

**ENVIRONMENT DIRECTORATE
ENVIRONMENT POLICY COMMITTEE
TASK FORCE FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION
PROGRAMME FOR CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE, CAUCASUS AND CENTRAL ASIA**

PAPER ON PARTNERSHIPS INVOLVING NGOs

Conference of EECCA Environment Ministers and their Partners

**21-22 October 2004
Tbilisi, Georgia**

The document is prepared by the EAP Issue Group of the European Eco-Forum. It reflects outcomes of NGOs discussions, organised by the EAP Issue Group of the European Eco-Forum on making the partnership for implementation of the Environmental Strategy efficient. It serves as background information on Agenda item 4.

ACION REQUIRED: For information.

JT00171286

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The Partnership to Achieve Objectives of the EECCA Environmental Strategy

Developed by the EAP Issue Group of the European Eco-Forum

1. *The Environmental Strategy as a WSSD Partnership*

1. The EECCA Environmental Strategy was registered as a partnership of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (2002).

2. According to the definition of the UN Commission for Sustainable Development, WSSD partnerships should meet the following key criteria:

- to be voluntary initiatives undertaken by *governments and relevant stakeholders*, that contribute to implementation of Agenda 21, the Program for Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Implementation Plan;
- to bring *concrete value addition* to the implementation process and be new - not merely reflecting existing arrangements;
- to bear in mind the *economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development* in their design and implementation;
- to be designed and implemented *in a transparent manner*;
- to be of *international nature*.

3. This document reflects outcomes of NGOs discussions, organised by the EAP Issue Group of the European Eco-Forum on making the partnership for implementation of the Environmental Strategy efficient. Unfortunately enough, so far, the above listed CSD principles are not applied to a full extent. This was one of the reasons why, for the period of time of a little more than one year, the EECCA Environmental Strategy *per se* has not generated tangible results in terms of environmental activities in the region and real environmental improvements. To make the EECCA Strategy partnership successful and to ensure its real contribution to sustainable development, it is necessary to apply the above principles more vigorously, it is necessary to ensure active, consistent and accountable activities for improvement of co-operation between the partners and involve new partners to the process.

2. *Improvement of East-West Co-operation*

4. Implementation of the EECCA Environmental Strategy substantially depends on development of partnerships between EECCA countries and other UN ECE countries. So far, the Environmental Strategy is mainly driven by international organisations and donor countries, rather than by EECCA countries themselves.

5. We call EECCA countries:

- to take the lead in the Strategy implementation, to recognise their own responsibility for sustainable development at national and the global levels;
- to demonstrate their adherence to the Strategy, to make specific commitments and set timeframes for achievement of targets of the document prior to the Conference "Almaty+5" in 2005.

3. *Active Involvement of Social and Economic Stakeholders.*

6. At the international level, close interlinkages between environmental problems and socio-economic issues are generally recognised. Environmental problems should be addressed accounting for these interlinkages. Correspondingly, it is necessary to improve co-operation of environmental ministries and their socio-economic ministerial counterparts.

7. Earlier, in EECCA region, attempts were made to extend co-operation of different ministries for purposes of addressing environmental problems, in the framework of Environment for Europe process. In particular, in 2000, in Almaty, the Conference of Environmental and Economic/Finance Ministers was held to discuss integration of environmental concerns into economic development policies, focusing on water problems. In this connection, the Ministerial Meeting in Tbilisi might be considered as a step backwards, as only environmental ministers are expected to participate in the event.

8. We hope, that in the future, a broader range of ministries and agencies (including the ones in charge of socio-economic issues) will be involved into implementation of the Environmental Strategy. To achieve this, it is necessary *inter alia*:

- to extend research studies that demonstrate interlinkages between economic, environmental and social issues for EECCA countries; to improve dissemination of findings of these research studies;
- to strengthen activities for raising public awareness of interlinkages between economic, environmental and social issues, in particular via mass media outlets;
- to intensify activities for capacity building of governmental officials, NGOs, the academic community and other social sectors in the sphere of sustainable development;
- to ensure a broader involvement of social and economic stakeholders into activities in the framework of implementation of the EECCA Environmental Strategy, to arrange information exchange.

