



**Economic and Social
Council**

Distr.
GENERAL

CEP/2005/5
25 July 2005

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

Twelfth session,
(Geneva, 10-12 October 2005)
(Item 3(c) of the provisional agenda)

**MINUTES OF THE STAKEHOLDERS' MEETING ON THE
"ENVIRONMENT FOR EUROPE" COMMUNICATION STRATEGY**
(Geneva, 7 June 2005)

Introduction

1. As mandated by the Ministers in Kiev, the Committee on Environmental Policy has been developing a Communication Strategy "to raise awareness of the Environment for Europe process among a wider audience of stakeholders and the general public based on the achievements of the process"¹.
2. At its eleventh session, in October 2004, the Committee discussed a draft of the Strategy prepared by a consultant. It deemed important to fully involve stakeholders from international and non-governmental organizations in the further development of the Strategy as well as in its future implementation.
3. To this end, a meeting with the stakeholders was organized on 7 June 2005 to discuss and to comment on the draft Strategy, as contained in document CEP/2004/7.
4. Mr. Zaal Lomtadze (Georgia), Chairman of the Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP), chaired the meeting.
5. The meeting was attended by the members of the Bureau of the CEP and by representatives from the European Eco-Forum; the Regional Environmental Centers (RECs) for

¹ Kiev Declaration, ECE/CEP/94/Rev.1, para. 75

Central and Eastern Europe, Caucasus, Central Asia, Moldova and Russia; OECD and UNEP. The list of participants is annexed.

I. OVERVIEW OF THE PREPARATIONS FOR THE “ENVIRONMENT FOR EUROPE” BELGRADE MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE (2007)

6. The Director of the UNECE’s Environment and Human Settlements Division, Mr. Bärhund, informed the meeting that the Working Group of Senior Officials (WGSO) will hold the first preparatory meeting for the Belgrade Ministerial Conference on 12 and 13 October 2005. At this meeting, the WGSO will discuss the themes for the Conference.

7. At their informal consultation meeting of 6 June 2005, the Bureaux of the Governing Bodies of the UNECE Environmental Conventions and the Committee on Environmental Policy had held initial discussions on the possible topics for Belgrade in relation to the Conventions.

II. DISCUSSION OF THE DRAFT COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Rationale

8. The meeting agreed on the importance of putting the Environment for Europe (EfE) process high on the international agenda and giving it a maximum of publicity. The Strategy was deemed necessary both for covering the individual Ministerial conferences in an optimal way and for providing information on the process in general in an easily accessible and understandable format.

9. The Strategy would need to demonstrate the unique nature of the EfE as the only forum that brings together Ministers of the Environment throughout the Pan-European Region. The process should be seen as a major “marketplace” with important “products”, such as the legal instruments signed by the Ministers. Without the existence of such a marketplace, these instruments could never come to being or would take longer to negotiate.

Main goals and means for reaching them

10. The meeting agreed on the need to clearly define the main overarching goals that are expected to be achieved through the implementation of the Strategy. These goals should correspond to a general mission statement of the EfE process, such as “fostering the understanding of, and support for, environmental progress in the Pan-European Region” (para 19 of the draft Strategy) and “following-up and enhancing the implementation of the commitments made in the EfE process”.

11. It was deemed essential to distinguish between “goals” and “means” for reaching these goals. “Raising awareness of the EfE process and its achievements “ and “encouraging communication” were seen as the main means or tools to be used for achieving the overarching goals of the Strategy.

Target audience

12. The meeting stressed the importance of identifying the target audience for the Strategy in order to better define the issues that are of interest to it. It was also pointed out that the language to be used may also need to be adapted depending on the group targeted. Finally, a prior assessment of the awareness of the audience was considered useful, but difficult to carry out.

13. The Strategy should address the concerns of all the countries in the region, even though special attention should be paid to the specific situation of countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) and in South-East Europe (SEE).

14. The meeting agreed that the Strategy primarily target the general public, so that it would be better equipped for exerting the necessary pressure on the decision makers to move things forward. Within the general public, special attention should be paid to subgroups such as the media (in general and not only the specialized environmental press), local governments, parliaments, academic community, children and youth. It was suggested at this stage to leave the target groups fairly general and non-exclusive.

Key messages

15. A clear definition of the key messages to be disseminated was deemed essential for the success of the Strategy.

16. It was seen as particularly important to demonstrate that the EfE process has a direct impact on the lives of the people at the local level. Owing to the fact that people tend to have rather short-term perspectives, and sometimes lack sufficient knowledge and understanding of international processes, it was considered necessary to translate the EfE process into practical, tangible outcomes. This could be done, for example, by explaining the consequences of particular activities as regards the level of air pollution or wastewater treatment in a given city. Furthermore, the Environmental Performance Reviews and the State of the Environment Reports were referred to as concrete and valuable tools that could be used in the national educational systems, should people know about them.

