younger generation, namely, to live on a planet that would offer them prosperity and the chance to live in harmony with nature. The speaker expressed the hope that the deliberations during, and the declaration adopted as a result of, the Conference would guide policies and actions at the national, regional and international levels.

3. The Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) noted the importance of the Environment for Europe process in providing a forum for closer regional cooperation on environmental issues that delivered important products and outcomes, such as the ECE Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Programme, the Environment Performance Review Programme, the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development, several regional multilateral environment agreements, the Batumi Action for Cleaner Air and the Batumi Initiative on Greening the Economy. Unfortunately, the war in Ukraine had put regional cooperation mechanisms such as the Environment for Europe process to the test, posing the challenging question of whether the region would be able to pursue its common goals, be they global or regional, sectoral or cross-cutting. The

Nicosia Conference and the Environment for Europe process could address these questions by bringing people and countries together.

4. The Acting Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), in her welcoming speech, referred to the Stoic school of philosophy, which had been founded on a belief in the importance of nature, and, among other things, of living a simpler and more virtuous life. The pan-European region had undergone profound socioeconomic and political changes that had put immense pressure on the environment. That had resulted in overfishing, deforestation and increased levels of pollution and waste, putting at risk the health and well-being of the region's inhabitants. The speaker concluded that the application of circular economy principles and nature-based solutions could transform the sectors that were responsible for most of the harm, including infrastructure and tourism.

5. A representative of youth spoke about a life-changing accident that had forced her to use a wheelchair for the past three years. Simple things that she had previously taken for granted were currently beyond her reach. However, the accident had changed her perspective and the way she perceived life and what was truly important. Modern lifestyles and the related burden on the environment were leading to the devastation of the planet, with everyone bearing witness on a daily basis to the changes caused by climate change, for example. The speaker stated that individuals should take personal responsibility for saving the planet and that it was imperative to move forward more decisively and bravely.

II. From Dobris to Nicosia: 30 years of environmental cooperation in the pan-European region

A. Establishment of a pan-European Shared Environmental Information System

6. The Chair of the session invited participants to refer to the Final review report on the establishment of the Shared Environmental Information System (ECE/NICOSIA.CONF/2022/8).

7. The Acting Director of the UNEP Europe Office, in her moderating role, highlighted the longstanding successful cooperation of ECE, the European Environment Agency (EEA), UNEP and countries in establishing, during the past decade, the Shared Environmental Information System in Europe and Central Asia to inform environmental policymaking. She then invited the Chair of the ECE Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment to present the achievement of establishing a Shared Environmental Information System and a representative of EEA to speak about future directions, building upon the establishment of the System.

9. The representative of EEA emphasized the importance of a consistent baseline and environmental assessment of the whole European region. He spoke about the five pan-European assessment reports developed under the lead of EEA in the past.¹ He emphasized that open, easy and structured access to data was one of the main drivers determining the use and impact of environmental information, the quality of indicators and assessments and the reliability of decisions at all levels. The speaker also underlined the close cooperation and synergies that were ensured with various international partners, primarily with ECE and UNEP, and that the joint work contributed to the implementation of the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) and the reporting obligations of the pan-European region countries.

¹ See https://unece.org/pan-european-environmental-assessment#accordion_1.

10. Regarding future needs and directions, the speaker spoke about the ambitious objective of implementing the European Green Deal with its underpinning initiatives and the Digital Agenda for Europe, both supported by a comprehensive European Union data strategy. He then noted that the growing volume and diversity of data required the development and use of new methods and technologies, such as big data and artificial intelligence, supported by a modernized information technology infrastructure based on cloud and edge computing. The goal was the management and sharing of environmental information in an open and accessible manner. The European Union Copernicus Programme was given as an example. Furthermore, the current EEA strategy for the period up to 2030 involved adopting a systemic approach whereby thematic priorities, digitalization and access to environmental and related information and cooperation closely interacted and complemented each other throughout all the key strategic objectives. The speaker emphasized the EEA strategic objectives of making full use of the potential of data technology and digitalization, which represented a confirmation of the principles of the Shared Environmental Information System and the work carried out in the past by EEA jointly with ECE and UNEP.

B. Relay from Dobris to Nicosia of all hosts of the Environment for Europe Ministerial Conferences

11. The Minister for the Environment of Czechia noted that the Environment for Europe process was marking its thirtieth anniversary. Organized in times of abrupt geopolitical change, the First Environment for Europe Conference (Dobris Castle, then-Czechoslovakia, 21–23 June 1991) had set the ambitious goal of bringing East and West together and had focused on three components: institutional; programmatic; and ethical. Thirty years on, the process had brought very good results, spanning from various initiatives and strategies to assessments and binding agreements. The speaker noted that the Environment for Europe process was also adapting to emerging challenges.

12. The representative of the European ECO-Forum expressed concern that current economic development aspirations in Europe in the form of economic integration, free trade, and the establishment of the Single Market and the European Economic Space (later renamed the European Economic Area) might further deteriorate the environment. Countries of Europe should demonstrate their real intention by moving beyond mere statements. Access to information and decision-making in environmental matters for the public remained insufficient, particularly in countries of Eastern and Central Europe. European countries should also: ban exports of hazardous waste to non-European Union countries; improve energy efficiency; introduce a moratorium on the use of nuclear power plants; and reassess the value of nature and change education systems.

13. The State Secretary of the Ministry of Environment of Slovakia stated that the Dobris Conference had prompted the creation of EEA, which, in turn, had introduced new monitoring mechanisms, including a European information and monitoring system, and regularly produced comprehensive environmental assessments for the pan-European region. However, European nature continued to deteriorate owing to poorly thought-out policies related to motorway construction, power plants, extraction industries and commercial tourism, among other things. Despite the efforts of the European Union, the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem degradation continued.

