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#### INFORMATION NOTE

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From: General Secretariat of the Council  
To: Delegations

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Subject: United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE):  
Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference  
(Batumi, Georgia, 8-10 June 2016)  
- Statements by the European Union and its Member States

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Delegations will find in the [Annex](#) for information a compilation of statements, as agreed, on the main Conference agenda items, which were delivered during the meeting.

**United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE):  
Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference  
(Batumi, Georgia, 8-10 June 2016)**

**- Statements by the European Union and its Member States -**

**Agenda item 2: The environment dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development  
- moving forward in the pan-European region**

**(a) Multilateral environmental agreements, mechanisms, policies and institutions  
supporting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

Mr. President, Mr. Prime Minister, Your Excellencies,

Let me first thank the Government of Georgia for hosting us here in Batumi – on behalf of the European Union and its Member States, on behalf of which I am honoured to address you today.

This Conference marks the 25th anniversary of the "Environment for Europe" process: 25 years of fruitful international cooperation, bringing us considerable improvement in Environmental policy in all countries. And we are still learning from each other.

This has always been a unique platform, as it regularly brings together the representatives of governments, international organizations, financial institutions, academia, private sector and civil society.

Today, we are looking at the impact of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This will be our global Compass to steer our actions towards sustainability. To implement this Agenda we urgently need an integrated approach that balances the three dimensions of sustainable development - social, economic and environmental.

The Environment for Europe process is a good example of what such an integrated approach can bring about. In the past 25 years the "Environment for Europe" process has produced a number of cross-sectoral approaches: from transport, health and environment to decoupling economic growth and environment. But also water, food and ecosystem interdependencies and even the relations between trans-boundary environmental problems and risks to security and political stability. These cross-sectoral approaches have also led to cooperation between many countries and international organizations, such as between the Environment for Europe and the Environment and Health Process.

The "Environment for Europe" has resulted in a number of binding instruments for countries, supported by international organizations, private sector and civil society. The EU and its Member States have always supported the strong participation of all Stakeholders in this process. We are convinced that this is one of the main added values of this process – and that active participation provides a priceless contribution. Beside these legally-binding instruments, we must not forget the role played by the Environmental Performance Review Programme in the past 20 years and its value in supporting the implementation of the environmental dimension of Agenda 2030

In order to achieve Sustainable Development, moving towards more sustainable consumption and production patterns, including through Greening the Economy, is essential. We realise that Economic Growth cannot be separated from a healthy environment and good management of our natural and human capital. We therefore fully support the goals of the Strategic Framework for Greening the Economy that will be endorsed this week. Reduced environmental risk and ecological scarcity, enhanced economic progress and improved human well-being and social equity are also key in the recent package on Circular Economy that we currently discuss within the EU. A transition to a more circular economy is essential for the contribution to a sustainable, competitive economy. Both business and consumers are key drivers in this process and should be involved. The transition is an opportunity to generate new and sustainable competitive advantages. Increased policy coherence is essential for the implementation of global commitments made in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – in particular by ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns.

Another example of the need for an integrated approach is the major achievement of last year's Paris Agreement. Although the "Environment for Europe" process does not deal directly with climate issues, we realise more and more that measures needed for combating climate change are relevant for air quality which is one of the umbrella topics at this conference. A concrete example can be found in short lived climate pollutants. The International Climate and Clean Air Coalition is promoting solutions that have positive effects to both climate and air quality. We hope that some of the Actions that were submitted under the Batumi Action for Cleaner Air are also directed to these specific pollutants.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides a long term perspective for humanity and our planet . It will greatly influence our work in the coming years, at local, national and international level. Again, we believe that implementation should be based on an integrated approach, taking all universal Goals into account – and based on cooperation between governments, international organisations, private sector, local authorities and civil society.

We acknowledge the role that the "Environment for Europe" process can play and underline the support that UNECE tools can provide to help countries in their commitments to implement the SDGs towards 2030. Let's use all available instruments to the fullest extent!

Thank you.

