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Ad Hoc Preparatory Working Group of Senior Officials
“Environment for Europe”

First session, Geneva, 12 to 13 October 2005

REPORT OF THE FIRST SESSION

Introduction

1. The first session of the Ad Hoc Preparatory Working Group of Senior Officials “Environment for Europe” (WGSO) took place from 12 (afternoon) to 13 October 2005, in Geneva.
2. The meeting was attended by delegates from Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Monaco, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom, and United States of America. Representatives of the Commission of the European Communities also attended.
3. Representatives from the following organizations and specialized agencies of the United Nations system participated: the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the World Bank, the World Health Organization’s Regional Office for Europe (WHO/EURO), the Secretariat of the Basel Convention and the Secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.
4. Representatives of the European Environmental Agency (EEA), the Secretariat of the Task Force for the Implementation of the Environmental Action Programme for Central and Eastern Europe (EAP Task Force), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the Energy Charter Secretariat, the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe (MCPFE), the

Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy (PEBLDS), the World Conservation Union (IUCN), the International Council of Environmental Law, the Project Preparation Committee (PPC), the European ECO-Forum, the European Environmental Bureau, the ECO-Accord Center, Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF) and the NGO Union for the Defence of the Aral Sea and Amudarya also took part.

5. Also represented were: the Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia (CAREC), the Regional Environmental Centre for the Republic of Moldova, the Regional Environmental Centre for the Russian Federation and the Regional Environmental Centre for Central Europe and Eastern Europe (REC).

I. OPENING, ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND ELECTION OF THE CHAIRPERSON

6. The meeting was opened by Mr. Paolo Garonna, the acting UNECE Executive Secretary. Mr. Garonna delivered a welcome speech in which he addressed emerging global and regional challenges. He highlighted the unique nature of the Environment for Europe (EfE) ministerial process, particularly that it includes all major actors within the region. He stressed that one of the most important goals of the EfE process should be the strengthening of the implementation of regional conventions and protocols, and encouraging efforts to improve their efficiency, effectiveness and coherence. He also pointed out that one of the most important tasks for the future would be to link the EfE process with the regional follow-up to the Millennium Development Goals and the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

7. The Working Group adopted its agenda as contained in document CEP/AC.11/2005/1.

8. The Working Group elected Mr. Miroslav Spasojević (Serbia and Montenegro) as its Chair.

II. REVIEW OF DECISIONS TAKEN AT THE FIFTH MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE “ENVIRONMENT FOR EUROPE”, THAT RELATE TO THE ORGANIZATION OF THE SIXTH MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE.

9. The secretariat, Ms. Monika Linn, introduced the document on possible topics for the agenda of the Belgrade Conference (CEP/AC.11/2005/5). She emphasized that this document should be viewed as a tool for the Working Group to prepare the agenda for the Belgrade Conference and to link together the different preparatory activities.

10. The Working Group discussed the possible political framework and themes to be addressed by the Belgrade Conference. With regard to the key purpose of the Conference, strong support was expressed for a focus on implementation. The Belgrade event should become a conference of delivery. Three major components within this context were identified: (a) assessment of the effectiveness of agreed commitments and tools (e.g. Environmental Programme for Europe, Kiev Declaration, Environmental Strategy for Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA), multilateral environmental agreements, Johannesburg

Plan of Implementation, Millennium Development Goals); (b) analysis of problems in the implementation of existing commitments and their root causes; and (c) presentation of success stories and good practices to be built on for further progress in capacity building and in the implementation of existing commitments. It was suggested that an independent report be prepared as a basis for discussions.

11. With regard to the themes that could be addressed by the Conference, the following received support: biodiversity and ecosystems; cleaner technology and energy (e.g. renewable and cleaner energy, phase-out of leaded petrol); education for sustainable development, sustainable production and consumption (e.g. eco-efficiency, eco-labelling, organic farming), and water (e.g. qualitative and quantitative aspects, transboundary and health-related issues). Some delegations also proposed land degradation and chemicals (e.g. a new EU policy on chemicals) as possible topics. While delegations considered all these issues to be highly important, they were concerned that some themes might duplicate and overlap with the work carried out in other relevant forums and processes (e.g. the Marrakech process, meetings of the parties to multilateral environmental agreements, environment and health, regional events on sustainable development). The Working Group will further consider these themes at its next meeting.

12. Many delegations confirmed the important role of environmental monitoring and assessment, in providing a solid basis for discussion on the state of the environment and trends related to it. They also emphasized the value of the Environmental Performance Reviews (EPRs), suggesting that a possible discussion on EPRs in Belgrade should revolve around policy aspects.

13. The Working Group also discussed possible sub-regional issues for the Belgrade Conference and agreed to emphasize the sub-regions of EECCA and South-East Europe, while at the same time not neglecting the priorities for the ECE region as a whole. Suggestions were made that a deeper analysis of both the progress achieved and causes of failure in the implementation of commitments by EECCA countries should be undertaken. Moreover, a realistic road map on how to overcome these problems, including policies for capacity building, should be prepared as a next step.

14. The Working Group discussed the format of the major outcome of the Belgrade Conference. Many participants felt that a short negotiated document providing strategic directions would be the most appropriate option. Some delegations proposed a Chair's summary.