14. The State Secretary for the Environment of Switzerland said that Switzerland had always strongly supported the “Environment for Europe” process, hosting the Second Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Lucerne, Switzerland, 28–30 April 1993), which had endorsed the Elements for a Long-Term Environmental Programme for Europe that identified policies for common high standards. That had led to the establishment of programmes and legal instruments – including national environmental performance reviews, pan-European environmental assessment reports – and public participation. In addition, the Lucerne Conference had endorsed the Environmental Action Programme for Central and Eastern Europe, which had progressively evolved to include the countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia.

15. The Co-Chair of the GREEN Action Task Force, OECD, stated that the Task Force was a unique cooperation platform for Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, development cooperation partners and the countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. It provided a venue to develop and implement policies that improved environmental quality and social well-being, while creating opportunities for strong economic growth and decent jobs in the region. The Task Force generated a large number of very tangible results on the ground, including: the development of ambitious environmental and green economy strategies and policies; and the modernization of regulatory and economic instruments for more efficient and effective environmental management. The Task Force also helped to build capacities of institutions in the region for reducing environmental risks and mobilizing finance for green investment.

16. The Minister for Environment and Water of Bulgaria stated that, at the Third Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Sofia, 23–25 October 1995), ministers had underlined the urgent need for the further integration of environmental considerations into all sectoral policies, so that economic growth took place in accordance with the principles of sustainable development.

17. The Deputy Minister for Environment of Lithuania, speaking on behalf of the Bureau of the Aarhus Convention, stressed the importance of the adoption of the Aarhus Convention at the Fourth Environment for Europe Conference (Aarhus, Denmark, 23–35 June 1998). The Aarhus Convention linked environmental rights and human rights, government accountability and environmental protection, and acknowledged that sustainable development could be achieved only through the involvement of all stakeholders.

18. The Minister for Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of Ukraine highlighted that the Fifth Environment for Europe Conference (Kyiv, 21–23 May 2003) had adopted and opened for signature three multilateral environment agreements: the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers to the Aarhus Convention; the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment to the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention); and the Protocol on Civil Liability and Compensation for Damage Caused by the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents on Transboundary Waters to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) and to the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents (Industrial Accidents Convention). The speaker highlighted that the aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine had caused significant damage to the infrastructure and ecosystems of the country. Despite those calamities, Ukraine continued to implement its commitments under the environmental agreements, and to develop and approve national laws, including a law on the national pollutant release and transfer register.

19. The Deputy Secretary General of the Ministry of Environment of Estonia spoke about the importance of the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment to the Espoo Convention. The Protocol had proved to be a valuable international treaty in ensuring the early integration of environmental, including health, considerations into the development of plans and programmes. Consequently, a high level of protection of the environment was provided also in terms of developing sustainable infrastructure.

20. The State Secretary of the Ministry of Environmental Protection of Serbia emphasized that the Environment for Europe process was a major environmental process in the region that had resulted in the adoption of several environmental instruments. It also served as an environmental pillar for sustainable development in the region, as well as providing a platform for identifying and addressing emerging environmental challenges. The speaker urged countries to integrate environmental issues into all sectoral policies to ensure economic growth based on sustainable development principles.

21. The Deputy Minister for Ecology and Natural Resources of Kazakhstan stated that Kazakhstan had hosted the Seventh Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Astana, 21–23 September 2011) with two themes in focus: green economy; and preservation of water-related ecosystems. She also stated that green economy remained a key tool for building back better and greener. Kazakhstan had launched the Green Bridge Partnership Programme,

which aimed to join the efforts of countries in transition to green growth through mutual exchange and partnership.

22. The Deputy Minister for Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia acknowledged that all the Environment for Europe Ministerial Conferences were remarkable in their unique directions. That was also true for the Eighth Conference (Batumi, Georgia, 8–10 June 2016), which had focused on two themes: greening the economy in the pan-European region: and, improving air quality for a better environment and human health. The Conference had also launched two initiatives: the Batumi Action for Cleaner Air; and the Batumi Initiative on Greening the Economy. Six years into the successful implementation of both initiatives, member States had demonstrated a serious commitment to addressing air quality challenges and promoting the green agenda.

III. Environment in the pan-European region: visions of 2030 and beyond

A. Pan-European environmental assessment: key messages to guide environmental action until 2030 and beyond

23. The Chair of the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy launched the Seventh Pan-European Environmental Assessment and presented key findings, including the current state of affairs and trends in the region. She summarized recommendations and urgent measures to be taken by member States to strengthen environmental governance. The assessment report, which was indicator-based, provided an environmental assessment of the pan-European region and offered a foundation for improving environmental policy, identifying emerging issues and enhancing the science-policy dialogue.

24. The Chair then summarized key findings, including that greenhouse gas emissions and waste generation were still rising in the region and that the status of ecosystems remained a concern that needed to be urgently addressed. She also provided a brief overview of suggestions and recommendations provided by the assessment, including the specific call to: use nature-based solutions; foster participation in multilateral environmental agreements; develop coherent policies, including on sustainable infrastructure and tourism and shifting to a circular economy across the whole value chain of the economy. The crucial role of reliable, timely and comparable data and indicators applied across the region and the need to improve the knowledge base, including for emerging policy themes, was highlighted.

25. The assessment launch was followed by a panel discussion on the outcomes of the pan-European regional assessment, during which representatives of the Netherlands (video intervention), Cyprus, Georgia and Uzbekistan presented actions and initiatives their countries were taking in waste management and circular economy, sustainable tourism and circular economy, decarbonization and addressing climate change and in reversing or reducing biodiversity loss, respectively.

26. The Minister for the Environment of Netherlands (video intervention) emphasized in her response on the findings of the pan-European environmental assessment that waste generation was still rising in the region and that circular economy was not a “nice to have” but a “must have”. She referred to tools such as the Single-Use Plastics Directive² and the introduction of extended producer responsibility in the textile industry in the Netherlands in support of a transition to a circular economy.

27. The Deputy Minister for Tourism of Cyprus echoed the findings of the assessment and the importance of preventing marine pollution through effective and sound marine spatial planning. He referred to initiatives such as the “Plastic Free Beach Project” or the “Zero

² Directive (EU) 2019/904 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 June 2019 on the reduction of the impact of certain plastic products on the environment, *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 155 (2019), pp. 1–19.