## **(b) Keeping the pan-European environment under review**

### ***SEIS*** \*

1. The EU and its Member States reiterate their strong support to the commitment taken by the Ministers of the Environment from the pan European region at the Seventh Environment for Europe (EfE) Astana Ministerial Conference on the development of SEIS across the region and, based on this, on the development of a regular reporting and assessment process. The EU and its Member States recognise the essential role of sharing environmental data and information not only as basis for improved assessments at all levels but also as a solid basis for better policies and environmental governance.

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\* could not be delivered.

2. We are confident that the gradual implementation of Shared Environment Information System (SEIS) will play an important role in reducing administrative reporting burden for the realisation of national state of environment reports in the pan European region and, when possible, in streamlining the various reporting processes at regional and global levels, including the reporting obligations under the various MEAs. The role of SEIS as an input into the regional and global assessment under UNEP will require enhanced coordination between UNEP, UNECE and EEA towards sharing and better use of available data, information and assessments at national and regional .
3. We thank the ECE Secretariat for the preparation of a first progress report in establishing SEIS in support to regular reporting in the pan-European region. We acknowledge that developing a mechanism to monitor SEIS progress across the pan-European region is still a work in progress. Subsequently we invite UNECE, in dialogue with the member countries and other international partners such UNEP and EEA, to continue this work, building on the good practices and experience already available in the region in implementing SEIS and streamlining the reporting processes.
4. We also acknowledge that, Western Balkans, South Eastern European, Eastern European, and Caucasus countries are currently receiving support in implementing SEIS through various EU assistance projects, with the aim of facilitating better cooperation between national institutions for producing and sharing a number of crucial environmental data and indicators and improve the quality of environmental reporting. Therefore we believe that the next reporting cycle by 2020 will be largely based on SEIS principles. The EEA, UNECE and UNEP, by sharing their experience and knowledge, are invited to jointly guide this work.
5. Lastly, the EU and its Member States fully support the idea of having in place a more sustainable mechanism to assess SEIS performance and the progress achieved across the pan-European region, using effectively environmental indicators, as well as to facilitate the exchange of good practices among countries and to improve communication during the SEIS implementation phase. In this regard, we suggest to use as far as possible already existing ECE structures, possibly reinforcing their mandates by incorporating the task of monitoring and reporting on SEIS progress across the region.

## **GEO-6**

The EU welcomes the launch of the GEO-6 European regional assessment and appreciates the efforts made to produce this report for the Batumi Ministerial Conference. The summary with the key messages is especially useful, as it is of high quality, coherent and analyses well the thematic priorities of the region.

In view of the GEO regional assessment serving as a future regular assessment for the pan-European region, the EU and its Member States encourage UNEP to make better use of available data, information and assessments at national and regional level following the SEIS principles.

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#### Agenda item 4: Greening the economy in the pan-European region

- At the last EfE Conference in Astana, Ministers and other Heads of delegations agreed to take the lead in the transition to a green economy in their countries and through the engagements of Governments and cooperation with the private sector and with various partners in the region, inter alia by supporting the decoupling of economic growth from environmental degradation.  
We are here today to exchange our experiences on what we have learned and achieved so far and how to move further together on this path.
- As part of its support to a green economy, the EU has highlighted the need to move from a linear to circular economy. This is not just a question of environmental protection but a step towards improving competitiveness, creating new business opportunities, addressing issues such as increasing and volatile resource prices, security of supply for certain crucial raw materials, increasing costs of managing waste. At the same time, clearly, there is a strong economic logic behind this transition.
- The business as usual approach is no longer viable. This linear economy model with its 'take, make, dispose' approach implies that resources that could be recycled and reused, are instead of being wasted and ending up in landfills or in our seas as marine litter. A circular economy model offers the potential to achieve sustainable growth and achieve resource and energy efficiency, also protecting biodiversity, ecosystems and ecosystem services.
- Studies demonstrate significant cost-saving opportunities for the EU industry from circular economy approaches. Growth and jobs is one of the EU's priorities and studies show that by 2030, the circular economy would create a net benefit of almost € trillion more than in the current linear development path, and would represent a 7% GDP gain. Increasing resource productivity by 30% could boost GDP and create 2 million more jobs by 2030 than business as usual.
- The transition towards a circular economy will require investments and changing the way we produce, consume and dispose of things and finding ways of turning waste into a resource, as well as the phasing out of hazardous substances in order to secure toxic free material streams. It should focus on industrial symbioses within and cross-sectoral value chains and avoid policy fragmentation.
- Cooperation with the private sector (big enterprises but also SMEs) and other stakeholders (civil society, research and financial institutions, governments at all levels) is important in the transition towards the circular economy. Therefore also education and training programmes are crucial to ensure that a transition to a circular economy that generates quality jobs is achieved. Market-based instruments are important to create economic incentives to stimulate the sustainable use of resources. Besides that green public procurement is also recognised as an important tool to create markets for circular products and services.
- The circular economy concept appeals especially to manufacturing sectors that rely on high input of material resources, such as the machinery, engineering, or chemical industries. There is growing demand for new business activities in recycling, repair, upgrading, and remanufacturing, but also for new business models like the sharing economy.

