

EIGHTH ENVIRONMENT FOR EUROPE MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE: WEDNESDAY, 8 JUNE 2016

The Eighth Environment for Europe (EfE) Ministerial Conference opened on Wednesday, 8 June 2016, in Batumi, Georgia. Gigla Agulashvili, Minister of Environment and Natural Resources Protection, Georgia, chaired the Conference, which convened under the theme ‘Greener, Cleaner, Smarter!’

In the morning, Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili, Georgia, welcomed participants to the Conference. The UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Executive Secretary, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) Deputy Executive Director, and others delivered introductory remarks.

In the morning and afternoon, a plenary session and interactive discussion took place on ‘The environment dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: moving forward in the pan-European region.’ In the afternoon, a plenary session and interactive discussion convened on ‘Towards a new society: 10 years of education for sustainable development (ESD).’

In the evening, participants attended a reception and cultural event hosted by the Government of Georgia.

OPENING OF THE CONFERENCE

Prime Minister Kvirikashvili, Georgia, welcomed participants, underscoring the importance of the EfE process as a platform for international cooperation on environmental issues and Georgia’s commitment to a green economy and sustainable development.

Christian Friis Bach, Executive Secretary, UNECE, called for the EfE process to continue to reach tangible achievements to help implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)



Giorgi Kvirikashvili, Prime Minister, Georgia

and take bold decisions at this Conference on the proposed Batumi Initiative on the Green Economy (BIG-E) and the Batumi Action for Cleaner Air (BACA).

Archil Khabadze, Chairman, Government of the Autonomous Republic of Ajara, Georgia, stressed his government’s commitment to develop and implement environmental policies, such as participating in the UNDP Green Cities Programme.

Ambassador Tomáš Pernický, Czech Republic, said the SDGs provide an opportunity for common ground for EfE activities. He stressed the importance of regions in the 2030 Agenda’s global environmental architecture.

Ibrahim Thiaw, Deputy Executive Director, UNEP, highlighted the second UN Environment Assembly’s (UNEA-2) resolutions on inclusive green economy and air quality and called on EfE participants to take actions to foster a green economy and tackle air pollution.

Chair Agulashvili introduced the agenda (ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/1), which participants unanimously adopted.



Christian Friis Bach, Executive Secretary, UNECE



Archil Khabadze, Chairman of the Autonomous Republic of Ajara, Georgia





Ibrahim Thiaw, Deputy Executive Director, UNEP, moderated the session on the "Environment Dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development"

THE ENVIRONMENT DIMENSION OF THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Multilateral environmental agreements, mechanisms, policies and institutions supporting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Chair Agulashvili introduced the 'Final report on the implementation of the Astana Water Action: fostering progress towards improved water management' (ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/10) and 'Mapping of the Environment subprogramme processes and activities that support countries in achieving the SDGs (ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/INF/1). He invited participants to reflect on how to make best use of existing instruments and agreements to achieve the SDGs. Bach and Thiaw moderated the panel discussion.

Cross-cutting issues: THE NETHERLANDS, on behalf of the European Union (EU), called for political commitment to: decouple economic growth with environmental degradation; engage international stakeholders; create circular economies; and include the Paris Agreement in the Conference outcomes.

ARMENIA shared national efforts to bridge government with academia and commitments on joint actions. BELARUS showcased national experiences, underscoring the importance of monitoring results.

GEORGIA emphasized harmonized legislation to develop green economies, highlighting the ESD Initiative.

TAJKISTAN highlighted poverty reduction, institutional reforms and the need for mechanisms to ensure stable financial investments to support sustainable development.

GREECE underscored the role of UNECE in monitoring SDG implementation, avoiding duplication among multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) and raising awareness of the 2030 Agenda.

BULGARIA noted that its third Environmental Performance Review (EPR) is underway, underscoring its role in advancing environmental policies at the national and international levels.

KAZAKHSTAN highlighted access to safe drinking water, increased energy efficiency and agricultural productivity and stressed the need to develop infrastructure and attract green technologies.

UZBEKISTAN underscored the importance of water resources for Central Asia's sustainable development.

PORTUGAL underscored the need to mainstream environmental issues at the national and international levels and stressed the role of UNECE in this regard.