Waste Beach” project in Cyprus, which served as good practice examples that could be replicated in other countries.

28. The Deputy Minister for Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia presented the vision of and actions taken by her country to decarbonize the economy. She highlighted the importance of transforming the energy sector and significantly increasing the share of renewable energy as key strategic directions for the country. Tax exemptions for electric and hybrid vehicles and the adoption of a national energy efficiency action plan were actions taken by the country to support decarbonization and the Sustainable Development Goals.

29. The Deputy Chair of the State Committee for Ecology and Environmental Protection of Uzbekistan presented national actions and ambitious targets to reverse and reduce biodiversity loss and to ensure environmental protection overall – one of the areas highlighted in the assessment that required urgent action in the region. Measures on afforestation were among the actions referred to in that regard.

30. The Chair of the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy then summarized the panel discussion and reminded participants that if all were truly concerned, aware and ambitious, then the region would be successful in reversing environmental loss and protecting nature and the future of humankind.

31. She expressed the need to keep the environment in the region under regular review and expressed the hope that the next pan-European environmental assessment would be developed with the support of additional organizations and partners, including EEA.

B. Advancing environmental performance in the region and beyond and launching the fourth cycle of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe environmental performance reviews

32. The Minister for Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment of Cyprus chaired the discussion on agenda item 3 on advancing environmental performance in the region and beyond and launching the fourth cycle of ECE environmental performance reviews (EPRs). The Chair of the ECE Expert Group on EPRs (Estonia) moderated the discussion.

33. The segment commenced with a video showing the tangible results of implementing EPR recommendations by reviewed countries, showing that EPRs were a powerful tool for decision-makers. Actions by countries included: improving environmental governance and advancing sustainable development; producing indicator-based environmental assessments; improving air quality and enhancing its monitoring; protecting biodiversity and natural areas and increasing the number of protected areas; practising organic farming; treating wastewater and increasing the number of wastewater treatment plants; banning single-use plastic bags and raising awareness on plastic pollution; remediating dumpsites; introducing education for sustainable development for children, youth and adults and promoting environmental protection; promoting electric cars and energy efficiency; and making green technical jobs accessible to women. Acting upon EPR recommendations resulted in concrete changes for people and the environment.

34. The moderator highlighted the main achievements of the ECE EPR Programme for over 25 years in support of countries’ efforts to improve their environmental governance, management and performance, thus contributing to enhanced environmental protection and increased resilience. Since 2011, EPRs had addressed issues related to greening the economy and financing environmental protection, and education for sustainable development. Since 2017, EPRs had looked into country developments to achieve relevant Sustainable Development Goal targets. A total of 57 reviews had been carried out under the ECE EPR Programme and 30 countries had benefited from a review of their environmental performance. Recommendations resulting from EPRs had an average implementation rate of 68 per cent, albeit varying from country to country. The number of Sustainable Development Goal targets addressed in each EPR also varied, from 40 to 93, depending on the content.

35. The Chair of the Committee for Environmental Protection under the Government of Tajikistan highlighted the role of EPRs as a powerful tool to support policymakers and civil society in their efforts to improve environmental management and promotion of sustainable development in Tajikistan. He emphasized the importance of EPRs in supporting glacier protection and sustainable water resource management in the country, thus contributing to water availability in the entire Central Asian region. Key achievements included increasing protected areas in the country, carrying out measures on climate change adaptation and mitigation, and enabling free online access to environmental legislation. The country had developed a road map to facilitate the implementation of EPR recommendations, which had proved to be an efficient approach to enhancing implementation coherence and its rate. The country had requested that a fourth EPR be undertaken by ECE.

36. The State Secretary for the Environment of Switzerland recalled the inception of the ECE EPR Programme at the Second Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, and stressed the valuable contribution of EPRs to mainstreaming environmental considerations into sectoral policies and providing focused and tailor-made recommendations to countries in the ECE region and beyond. She reflected on the effectiveness of EPRs in giving reviewed countries the flexibility to address specific national environmental concerns, and highlighted the nexus approach offered in the fourth cycle, with the aim of developing recommendations for increased policy coherence. She praised the focus of the fourth cycle of EPRs on assisting reviewed countries in implementing EPR recommendations through capacity-building activities and donor support. She reiterated the commitment of Switzerland to continue contributing financially and in-kind to the ECE EPR Programme.

37. The State Secretary for the Environment of the Republic of Moldova highlighted the value of EPRs for improving environmental protection in her country and as an effective and practical policy tool supporting the achievement and monitoring of Sustainable Development Goals. The implementation of EPR recommendations had resulted in the establishment of an environment agency and the strengthening of environmental capacities and institutions. Also, reforms to establish inclusive, transparent and efficient environmental governance and decision-making, and to enhance public participation, were ongoing. In addition, steps were being taken to implement sustainable solutions in the energy sector, integrate the European Green Deal policy and measures to address climate issues, develop an effective system of environmental financial instruments and promote circular economy. The State Secretary underlined the good timing of the fourth cycle EPRs, including options for enhanced review of circular economy, gender and the environment and environmental human rights, also in support of achieving Sustainable Development Goals until 2030. The Republic of Moldova requested ECE to carry out a fourth EPR of the country.

38. The moderator introduced a poster on the EPR Programme, showing four mountains representing the four cycles of ECE EPRs. The countries reviewed during the third cycle EPRs and those eligible for an EPR, were represented as mountaineers carrying their national flags to the summit. The countries and organizations contributing to the EPRs with expertise and financially had their tents with flags and emblems at base camps at the foot of the mountains. Representatives of the reviewed and donor countries and organizations came up to the podium and signed the poster, thereby launching together the fourth cycle of ECE EPRs for an improved environment for the benefit of all. The segment concluded with an EPR family picture taken in front of the poster.

IV. Third High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries³

39. The Third High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries, co-chaired by the Minister for Education, Sport and Youth and the Minister for Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment of Cyprus, was held within the framework of the Nicosia

³ For more details on the High-level Meeting, see the Co-Chairs' summary (ECE/NICOSIA.CONF/2022/2/Add.4).