9. We call countries to organise high-level events for EECCA countries and their partners with participation of different social sectors, including events dedicated to environment and poverty eradication, sustainable production and consumption.

4. *Involvement of Industry and Businesses.*

10. There are numerous documents that recognise importance of involvement of industrial and business stakeholders into addressing environmental problems of the region, but the real involvement efforts and their effects are clearly insufficient so far. Activities in the framework of the Strategy implementation should include:

- development of legislative acts and policies to facilitate involvement of industry and businesses into activities for environmental improvements and integration of environmental considerations into economic activities;

- dissemination of ideas of social responsibility of businesses in its broad meaning, including responsible treatment of the environment;
- facilitation of accession of the EECCA business communities to progressive international initiatives (the Global Compact, the Global Reporting);
- improvement of information activities, broad dissemination of success stories in the sphere, including, in particular, information on win-win projects.

11. The EAP Issue Group of the European Eco-Forum plans to extend discussions with businesses and governments on options to maximise efficiency of these activities. The EAP Issue Group is interested in practical implementation of projects in the sphere.

5. *More Efficient Partnerships with NGOs.*

5.1 A Broader Involvement of NGOs into Activities to Achieve Objectives of the Strategy.

12. Now, roles of non-governmental organisations in addressing diverse problems, including environmental ones, are steadily growing in almost all EECCA countries. NGOs protect citizens' rights, work with the general public, propose new initiatives, that often result in new local, national and international processes and projects, attract attention of policy-makers and governmental authorities to major problems, propose alternative options to resolve them; NGOs use their experience, knowledge and enthusiasm to implement specific environmental projects and generate tangible results.

13. Notwithstanding substantial growth of public participation in the region, we are concerned about attempts to put pressure on the non-governmental sector - these attempts become more intensive not only in countries outside the Aarhus Convention but in countries-parties of the Convention as well. Unfortunately enough, sometimes governments tend to suppress civic activities under pretext of counter-terrorist measures.

14. There are numerous examples of growing partnerships between NGOs and other social sectors, particularly partnerships between NGOs and governmental/local authorities. However, in general, NGOs consider the contemporary level of partnerships as insufficient or unduly efficient. All parties are sometimes reluctant to co-operate, they often demonstrate distrust or unwillingness to co-operate. Many initiatives of NGOs are not accounted for or supported, or are simply ignored. Having a strong capacity, NGOs often do not have sufficient resources for an efficient partnership.

15. What is the most important - it is necessary to *recognise* that we need to unite efforts of all stakeholders if we want to improve environmental quality and reach sustainable development in general, and to achieve objectives of the Environmental Strategy, in particular. We all are interested in making our efforts more efficient. Therefore, it is necessary to make a transition from endless discussions on co-operation between governmental bodies and NGOs to efficient and specific partnerships.

16. In order to make the community of NGOs an efficient partner, it is necessary:

- To expand exchange of information on activities of different sectors for achievement of objectives of the EECCA Environmental Strategy.
- To improve capacity building of NGOs, to increase finance support of their initiatives, including such projects as "East-West" and "West-East";

- To involve actively a broader range of NGOs into achievement of objectives of the Environmental Strategy - including youth and women's NGOs, trade unions, development-oriented and other NGOs, besides the environmental ones.

17. *New Regional Environmental Centres* can and should play a more important role in the process of broader involvement of NGOs into the Strategy implementation activities. Fulfilling their mission of supporting public participation, new RECs might become more active in mobilisation of finance resources, including domestic resources, for purposes of supporting NGOs initiatives, new RECs should promote their partnerships with other social sectors.

18. It is important to enhance roles of new RECs in development of partnerships in EECCA region for achievement of objectives of the Environmental Strategy. It is necessary to ensure that different social sectors participate in selection of priority activities of new RECs at the regional level. Earlier, the Council of new RECs existed - the Council incorporated representatives of governmental organisations and NGOs of all countries and regions of RECs operations, as well as representatives of international intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations. Now, the Council does not operate. However, the Council is really needed. It is necessary to establish an intersectoral body and a consultative council of NGOs. Improvement of relations between new RECs and NGOs at the regional level seem to be particularly important in the context of possible transfer of the EAP Secretariat to EECCA countries. We should not allow to lose good traditions of efficient partnerships between the EAP TF Secretariat and NGOs.

