



SIXTH MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE
“ENVIRONMENT FOR EUROPE”

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REPORT OF THE SIXTH MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE
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Addendum

**CHAIR’S SUMMARY OF THE JOINT SESSION ON EDUCATION FOR
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**



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**CHAIR’S SUMMARY OF THE JOINT SESSION ON EDUCATION FOR
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

*by Mr. Spyridon Taliadouros, Deputy Minister of National Education and Religious Affairs,
Greece, Chairperson of the Joint Session*

Ministers of Education and of the Environment of the UNECE region met for the first time after the adoption of the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development. Ministers considered achievements, lessons learned and challenges since the 2003 Kiev Ministerial Conference and agreed on the way ahead. They adopted by acclamation a Joint Statement proving commitment to the further implementation of the Strategy throughout the second and the third phases and beyond the year 2015. They extended the mandate of the Steering Committee until 2015 and requested it to oversee the regional implementation of the Strategy. It was the first time in the history of the “Environment for Europe” process that ministers from two sectors came together for a joint decision, giving an encouraging signal for integration to other sectors as well to cooperate and make sustainable development a reality.

INTRODUCTION

1. Ministers, Heads of delegations, representatives of civil society and the United Nations and other international bodies met in Belgrade to review the progress in implementation of the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and to debate ways to improve the effectiveness of ESD implementation. They confirmed that ESD could empower people to change their mindsets and make informed choices in favour of SD, and ESD could thereby play an important role in overcoming social, economic and environmental challenges.

2. The ministers agreed that the Strategy constituted a unique example of regional implementation of ESD among different initiatives developed in the framework of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development and served as a blueprint for other regions. The Strategy had proven to be an important framework for ESD implementation at the State level and provided an opportunity for effective regional cooperation. It had encouraged cooperation among different actors and had helped enable a comprehensive approach to introduce SD themes in formal, non-formal and informal education.

I. KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

3. A comprehensive reporting mechanism and set of indicators were evaluated as innovative tools which had helped countries to evaluate progress in the implementation of the Strategy. The feedback of 36 national implementation reports – even if the details of information were different – had been a success. The close and effective collaboration between UNECE and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), especially in the area of monitoring progress, had been highly appreciated by Governments. Other relevant international organizations were called upon to join this cooperation on reporting in the future.

4. The fulfillment of phase I for the implementation of the ESD Strategy was well on its way; most countries were showing commitment to establishing the necessary policies as well as institutional and administration structures to implement the Strategy. In particular, the countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) had made visible progress. The countries of South-Eastern Europe (SEE) had a number of challenges ahead, in that many of them were still in the process of taking the prerequisite measures to support the promotion of ESD. Other countries of the region had progressed significantly. Decentralized governing structure was not an obstacle for implementation of the ESD Strategy. Countries with a federal structure had made good progress.

5. Another key achievement of this process had been the collection of good practices in ESD in the UNECE region. This joint UNECE and UNESCO endeavor had resulted in the first publication of a wide range of good practices for promoting ESD in formal, non-formal and informal education. Good practices offered a wealth of experience and could be a key tool for promoting ESD in the region and worldwide during the next phases of the implementation of the Strategy.

6. Joint efforts in addressing ESD in Central Asia, the Mediterranean, the Baltic and recently in SEE offered a unique example of subregional cooperation in practice.

II. LESSONS LEARNED AND CHALLENGES

7. Those in kindergarten or in primary school today were tomorrow's decision-makers and they would be the ones to make the needed transitions.
8. A stronger partnership between authorities and stakeholders and among different departments, in particular, between education and environment ministries, remained an important precondition for enhancing implementation.
9. Competence in ESD within the education sector was an issue that had been confirmed to be relevant for the entire region and, therefore, needed to receive the highest priority, as it was a bottleneck in many occasions for the quality of education.
10. Another important challenge was capacity-building for decision makers and other stakeholders. In many countries informal education in cooperation with NGOs or so-called "social learning" among stakeholders was in its infancy.
11. SD had been conceptualized in different ways. Most of them were of an environmental nature, especially in EECCA and SEE countries. Only in some countries was a more integrative conceptualization of SD emerging which also allowed for socio-economic perspectives to enter the contents of ESD.
12. Materials for ESD at all levels needed to be developed, not only for educators and teacher trainers, but also for other ESD stakeholders (i.e. government officials, representatives of non-governmental organizations, administrators and business leaders). In most countries, a national strategy for the encouragement of the development of ESD tools and materials was still lacking. Despite the need for research on ESD-related issues, little had been done in this respect.
13. Although many countries in the region had rich sources of indigenous and other local knowledge, lack of its use remained a weak point in the ESD implementation process.
14. Another challenge was to make sustainability attractive not only to certain target groups, but to the society as a whole. In the global context, the problems posed by climate change were a leading example of where ESD could be applied to daily life, as climate change affected everyone and ESD offered an essential way to shape knowledge and attitudes, and hence could help us to address these problems.

III. THE WAY FORWARD

15. Phases II and III of the Strategy implementation should focus on the further strengthening of the initial measures and on the development of competences, ESD content and teaching tools and materials. A more integrative conceptualization of ESD was needed to better integrate all other components of SD with the environmental one, which was the focus of Environmental Education. This key objective would only be achieved with the promotion of stronger partnerships through multi-stakeholder forums between education on the one hand, and

environment sectors on the other. One of the priority activities for countries should be the development and start of implementation of their national plans.

16. ESD should be promoted through capacity building, the dissemination of good practices and the exchange of positive experiences. Implementation should be needs-driven and respond to country-specific challenges and common interests identified by subregions.

17. Partnerships with the private sector, in particular with the local businesses, should be further enhanced in promoting ESD. Stronger links with economic issues, including through exploring economic incentives and “greening” procurement, should be promoted.

18. Raising awareness of the potential contribution of indigenous and other traditional and local knowledge with respect to moving towards a more sustainable world should be given attention.

19. The Steering Committee should continue to manage the process at regional level. Securing funds for national implementation and for the regional process should be one of the priority tasks for Governments. To ensure stable and effective implementation of the programme, the ministers requested to consider the allocation of regular United Nations budget funds for the further work on the Strategy within UNECE.