Conference with a view to adopting a new framework for the implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development up to 2030, focusing on the special role that education had to play in addressing the unprecedented challenges faced currently by humankind.

40. At the conclusion of the Meeting, ministers and heads of delegation adopted the framework for the implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development from 2021 to 2030 (ECE/NICOSIA.CONF/2022/10) and the Draft Nicosia Ministerial Statement on Education for Sustainable Development (ECE/NICOSIA.CONF/2022/L.2), providing a way forward for the implementation of the Strategy in the region up to 2030.

V. Greening the economy in the pan-European region: working towards sustainable infrastructure

41. The Chair of the thematic segment, the Deputy Minister for Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia opened agenda item 5 and highlighted that the segment would address: infrastructure and sustainability: challenges and opportunities; practice and experience in sustainable infrastructure in the region; and, measuring sustainable infrastructure in the region. In addition, a thematic document had been prepared by the Committee on Environmental Policy with support from ECE and UNEP (ECE/NICOSIA.CONF/2022/4).

42. The State Secretary of the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection of Germany gave a key note speech highlighting the danger of losing sight of the global environmental crises – climate change, biodiversity loss and the pollution of the planet with waste and chemicals – and of the need for an integrated policy approach that tackled several crises at once and that made the economy and society more resilient. Sustainable infrastructure was a key element for building resilience. The expansion of renewable energy, energy efficiency and power distribution were important elements in that regard. Additional overarching challenges concerned adaptation to the impacts of the climate crisis. Different measures were needed in different places and municipalities were key actors. The Federal Ministry supported efforts in that regard. The transport sector also required particular attention due to its high level of investment and high emissions. Careful planning was needed to assess what transport investment was most beneficial to the public. She highlighted that truly sustainable infrastructure was a work in progress and much remained to be done.

43. The Acting Deputy Executive Director of UNEP gave a keynote speech, stating that most of the infrastructure in ECE member States dated back to the post-war period and required renovation. That situation should be a boost to countries knowing that, every euro spent on sustainable renewable infrastructure could generate four euros in return. She noted that the need to transform infrastructure was gaining momentum in Europe, with frontrunning countries and new funding opportunities appearing. She recommended prioritizing investment in sustainable infrastructure, given that, investing in infrastructure that put nature at its heart could generate \$3 trillion in additional annual revenues by 2030 and create 117 million new jobs in the next eight years. There was a need to learn from the past, respect nature and support investments in sustainable infrastructure that put nature first. She highlighted that education must make all relevant actors aware that progress would not be possible unless it was sustainable. There were currently promising signs, which needed to be nurtured because the situation regarding sustainable infrastructure development was far from the desired goal.

44. There were subsequently statements and interventions by representatives of Czechia (speaking on behalf of the European Union and its member States), the European Commission, Ukraine, Cyprus, North Macedonia, Finland, Lithuania, Greece, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean, the OECD Environment Directorate, Azerbaijan, the Republic of Moldova, Armenia and the United States of America.⁴ Subsequently, two round tables were

⁴ Representatives of countries and organizations are listed in the order in which they took the floor.

held highlighting the crucial role of infrastructure for the Sustainable Development Goals and where participants reflected on what was essential for sustainable and resilient infrastructure. The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) Principles for Resilient Infrastructure⁵ and the Resilient Infrastructure Stress Test were highlighted as essential aspects in enhancing the resilience of infrastructure. The moderators then asked what the pressing challenges to infrastructure sustainability in countries were.

45. The key messages and aspects considered as essential for enabling and implementing sustainable infrastructure, which were presented by the Chair during the Conference, were the following:⁶

Current situation and challenges

- Because of the war in Ukraine and after the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, there was a danger of losing sight of the global environmental crises – climate change, biodiversity loss and the pollution of the planet with waste and chemicals. There was a need for solutions that tackled several crises at once and that made the economy and society more resilient. Sustainable infrastructure was a key element for building resilience.
- Learning from the past and respecting nature would be important.
- Sustainable infrastructure was often part of carbon neutrality strategies and policies in countries.
- Current “brown” infrastructure had a large environmental footprint, including on biodiversity.
- Infrastructure was responsible for 60 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions. Improvements were therefore urgently required.
- Extreme hydrological events were a reminder that a more sustainable economy and infrastructure were needed.
- The role of impact assessment tools would be equally important for greening the massive infrastructure reconstruction efforts that would be needed in Ukraine.
- Impact assessment could also be used for the evaluation of environmental damage resulting from conflict.
- Nature-based solutions were underused and could be a low-cost measure in many projects. The use of such solutions should be more frequently promoted.
- An inclusive green economy must stress the importance of integrated economic, social and environmental policies that embraced opportunities for growth while avoiding placing unsustainable pressure on the quality and quantity of natural resources.
- There were challenges in collecting relevant data and monitoring to support the switch to sustainable infrastructure. Correct information, including maps, was crucial for sustainable infrastructure.
- The appraisal of projects in terms of economic return was not practised in some countries.
- There was no excuse for continuing with unsustainable infrastructure in modern times – information needed for the development of and investment in green infrastructure was available.

Measuring sustainable infrastructure and decision-making based on science and knowledge

⁵ United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), Principles for Resilient Infrastructure (n.p., n.d.).

⁶ All the interventions made during the thematic session are available at <https://unece.org/info/Environmental-Policy/events/368999>.

- Infrastructure planning and implementation needed to be a data- and science-based process.
- Timely monitoring and evaluation using a science-based approach was important.
- A common definition of sustainable infrastructure was important, as was the use of common indicators.
- Exploration of innovative solutions was essential.