GERMANY noted that several MEAs can contribute to SDG implementation and highlighted the green economy and air quality as cross-sectoral issues.

Education: CROATIA recognized the value of collaboration with stakeholders to support and strengthen synergies between formal, non-formal and informal education initiatives. ESTONIA underscored how environmental instruments can integrate work among sectors.

SWEDEN previewed a pilot project to inform users of environmental data in order to promote informed decision making and protection of children. CZECH REPUBLIC shared experiences integrating the environment in policy, suggesting a central body for UNECE to support SDG implementation.

Water and health: FRANCE referred to the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) and its Protocol on Water and Health as examples of successful cross-sectoral integration. HUNGARY said the Water Convention and the Protocol on Water and Health can play key roles in implementing SDG 6 (Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all). He encouraged reforming institutional architecture and pursuing pragmatic solutions and cost effective technologies and methods to achieve water-related SDGs.

LITHUANIA highlighted how an electrified railway connecting the Baltic states to Europe will contribute to environmentally-friendly transport and health benefits.

REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA described her country's inter-sectoral approach for implementing MEAs and EPRs, emphasizing the importance of such approaches for implementing the SDGs and achieving green economy priorities.

FINLAND stressed the importance of transboundary water cooperation, including for energy and food security, saying UNECE conventions offer strong platforms for future cooperation.

LATVIA said implementing different MEAs had advanced common understanding on water and the marine environment in the UNECE region.

Different perspectives from non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations: EUROPEAN ECO FORUM applauded support for public participation, highlighting a link to regional trade agreements.

REGIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL CENTRE FOR CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE (REC-CEE) recommended partnerships, increased capacity building at all levels of government and continued public participation.

FRIENDS OF THE SIBERIAN FORESTS and THE GLOBAL FOREST COALITION underscored cross-cutting impacts of eliminating deforestation and called for a refined definition of forests in Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO).

THE ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT (OECD) shared actions to support SDG implementation, announcing the Task Force for the Implementation of the Environmental Action Programme has become the Green Action Program.

Responsible consumption and production: ROMANIA identified SDG 12 (Ensure sustainable consumption and production (SCP) patterns) as an enabler of the green economy and welcomed EPRs as a tool for implementing sustainable development.

ISRAEL shared his country's innovative technology in the agriculture, energy and water sectors, urging integrated environmental approaches and SCP.

ITALY supported decarbonizing the economy to achieve SCP, underscoring the role of public access to information and public participation in achieving climate goals and the SDGs.

Industry, innovation and infrastructure and the Astana Water Action: SLOVENIA highlighted SDG 9 (Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation), reflecting on the link among industrial accidents, resilience and sustainable development. He said MEAs are key in both setting high environmental standards and listening to country's needs.

TURKEY shared his country's goal of achieving 30% renewable energy and its establishment of a Ministry of Environment and Urbanization to promote coordinated action on environment and urban issues.

KEEPING THE PAN-EUROPEAN ENVIRONMENT UNDER REVIEW

Session Chair Agulashvili introduced the 'Report on progress in establishing the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) in support of regular reporting in the pan-European region' (ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/8) and the 'Summary of key findings and policy messages of the European regional assessment of the Sixth Global Environment Outlook (GEO-6)' (ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/9), among other documents.

Andrei Kovkhuto, Minister of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection, Belarus, described SEIS's development, saying increased access to environmental information helps fulfill MEA obligations. He highlighted challenges, including data quality.



Hans Bruyninckx, Executive Director, EEA

Hans Bruyninckx, Executive Director, the European Environment Agency (EEA), presented EEA milestones in implementing SEIS, highlighting data traceability and transparency. He said electronic reporting facilitates timely access for policy makers and the public, supporting joint work.

Country testimonials: GEORGIA, BULGARIA, CZECH REPUBLIC, BELARUS, and others discussed the value of SEIS in a video presentation.

The US applauded efforts under SEIS, stressing future developments should ensure data integration with existing social and economic data to support national monitoring of SDG implementation.

AUSTRIA presented its experience with SEIS for monitoring air quality and making information publicly available, suggesting targeted capacity building activities and partnership among countries.

REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA offered views on SEIS in support of a green economy, highlighting the need for comparable green growth and environmental indicators and the importance of inter-sectoral cooperation.

KAZAKHSTAN highlighted his country's SDG implementation activities related to water, renewable energy and climate change and promotion of SEIS principles.

GEO-6 launch: Jan Dusik, Director, UNEP Regional Office for Europe, and Bach launched GEO-6. Dusik stressed clean air and water and resilient ecosystems as critical for a healthy planet and healthy people, calling for closing resource loops, among other solutions. Bach said GEO-6 is one component of establishing a regular reporting process across the UNECE region, underscoring the report as a foundation for improving environmental processes, identifying emerging issues and enhancing science-policy dialogue.



Jan Dusik, Director, UNEP Regional Office for Europe



Cristiana Pasca Palmer, Minister of Environment, Waters and Forests, Romania

Matthew Billot, UNEP, identified air quality as the largest health risk to the pan-European population, saying lifestyle patterns, consumption and transport produce the biggest impact. He concluded environmental challenges in the pan-European region are increasingly complex and require coalitions among actors to agree on pathways to tackle risks.

Interactive ministerial panel discussion: Cristiana Pasca Palmer, Minister of Environment, Waters and Forests, Romania, moderated the panel.

Norbert Kurilla, State Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Slovakia, underscored the importance of analytical data, informing that Slovakia has created an Institute for Environmental Policy to promote such efforts.

Slaven Dobrović, Minister of Environment and Nature Protection, Croatia, called for harmonizing environmental spatial data according to agreed guidelines and suggested the pan-European region establish a geospatial information pillar under SEIS.

During discussions, many welcomed GEO-6. KYRGYZSTAN and the EU reiterated the importance of information access for governments and the public. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION called for clarification in the report's conclusions on exposure to air pollution, cautioning that using estimates can lead to inaccuracies.

Chair Agulashvili concluded by highlighting the importance of the GEO-6 for policy, transboundary cooperation and implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

TOWARDS A NEW SOCIETY: 10 YEARS OF ESD

Session Co-Chair Alexandre Jejelava, Minister of Education and Science, Georgia, opened the session by introducing the 'Draft Batumi Ministerial Statement on ESD' (ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/L.2) and the 'Framework

for the future implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD' (ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/11). He shared ESD achievements in Georgia, *inter alia*: standards for preschool teachers to increase general awareness; and funding for vocation and higher education for scientific studies.

Session Co-Chair Teimuraz Murgulia, First Deputy Minister, Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources



Co-Chair Teimuraz Murgulia, First Deputy Minister, Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection, Georgia

Protection, Georgia, said education initiatives should raise awareness on climate change impacts and called for an internationally binding agreement on ESD.

Costas Kadis, Minister of Education and Culture, Cyprus, outlined actions to bring ESD forward, including prioritization at ministry level and financial investment. He invited all UNECE education Ministers to the Ministerial Meeting for

the Adoption of the Action Plan for the ESD Mediterranean Strategy in Cyprus in December 2016.

Sharon Dijksma, Minister for the Environment, the Netherlands, focused on the importance of formal, non-formal and informal education for the transition to sustainable development and its role in understanding complex environmental challenges and in dealing with uncertainty and changing values.

Qian Tang, UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), via video address, said the Global Action Programme on ESD aims to contribute to the SDGs as a follow up to the UN Decade of ESD and urged strengthened collaboration.

Gerald Farthing, Chair, ESD Steering Committee, shared key findings in implementing the UNECE Strategy for ESD, highlighting secure leadership, political will and allocating budget and human resources as 'game-changers' in advancing progress.

BELGIUM, ROMANIA, BELARUS, UKRAINE, HUNGARY, GERMANY, POLAND, CZECH REPUBLIC, GREECE, KYRGYZSTAN, ECO FORUM, REC-CEE, and UNEP made interventions, with some sharing national actions, noting stakeholders' roles and pledging support for the Batumi Ministerial Statement on ESD.

Co-Chair Jejelava invited delegates to adopt the relevant documents, to which participants agreed.



Heads of delegation posed for a family photo during the first day of the 8th Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference