EU Environmental Policy Briefing[*]

UN 'Environment for Europe' Process Reaffirms its Commitments to Halt the Loss of Biodiversity

19 October 2007

The sixth ministerial conference of the 'Environment for Europe' (EfE) process convened in Belgrade, Serbia from 10-12 October 2007. The EfE process was initiated in 1991 under the auspices of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). The meeting, attended by over 1,000 delegates from over 50 countries, provided an opportunity to assess the implementation of previous EfE commitments and consider the future of the process.

Discussing progress in the implementation of the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy (PEBLDS)[1] and the Kiev Resolution on halting the loss of biodiversity in Europe by 2010[2] formed one of the issues on the ministerial agenda. The roundtable discussion on biodiversity between Ministers and stakeholders, including the Ministers of environment participating in the PEBLDS process, the European Environment Agency (EEA) and representatives of NGOs, took place at the end of the first day of the meeting. The participants in the discussions highlighted, for example, the role of biodiversity in supporting sustainable social and economic development and the importance of improving the synergies between biodiversity and climate change policies.

At the close of the roundtable session the delegates adopted the Belgrade Statement on Biodiversity[3]. In the statement the Ministers and Heads of Delegation reaffirmed, inter alia, their commitment to the implementation of the Kiev Resolution and PEBLDS. They also pledged continued support to the implementation of the Pan-European Ecological Network (PEEN) as an important means for protecting biodiversity in Europe. However, the Ministers emphasised that it was also necessary to reconcile land use and development needs with the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem services in the wider context of landscape protection. Finally, Ministers noted with concern that even though several regional, sub-regional, national and local measures had already been taken to reduce the current rate of biodiversity loss, considerable additional efforts were still needed to attain the 2010 biodiversity target.

[*] This work was funded by the statutory conservation and countryside bodies in the UK, as part of a contractual arrangement with IEEP to provide intelligence on EU environment policy and other policies which impact on the environment. It reflects the independent views of IEEP and not necessarily the views of the funding bodies. For further information contact Emma Watkins at ewatkins@ieep.eu

The commitments made in the Belgrade Statement on Biodiversity were also mentioned in the final Ministerial Declaration of the meeting. However, when addressing future developments, the Declaration mainly focused on the general reform of the EfE process; no specific thematic areas, including ones related to biodiversity, were particularly highlighted.

In general, the biodiversity-related outcomes of the Belgrade meeting can be deemed relatively good, especially when considering the earlier difficulties in reaching an agreement on including biodiversity on the conference agenda in the first place, for example due to the strong initial opposition from the United States. It is now hoped that the upcoming reform of the EfE process does not shift the focus away from further addressing its important biodiversity-related commitments. In addition a number of stakeholders, the NGO representatives in particular, also emphasise that the future implementation of these commitments should not solely be focused on the countries in South Eastern Europe (SEE) and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA), but that the EfE process should also aim to reach the committed targets in Western and Central Europe.

References

1. The Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy: http://www.strategyguide.org/fulltext.html
2. The Kiev Resolution on Biodiversity, UNECE 'Environment for Europe' process, Fifth Ministerial Conference, 21-23 May 2003, Kyiv, Ukraine: http://www.unece.org/env/proceedings/files.pdf/Item%209/9Documents/ece.cep.108.e.pdf
3. Belgrade statement on biodiversity (ECE/BELGRADE.CONF/2007/15 Corr.1), UNECE 'Environment for Europe' process, Sixth Ministerial Conference, 10-12 October 2007, Belgrade, Serbia (not yet available online)
4. Ministerial Declaration 'Building Bridges to the Future' by Ministers of the region of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), UNECE 'Environment for Europe' process, Sixth Ministerial Conference, 10-12 October 2007, Belgrade, Serbia: http://www.unece.org/env/documents/2007/ece/ece.belgrade.conf.2007.8.e.pdf

Marianne Kettunen, Policy Analyst
mkettunen@ieep.eu

© Copyright IEEP 2007