Investing in sustainable infrastructure

- Investment in sustainable infrastructure was essential.
- Infrastructure that put nature at its heart could generate 117 million new jobs within the next eight years.
- Investments in renewable energy alone could add over 40 million jobs to the global economy, while creating health-care savings eight times greater than the cost of the investment.
- The need to transform infrastructure was gaining momentum and new funding was becoming available.
- High-cost infrastructure projects needed the support of financial institutions and mechanisms.
- A green public procurement action plan could be used to promote the use of environmentally friendly building materials.
- Maritime spatial planning and International Organization for Standardization certification promoted the greening of port infrastructure.
- Some Mediterranean countries lacked funding; green bonds and microfinance were fundamental.
- There was a need to address the timing of resources, such as up-front investments.
- The assessment of investment needed for climate action until 2030 required classification of priority infrastructure projects through systematic strategic and economic assessments, with multisectoral projects being prioritized. Results needed to be monitored.
- Potential areas for investment in sustainable infrastructure were:
 - Renewable energies
 - Energy efficiency
 - Power distribution
 - Natural gas during the transition
 - Waste management
 - Mobility, green mobility and smart green cities
- Careful planning was required for investment in the transport sector to determine what transport investment was most beneficial to the general public and, accordingly, had priority for implementation.
- Countries had good practices in shifting investment to public transportation, digitalization and new railway infrastructure, for example, by conducting an evaluation of all ongoing projects and discontinuing the financing of those deemed unsustainable.

Cooperation, coordination and governance setting

- Global environmental crises needed an integrated policy approach and the active cooperation of all stakeholders.
- A holistic approach from the very beginning was important. There also needed to be sustainability at the economic and social levels.
- A stable regulatory environment, financial incentives and science-based information were important for carrying out reforms and investments. Societal decision-making must guide the green transition.
- New refurbishing and building infrastructure standards for greening needed to be established through policies.
- Sustainable infrastructure could be a connector between countries, fostering commitments and facilitating access to services through clean energy, smart grids, high-speed Internet, electric vehicle charging stations, and upgrades to roads, airports, ports, passenger rail and public transit.
- All solutions for infrastructure should go hand-in-hand with biodiversity protection and targets and climate change aspects needed to be embedded in all projects.
- Reducing the environmental footprint of infrastructure projects.

Enabling informed participation of stakeholders

- Decisions on sustainable infrastructure were decisions for the next 50 years. Building resilient infrastructure was critical to achieving Sustainable Development Goals. There was a need to create an enabling environment for all stakeholders to be able to create and use sustainable and resilient infrastructure.
- Accountability was key to protecting the environment.
- Sustainable infrastructure could create equal opportunities for all in promoting rural-urban connectivity and providing access in rural areas to basic services already available in urban areas.
- Good environmental governance, access to information, access to justice, stakeholder engagement and public consultations when constructing infrastructure were needed to avoid harm to the environment, identify potential impacts, and enable sustainable, inclusive and resilient projects.
- Advancing sustainable infrastructure depended on effective public participation from the earliest stages of project development, thereby avoiding delays in projects and the halting of infrastructure construction.
- Additional efforts for active participation of stakeholders, including both the most vulnerable and the private sector, were important.
- The burden of the transition to sustainable infrastructure should not be borne by the most vulnerable.
- Supporting education to sensitize the public and civil society, thus allowing for effective participation, would be equally crucial. Peer-to-peer knowledge-sharing and capacity-building could be used to solve urban issues ranging from sustainability to inclusion to climate resiliency.
- There must be a more concerted effort on awareness-raising on climate change and its impact on infrastructure at all levels of society. Education for sustainable development in schools was crucial.
- There was also support for partner countries in building sustainable infrastructure. The Environment for Europe process could be a mechanism to improve the situation in the pan-European region.

Role of subnational authorities and, especially, of cities

- The proportion of the population that lived in cities continued to grow; cities were where the need for greening was greatest. Cities must be on board.
- Cities played a key role in achieving a carbon-neutral welfare society and the green transition, in halting emissions and biodiversity loss.
- Both vertical and horizontal interaction between different levels of governance were needed.
- Local governments and communities were key, given their capacity to deliver a positive impact for people where they lived.
- By involving all relevant stakeholders and providing new opportunities for communities to strengthen sustainable development, it was possible to ensure a clean and healthy environment for all.

Potential role of programmes and initiatives

- UNEP had pledged to support member States in the region to promote sustainable and resilient infrastructure.
- With legal tools and guidelines from ECE, the European Commission, OECD, UNEP, EEA and the European Investment Bank, the way ahead was clear, despite the complexity of infrastructure development, especially sustainable infrastructure.
- Accession to and implementation of multilateral environmental agreements, such as those of ECE – notably the Espoo Convention, its Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment and the Aarhus Convention – was important.
- Voluntary commitments by countries and organizations under the Batumi Initiative on Green Economy.
- Countries should promote guidelines and standards on sustainable and resilient infrastructure, such as the Standard for Sustainable and Resilient Infrastructure.⁷
- The UNDRR Principles for Resilient Infrastructure and the Resilient Infrastructure Stress Test should be applied, providing best practices for embedding resilience in infrastructure development processes.
- Country examples included establishing dedicated funds to support industries in reducing the pollution that they generate, especially those in rural areas, including waste recycling. Governmental support to citizens to retrofit their homes with solar panels was practised.

VI. Applying principles of circular economy to sustainable tourism

46. The Minister for Tourism and Environment of Albania chaired the session on applying principles of circular economy to sustainable tourism. She highlighted the complex relationship between the tourism and environment sectors and the efforts of her country to gather the two sectors under one ministry to develop sustainable tourism. She stressed the importance of tourism for countries' economies and significant impacts on the tourism sector such as from climate change and pandemics. The Minister emphasized the importance of rethinking tourism as a sustainable development activity bringing pleasure, civic responsibility and empowerment. Tourism and affiliated sectors (e.g., agriculture, food, infrastructure, transport), needed reinventing to address their sustainability by applying principles of circular economy, requiring a new philosophy, a change of mentality, a huge amount of education, business transformation and investment in research. She expressed her wish to overcome challenges towards a better world through fostering society's strength, solidarity and resilience, and cited the proverb: "We do not inherit the Earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children."