17. Another challenging, yet necessary task would consist in explaining to people how the process itself has supported the achievement of concrete results, and to demonstrate that if the countries continue working together further progress can be achieved.

Plan for the implementation of the Strategy

18. The meeting considered that the draft Strategy needed to be shortened and made more conceptual. It should contain information on the goals and means for reaching them, the key messages to be disseminated and the target audience. Once amended, the draft Strategy should be submitted for consideration to the CEP at its 12th session and to the WGSO for adoption at its meeting in October 2005.

19. The meeting agreed that the Strategy should be complemented by a more detailed Communication Plan that specifies the steps to be taken for its implementation. It proposed that the WGSO set up a small group for drafting this Action Plan.

20. The drafting group for the Action Plan should consist of stakeholders who are familiar with the process and of people who have experience in communication. For the sake of efficiency, the number of participants in the group should be limited to 5 to 10 people. The meeting suggested including representatives from the EcoForum, the Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe (REC), the Central Asia Regional Environmental Centre (CAREC), the Task Force for the Implementation of the Environmental Action Plan (EAP Task Force), a number of country representatives, a member from the Aarhus Convention, as well as mass media specialists. It was agreed that a list of candidates would be put forward for adoption by the WGSO.

21. The meeting estimated that the draft Communication Plan should be finalized for adoption by the second meeting of the WGSO or by its Executive Committee in 2006, to allow for a timely implementation of the Strategy.

Implementation of the Strategy/ Elements for the Action Plan

22. In order to ensure that the key messages reach their target audience and are well received, it was deemed necessary to take into account the language barriers and different perceptions of people. This is why the implementation of the Strategy should involve national and local administrations and make use of the existing structures of local and regional NGOs and RECs.

23. For the greatest possible impact, it was seen as crucial to ensure a steady flow of information, as opposed to provision of sporadic news on one-time events. The Aarhus process should be looked at as an example, in this regard, including also its clearing house mechanism.

24. The meeting highlighted that access to the Internet was not guaranteed to everybody in the region. This is why the meeting suggested the following additional means for effectively spreading the information:

- (a) Broadcasting a short advert on local television;
- (b) Organizing of local events simultaneously with the Conference in Belgrade to attract the local press; and
- (c) Issuing of an official quarterly EfE Newsletter providing periodic progress reports on the process.

25. The stakeholders also suggested a number of concrete ways in which they could contribute to further work:

- (a) A communication expert from the OECD's EAP Task Force could provide assistance in developing the Plan and the EfE Newsletter. Work could also be done to help improve the UNECE/EfE website to link the contributing organizations;

(b) The facilities of CAREC and the other RECs (links to libraries and databases, resource centre for massmedia, weekly and quarterly publications, translation services into local Asian languages) could and should be used for the purpose of the Strategy, including building trust of the local communities.

Resources/Funding mechanisms

26. The meeting agreed that at this stage, in the absence of information on committed resources from Member States and the organizations involved, the Strategy should be flexible enough to accommodate the resources available. It was seen as useful to attempt to estimate the cost of the various activities for the implementation of the Strategy and to make this information available to potential donor countries.

27. Furthermore, it was deemed important to nominate a person responsible for coordinating the relevant work within the ECE secretariat, especially since the primary information should come from the ECE. Should the existing resources not allow this, the secondment of a staff member from a Member State, e.g. from the EECCA region, to the secretariat could be considered. The meeting noted that implementing all the suggested actions, including the website, the newsletter and contacts with the press, would be too much for one person working full time, and that help from the stakeholders was necessary.

28. The meeting stressed the importance of harnessing funds that countries have earmarked for the preparation of the Belgrade Conference. The WGSO and the CEP should be invited to request support from Member States for the Communication Strategy. The meeting suggested also the possibility of a prior agreement with the countries in the region that would commit them to spreading information at the local level.

29. The meeting specified that the support from the countries and the other stakeholders could be financial or in-kind, or involve provision of information.

30. Making use of the ongoing processes in the region, governmental or intergovernmental, was seen as an important means for minimizing the need of resources. The REC informed the meeting that on 22 June a stakeholders' coordination meeting was going to discuss the Belgrade Conference and the Communication Strategy.

31. The meeting invited the secretariat to circulate the revised draft Strategy for comments in early July.

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