15. Among other issues, the Working Group also discussed the following: (a) synergies and links between the "Environment for Europe" process and other relevant ministerial processes; (b) the importance of considering environmental problems within the context of sustainable development and involving both ministries of the environment and other ministries concerned in the discussions and decisions.

16. Participants were invited to submit to the secretariat further ideas and comments with regard to the agenda of the Belgrade Conference by 1 December 2005. The Chairman requested the secretariat to prepare a revised background paper on the possible items for the agenda of the Conference, taking into consideration the comments provided. This paper should be available to the second meeting of the Executive Committee. Thereafter, taking into consideration comments

provided by the Executive Committee, the amended paper would be submitted to the next meeting of the Working Group.

17. A number of organisations present at the meeting provided information with respect to their activities that might be relevant to the agenda of the Belgrade Conference. EEA informed that it has started the preparation of the Belgrade assessment report. The EAP Task Force reported that it plans to prepare documents on a number of items, including an assessment of progress in the implementation of the Environmental Strategy for EECCA countries. The PPC will submit to the Conference a report on its main activities with a focus on Goal 7 (target 10) of the Millennium Development Goals. The Energy Charter Secretariat confirmed that it is ready to prepare a progress report on the implementation of energy efficiency-related decisions of the Kiev conference. In this regard, some delegations raised the question of a possible contribution to this topic by the UNECE Committee on Sustainable Energy. The European ECO-Forum provided a number of proposals with regard to the Belgrade agenda. It also proposed to follow the Kiev experience and organise a round table between the Ministers and non-governmental organizations.

18. To facilitate further discussion on possible contributions from various constituencies to the agenda of the Conference, the Working Group requested that the secretariat prepare an overview of relevant activities by partners in the process that could provide inputs. The first draft should be made available for the second meeting of the Executive Committee. Thereafter, taking into consideration comments provided by the Executive Committee, the amended paper would be submitted to the next meeting of the Working Group.

III. HOST COUNTRY PREPARATIONS FOR THE SIXTH MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE

19. On behalf of the host country, the Chairperson informed the Working Group of the national preparatory process for the organization of the Belgrade Conference. To ensure an efficient preparatory process, an interdepartmental coordinating body had been established, chaired by the Minister of Science and Environmental Protection of Serbia. It embraces all key ministries, including the Ministries of Internal and Foreign Affairs and the customs services. To proceed with the practical arrangements, the coordinating body had set up a working group. The Ministry of Science and Environmental Protection of Serbia had been appointed as the focal point for the organisation of the Conference. The Chairperson confirmed Serbia and Montenegro's commitment to successfully host the meeting. The venue for the meeting and hotels for delegates' accommodation had been chosen and the practical arrangements were under way. The Working Group requested that the host country prepare a video presentation on the venue for its next meeting. With regard to the date, the Chairperson informed that the Conference will take place during the first or second week of October 2007.

20. Representatives of the secretariat had recently visited Belgrade to inspect the venue and discuss the preparations. The secretariat expressed its appreciation for the efficient co-operation and warm welcome that it received from the host country during its mission to Belgrade on 15 to 16 September 2005. An information note on the mission was distributed to delegations.

IV. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE WORKING GROUP OF SENIOR OFFICIALS

21. The Working Group established its Executive Committee in accordance with the mandate adopted by the eleventh session of the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy (ECE/CEP/124, Annex V) and the terms of reference prepared by the secretariat (CEP/AC.11/2005/3). The members of the Executive Committee were elected as follows: Serbia and Montenegro (Mr. Miroslav Spasojević, Chair), Italy (Mr. Massimo Cozzone), Hungary (Ms. Alojzia H. Lakos), Sweden (Mr. Jon Kahn), Switzerland (Mr. Juerg Schneider), Kyrgyzstan (to be announced), Russian Federation (Ms. Liubov Stepanova) and the United States (Mr. Chuck Ashley). A number of organisations were invited as observers, based on the mandate for the Working Group.

V. WORK-PLAN FOR THE WORKING GROUP AND ITS EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.

22. The Working Group discussed the calendar for its meetings and the meetings of the Executive Committee (CEP/AC.11/2005/4). It agreed that its next meeting will take place in the beginning of June 2006 back to back with the session of the Bureau of the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy. The Executive Committee's first meeting took place on 13 October 2005 (following the meeting of the Working Group) and the second meeting is scheduled for 28 February 2006. The secretariat was requested to prepare a paper on the timeframe for the preparatory process, with information on deadlines for the preparation of documents and organizational issues, for the next meeting. In addition, the Working Group asked the secretariat to prepare a list of relevant international high-level meetings scheduled to take place before the Belgrade Conference.

IV. THE "ENVIRONMENT FOR EUROPE" COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

23. The Chairman informed delegations about the outcome of discussions in the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy. The CEP took note of the draft strategy (CEP/2005/2) and passed it to the Working Group for further refinement.

24. The Chairman asked delegations to submit their comments on the content of the Strategy and on the further process until 15 January 2006. The secretariat would compile the comments and make them available to the next meeting of the Executive Committee for discussion and decision of the next steps.

V. CLOSING

25. The Chairperson expressed his appreciation of the fruitful deliberations and thanked all participants for their constructive contributions.