⁷ See <https://sure-standard.org/>

47. The State Secretary of the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Croatia, in his keynote speech, underlined that the tourism sector represented 10 per cent of global gross domestic product (GDP) and provided one in ten jobs worldwide. In Croatia, tourism generated 20 per cent of national GDP and was a vital source of both direct and indirect employment. The State Secretary highlighted the co-dependency and vulnerability (e.g., pandemics, environmental disasters, wars) of the tourism sector, which served as a litmus test for the resilience of society. The COVID-19 outbreak had had a severe impact, resulting in a global tourism economy decline of 80 per cent in 2020 and the loss of around 100 million jobs. Recovery was slow; however, the sector's growth projection was beyond 1.8 billion international tourists per year by 2030, bringing challenges to the environment, climate change, nature and local populations. The tourism sector was facing the challenge of decoupling its growth from the use of natural resources. The State Secretary praised the efforts of the European Union and international organizations (the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), UNEP, OECD and the World Travel and Tourism Council) to facilitate the transition to sustainable and resilient tourism. A General Assembly resolution on sustainable tourism was expected to be adopted in 2022.

48. The Principal Adviser to the Executive Secretary of ECE and Chief of the Sustainable Development and Gender Unit of ECE presented the main achievements in implementing the commitments made under the Batumi Action for Cleaner Air initiative. In all, under said initiative, 27 countries and 4 organizations had committed to taking 110 actions to: establish national action programmes to reduce air pollution (48 per cent); establish policy measures (14 per cent); establish systematic, comparable and transparent monitoring activities and emission inventories (14 per cent); establish capacity-building and technical support (12 per cent); and improve public awareness (12 per cent). In the period 2016–2022, the initiative had achieved its objectives of: providing Governments and other stakeholders with a list of possible concrete actions to address local, national and regional air pollution problems for their consideration; inspiring action on air pollution issues not currently being addressed; aiding the further implementation of the commitments under the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution (Air Convention) and its protocols; inviting stakeholders (international organizations, donors and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)) to support actions that improved air quality, in particular capacity-building and technical assistance actions; and inviting Governments to voluntarily commit to implementing specific actions and to share their successes and further challenges at future meetings of the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy.

49. The Chair of the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy (Portugal) presented the progress in implementing the Batumi Initiative on Green Economy. In all, under the Initiative, 27 countries and 13 organizations had committed to taking a total of 123 actions. Government actions focused on economic objectives complemented by environmental objectives (social objectives were rare), mostly covering the energy, agriculture and transport sectors. Legal, regulatory and policy instruments had been used more often than economic and fiscal instruments. Sustainable Development Goal 12 (responsible consumption and production) had been addressed by two-thirds of all commitments. In the period 2016–2022, 48 Initiative commitments had been implemented, 57 were in progress and the implementation of 5 had yet to be started. Following the Nicosia call for additional commitments, 61 new commitments had been made, including 50 by Governments of 18 countries and 11 by intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and programmes. The Initiative remained open for new commitments until 2030. To celebrate the new wave of Initiative commitments, countries and organizations that had submitted new commitments mounted the podium for an Initiative family picture.

50. The Secretary-General of UNWTO, in his keynote speech (video recording), emphasized the exposure of tourism to disasters and pandemics, and the good timing of recovering the sector by developing sustainable tourism. Applying principles of circular economy to sustainable tourism would benefit tourists, businesses and the environment. The Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism encouraged strong commitments to support halving emissions over the next decade and reach net zero emissions as soon as possible before 2050. The Secretary-General called for the building of synergies and the enhancement of cooperation between ministries in charge of tourism and those in charge of the environment, with a view to transitioning to sustainable tourism. The Global Tourism Plastics

Initiative provided a global framework for action to address the root causes of plastic pollution and was driving the tourism sector towards circular economy.

51. In the ensuing discussion, representatives of the following countries and organizations made statements from the floor: Switzerland, Sweden, Czechia (speaking on behalf of the European Union), Bulgaria, Cyprus, Ukraine, Germany, Greece, Armenia and the European ECO-Forum.⁵

52. The session then split into two parallel round tables to discuss issues related to applying principles of circular economy to sustainable tourism, with a focus on: (a) promoting circular tourism at the intergovernmental level; (b) promoting circular tourism at the national and subnational levels; and, (c) promoting circular tourism among the business community.

53. Key messages from interventions made during the plenary part and the two round table discussions were summarized and presented to the Conference by the Chair of the thematic segment, as set out below:

1. *Economic considerations of the tourism sector*

- While the contribution of the tourism sector to the economy varied from country to country, it constituted an important part of the GDP of many countries across the pan-European region.
- At the same time, in some countries (e.g., on islands and at seaside destinations) the tourism sector contributed to economic inequalities between tourist and non-tourist destination areas, resulting in internal work migration from rural areas to coastal zones.
- Circular economy was essential for the sustainable development of tourism.
- Some financial instruments fostered tourism that damaged local nature and culture.
- There was a need to develop innovative solutions and financial instruments, as well as sustainable financing in general, to support sustainable tourism.
- Impacts of port facilities, not only cargo vessels but also cruise ships. One option was to limit the number of cruise ships per day.
- Impact on tourism sector.
- Natural disasters and health pandemics had had an impact on the tourism sector, the recovery of which was slow.
- Consequences of conflicts and wars had a lasting impact on the tourism sector (e.g., lost or unsafe access to touristic sites).

2. *Environmental pressure from the tourism sector*

- The tourism sector had a considerable environmental footprint.
- The tourism sector had an important impact on climate change, biodiversity and other resources.
- Transport accounted for almost half of tourism-related greenhouse gas emissions.
- In particular, tourism had resulted in the destruction of coastal ecosystems.
- All sectors contributing to tourism needed to adapt and transform to become green and sustainable.
- The pandemic had confirmed the need to think more about how people lived and how and what they consumed, and made it even more evident how human activities had an impact on ecosystems.
- It was important to measure the carrying capacity of travel destinations and NGOs could help in that measurement. There was a need to establish a balance between a common trading market and circularity.

3. *Cooperation*

- Ministries in charge of the environment were encouraged to build synergies with ministries in charge of tourism.
- Partnerships needed to be developed between government, local community and the private sector, among other stakeholders, in addition to horizontal cooperation between the different sectors that contributed to tourism.

- Cooperation between public and private sectors was key to success.
- There was a need to partner more with UNWTO and to use guidelines for sustainable tourism.
- Joining networks that promoted sustainable consumption and production in tourism policies and practices to address the challenges of pollution, biodiversity loss and climate change. Promotion of knowledge-sharing and networking opportunities to define collective priorities and identify solutions, such as the One Planet Sustainable Tourism Programme.

4. *Public participation*

- It was crucial to engage NGOs, along with the private sector, in all actions and activities in greening the tourism sector.
- Civil society could play a greater role in the fight against plastic pollution from the sector.
- NGOs should be involved in the exchange of experience on good practice in sustainable tourism strategies.

5. *Involvement of local communities*

- Cheap imported souvenirs should be replaced by locally produced products and craftwork.
- There was also a need to provide adequate support to the transition of local communities to sustainability.
- Often tourism had an impact at the destination and could lead to difficult discussions with local communities.

6. *Involvement of business*

- Governmental action towards sustainable tourism must go hand-in-hand with action from business actors.
- Opportunities existed to develop sustainable value chains and shift towards reuse or at least recycling of materials.
- Eco-labels could be used to designate businesses practising sustainable tourism and for sustainable tourism destinations.
- Change needed to come from inside business. There was a need for better coordination on working with the private sector. Seize the opportunity to talk to the private sector, to change the paradigm and present opportunities for companies to be green.

7. *Education for sustainable development and capacity-building*

- Targeted capacity-building on sustainable tourism should be offered to stakeholders engaged in the tourism sector, including local authorities and communities, hotels, restaurants, enterprises and small and medium enterprises.
- The aim would be to develop the capacity of tourism sector actors in order to equip them with knowledge and practice of sustainability and circularity of the tourism sector.
- Further research and development of innovative solutions for making the tourism sector sustainable needed to be fostered, with the aim of applying principles of circularity and zero waste.
- More generally, awareness about sustainable tourism needed to be raised.

8. *Data and information*

- There was a lack of comparable indicators for measuring the circularity and sustainability of the tourism sector, and monitoring was needed.
- Criteria could be developed to measure the carbon footprint of the tourism sector.
- Labelling was among the methods that could provide the consumer with clear and reliable information about the circularity of products.

- Sustainable tourism components should be measured by indicators to ensure comparability between sectors and topics to enable the assessment of the level of sustainability of the tourism sector.
- Good examples of measuring existed in some countries, such as on the use of renewable energy sources, energy consumption for overnight stays, and the level of acceptance by the local population of tourists and tourist activities.
- Mass media had an important role to play in promoting environmental and sustainable development solutions.
- Tourism statistics should cover both domestic and international tourists.
- Using tools for measuring commitments made was vital in order to measure progress regarding achievement.

9. *Legal frameworks and policies*

- There was a gap in many national legal and policy frameworks on assessing the environmental impact of the tourism sector.
- Good examples of making mandatory separate collection of waste, including transportation of biowaste to compost treatment facilities for big hotel and catering businesses.
- A circular economy model needed to be introduced for the tourism sector.
- The new focus on sustainability was driving changes in tourism.
- Standards and methodologies required harmonization.
- Countries had good examples, such as the Cyprus Sustainable Development Tourism Initiative.
- National Governments could not make decisions alone; multiple layers of stakeholders must be involved. National Governments could be the bridge between communities and the private sector and NGOs could facilitate that.

10. *Available policies, mechanisms and tools, including:*

- General Assembly resolution on sustainable tourism
- United Nations Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production
- Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism
- Global Tourism Plastics Initiative
- Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism
- United Nations Environmental Assembly of UNEP resolution 5/14 “End plastic pollution: Towards an international legally binding instrument”
- Unspoiled beaches initiative, prohibiting any unsustainable action
- Green public procurement
- Batumi Initiative on Green Economy – past and new voluntary commitments by countries and organizations
- Eco-certification of tourism destinations
- One Planet Vision for a Responsible Recovery of the Tourism Sector
- Digital product passports, for example, for batteries
- Big data to assess tourism trends and concrete methodologies and indicators to assess sustainable tourism mobility

11. *General prerequisites of sustainable tourism, including:*

- Circular economy
- Sustainable mobility
- Sustainable destinations
- Partnerships to promoting the sustainability of the tourism sector
- Recognition of limited resources and, therefore, putting a limit to touristic activities

12. *Next steps and action needed*

- The tourism sector was forecast to grow considerably, thus underlining the urgency to transform the sector into a sustainable one.

- Circular economy offered a new paradigm for the development of a sustainable tourism sector.
- Decision-makers and entrepreneurs should apply circular economy principles across the tourism value chain.
- Circularity should be the major strategy for the transformation and recovery of the tourism sector from the pandemic.
- Decision-making must be based on science, knowledge and information.
- Incentivise the tourism business to turn to sustainable practices.
- Payment for ecosystems services was a key mechanism for the way forward.
- Environmental and cultural needs should be reflected in the tourism sector.
- The impacts of international and extreme mobility at tourist destinations must be reduced.
- The vision for sustainable tourism was in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through the Sustainable Development Goals. Sustainable tourism was an underestimated driving force that could shift other sectors, such as the energy sector, towards sustainability.
- Ministries of tourism needed to be brave enough to create a projected target to 2030 in terms of tourism that would not grow above a given percentage, a vital factor if tourism were to be circular.
- Measuring the carrying capacity of destinations could also be a way to work towards circular tourism.