5.2. A Broader Involvement of NGOs into Co-ordination and Improvement of the Environmental Strategy.

19. Non-governmental organisations (the European Eco-Forum) were officially recognised as partners in implementation of the Environmental Strategy. Prior to the Kiev Ministerial Conference, NGOs had made a major contribution into development of the Environmental Strategy, they implemented major information campaigns and organised discussions at national and regional levels (overall, more than 700 organisations of different sectors participated in these activities). The EAP Task Force invited NGO representatives to participate in all events, associated with preparation of the Tbilisi Ministerial Conference, that established efficient partnership relations with the European Eco-Forum.

20. However, notwithstanding their enthusiasm and support of ideas of the Environmental Strategy, NGOs have failed to become an efficient partner. They were not duly involved into development of action plans under the Strategy (beside the part, the EAP Task Force was responsible for). At the same time, their participation could be fairly useful. Provided their participation, the Strategy could better meet principles of WSSD partnerships. Initiatives of NGOs to launch a discussion on implementation of the Strategy immediately after the Kiev Conference did not gain support. NGOs failed to organise national discussions and arrange a regional NGO conference in Summer-2004 to provide timely and full comments to the documents. Unfortunately, NGOs have not provided sufficient information on regional partnerships with their participation, due to lack of a broad information campaign to substantiate the need of gathering information on these matters.

21. We greatly acknowledge support of DEFRA (UK), the Dutch Ministry of Housing, Physical Planning and Environment and the Ministry of Environment of Finland, that allowed us to implement some activities: the electronic discussion and the meeting of NGOs were held, as a result, comments on draft documents of the Tbilisi Ministerial Meeting were developed, reviews on public participation and environmental education in the region were drafted, proposals to improve mechanisms of the Environmental Strategy implementation were developed.

22. Non-governmental organisations of the region can make a major contribution into achievement of objectives of the EECCA Environmental Strategy - by participation in development of policies, legislative acts and programs, implementation of specific projects, and promoting broad public support of the Strategy. It is necessary to take practical steps to provide them resources, necessary for fulfilment of these functions at regional, subregional, national and local levels.

6. *The EECCA Environmental Strategy Partnership Needs a New Impetus for Development*

23. Efficient participation of NGOs in implementation of the Environmental Strategy is impossible without improvement of efficiency of the Strategy itself. Notwithstanding diversity of international co-operation processes, we consider the Strategy as an important tools for environmental improvements in the region.

24. We are concerned about the lack of regular and co-ordinated activities in the framework of the Environmental Strategy. After completion of the Kiev Conference (May 2003), when the Strategy was endorsed, for a year, no actions were made at the regional level to develop mechanisms of the Strategy implementation, as it was declared in Kiev. At that time, activities were limited to earlier processes, no new initiatives had been proposed.

25. It is well known, that there are still some conflicts between countries over use of their shared natural resources and these conflicts contradict to objectives of the Strategy. At the national level, the EECCA Environmental Strategy was not incorporated into national laws and regulations, many countries failed to designate bodies in charge of the Strategy implementation. National reports on implementation of the Environmental Strategy actually cover activities that are planned at the national level or in the framework of other processes, but these activities are not directly associated with the Environmental Strategy.

26. It is necessary to strengthen linkages between implementation of the Environmental Strategy, the Aarhus Convention. "Education for Sustainable Development" process and other international processes of relevance to environmental protection, sustainable development, poverty eradication, anti-corruption measures, improvement of public governance, financing for development, etc.

27. We understand that there are real difficulties - the majority of environmental agencies operate in difficult conditions of frequent reshuffles and have a low status vis a vis other ministries. These factors reduce their capacity to achieve substantial results. However, NGOs will continue their activities to make the society recognise high importance and priority of environmental issues, to make public environmental management systems efficient and effective.

28. We hope that the Ministerial Meeting will provide a new impetus to actions for environmental improvements in the region. From our side, the European Eco-Forum declares its willingness to contribute into the partnership process, developing co-operation between NGOs and all with governments and all other stakeholders.