13. *Practical actions include:*

- Phase out and ban single plastic products.
- Limit water consumption and promote reuse of water.
- Introduce deposit refund systems for glass bottles, among other products, and remove barriers in border regions.
- Promote consumption of food from local producers.
- Promote cultural tourism and agrotourism respecting local heritage.
- Remove funding from unsustainable “brown” tourism.
- Organize events to promote and celebrate sustainability in the tourism sector.
- Activate work on plastic pollution in the tourism sector, including in mountainous areas.
- Continue dialogues and cooperation between public authorities working in areas relevant for sustainable tourism.

VII. Adoption of the Conference outcomes

54. Ministers and heads of delegation adopted the Ministerial Declaration by acclamation.

55. A representative of the European Union welcomed the Ministerial Declaration, which strongly condemned the unprovoked and unjustified aggression against Ukraine by the armed forces of the Russian Federation. The European Union appreciated the focus on sustainable infrastructure and sustainable tourism in the Declaration and the emphasis on the role that innovation, circular approaches, public-private partnerships and public participation played in that regard. The European Union reaffirmed its support and commitment to the Environment for Europe process as a platform bringing together all relevant actors in the ECE region to address some of the greatest challenges of current times.

56. The Deputy Minister for Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia reiterated that recent challenges, such as the pandemic and the war of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, had vividly shown that greater international effort was needed to effectively overcome them. She emphasized that education for sustainable development played a critical role in better understanding and adjusting to the current rapidly changing world and underlined the importance of continuation and even strengthening of the education for sustainable development topic on the Environment for Europe ministerial agenda.

57. The Minister for Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of Ukraine expressed gratitude to all the signatories of the Ministerial Declaration for their resolute

stance regarding the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine and called on the whole world to fight against evil.

58. A representative of the European ECO-Forum noted that every day of the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine brought fresh destruction and had severe ecological consequences. She stressed that there was nothing more unsustainable than war and sustainability could not be achieved without peace. She urged all countries and stakeholders to support the green, sustainable and resilient reconstruction of Ukraine.

59. A representative of Women Engage for a Common Future noted with concern that opportunities for free and open speech in many countries in the ECE region were being curtailed, welcomed the appointment for the first Special Rapporteur on environmental defenders under the newly created rapid response mechanism under the Aarhus Convention and called upon all Governments to support that critically important work.

60. The State Secretary for Public Education of Hungary noted that Hungary joined other countries in supporting the Ministerial Declaration. He informed the delegates that the Seventh Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health would be held in Budapest from 5 to 7 July 2023. A short video on the Conference was screened for participants.

61. A representative of the World Organization of the Scout Movement presented the Youth Declaration of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference. He pointed out that, out of the 1,000 participants at that Conference, only 3 per cent had been young people, and call on Governments and institutions to meaningfully engage young people to the decision-making process.

62. A representative of the State of Palestine highlighted the role of solidarity at the level of both government and the public in protecting the environment and facing challenges posed by climate change. He linked solidarity actions to human values and suggested that solidarity should be reflected in educational curricula.

63. The Ambassador of the United States of America to Cyprus noted that war had returned to Europe and had taken a heavy toll on people and the environment. She pointed to the wide-spread damage caused by the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine to critical infrastructure and key ecosystems and services that they provided, and subsequent air, water and soil pollution and harm to biodiversity, and confirmed that the United States of America remained committed to addressing those issues, as well as to the 2030 Agenda, and informed the delegates that, on 21 September 2022, the Senate of the United States of American had given its consent to the ratification of the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer.

64. A representative of the Mediterranean Information Office for Environment, Culture and Sustainable Development highlighted a side event entitled “Environmental governance for transforming our planet – Promoting the Aarhus Convention in the whole of the Mediterranean region”, which would take place right after the morning plenary session of the Conference.

65. A representative of Egypt emphasized the role of youth in tackling climate change issues. He conveyed the message that all preparations for the forthcoming twenty-seventh session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, 6–20 November 2022) were progressing at full speed and expressed the hope that the Conference of the Parties would move from commitments to actions.

66. A representative of Cypriot civil society informed the delegates that a major fire in Cyprus in 2021 had affected eight villages and destroyed a large natural area. A strategic plan had been developed to recover the area in line with sustainability principles.

67. A representative of the European ECO-Forum expressed gratitude to the Conference organizers. In particular, she emphasized the crucial role of people working behind the scenes. She noted that, being at the Conference, she fully understood the meaning of “Filoxenia”, and that was what hospitality should be.

68. A representative of the National Youth Council of Ireland suggested that non-formal or informal education should be given equal focus in education on sustainable development and emphasized the role of young people in that process.

69. The Co-Chair of the Conference, the Minister for Education, Sport and Youth of Cyprus, recalled that, on 6 October 2022, in parallel with the Conference, the High-level Event of Education and Environment Ministers on the Mediterranean Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development had taken place and the revised Action Plan towards 2030 had been adopted.

70. The Co-Chair of the Conference, the Minister for Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment of Cyprus, expressed his deep satisfaction at the outcomes of the Conference and especially the Nicosia Declaration. He expressed strong support for the reference made to the unprovoked and unjustified aggression against Ukraine by the Russian Federation, and urged countries to work together for the advancement of a sustainable recovery of Ukraine. He reaffirmed the commitment by Cyprus to capitalize on the results of the Conference and stressed the important role of the Environment for Europe process in bringing together all stakeholders for a sustainable future.

VIII. Closure of the Conference

71. The Executive Secretary of ECE in her closing remarks noted that the Filoxenia Conference Centre had held not one but four high-level meetings since Wednesday 5 October 2022: the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference and, in its framework, the Third High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries; and in parallel, the High-level Meeting of the Ministers for Education on Education for Sustainable Development and the High-level Event of Education and Environment Ministers on the Mediterranean Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development. Thinking of the amount of content that had been packed into the past three days alone, she compared them to the *korokolios* – the straw baskets that the generous hosts of the Conference had given to each of the delegates as a souvenir of the wonderful country of Cyprus and its people. A *korokolios* looked rather small, but once opened, it was amazing to see how many useful and delicious items were packed inside. She expressed the hope that, by the time of the next Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference five years hence, the world would be greener, cleaner, more just and more peaceful than it currently was, and called on all the participants to make that change happen.