- Research and innovation are essential to develop new technologies, products, production techniques and innovative business models that are essential to enable the transition. Support could be given e.a. through innovation funds. The demand for innovation and know-how increasing circularity will not only expand in Europe, as- also other resource-poor economies in the world are expected to follow this approach, resulting in increased international trade.
- At EU level, the European Commission adopted on 2 December 2015 a Circular Economy Package, with an Action Plan and a set of legislative proposals on waste. The package addresses the full lifecycle of products: including sustainable sourcing of materials, product design and production processes, and better informed consumer choices. However, many Member States are already taking steps on national level towards a transition to circular economy to which the EU package can contribute.
- Both the proposed Action Plan and legislative measures are currently being examined by the Council of the EU and Environment Ministers will be discussing circular economy when meeting in Luxembourg in a few days, on 20 June, with a view to adopting Council conclusions on the EU Action Plan.

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## **Agenda item 5: Improving air quality for a better environment and human health**

### Background

*The EU has longstanding objectives for achieving clean air and limiting transboundary air pollution. The LRTAP Convention has played a key role in achieving those objectives: over more than four decades it has provided much of the basis for our policy, in particular through its science work under EMEP and the Working Group on Effects. Important examples include the use of common methods for air pollution monitoring and the estimation methodologies for air emissions, the "effects-based" approach including the key concepts of critical loads and levels and the use of integrated assessment tools (in particular the GAINS model). Also for the development of policies and measures the LRTAP Convention has played an important role, for example on the use of Best Available Techniques which can be implemented all across Europe. There is hence a continued mutual interest between the EU and the UNECE in pursuing the cooperation for cleaner air everywhere within the entire region and addressing the remaining challenges.*

*A specific challenge for the EU and the Convention will be to address the hemispheric and global air pollution issues, with due consideration to developing an integrated approach to air pollution and climate change promoting the positive interactions while avoiding the negative impacts.*

### Speaking points

- Although air pollution emissions have gone down significantly in the region, air quality is still not good everywhere. Particulate matter levels are higher than our standards in many places and we are quite a distance from our long term objectives as set out in the WHO guidelines for human health and set out in the critical loads for the protection of ecosystems and biodiversity. The EEA estimates that for 2012 more than 400,000 premature deaths in the EU occur due to air pollution. Part of these problems result from domestic emissions, at the same time significant fraction is due to long range transboundary air pollution.

- Some sectors have been able to reduce emissions significantly, in particular industry and energy and, to a certain extent, also transport. However, it is necessary also to reduce emissions in the agriculture sector, taking into account, if appropriate, the specific circumstances for implementing source control measures in this sector, in order to reach our long term objectives (specifically on the protection of biodiversity due to eutrophication and exposure to secondary particulate matter).
- A more integrated approach to air pollution and climate change could lead to significant co-benefits, as well to reducing the risk of applying climate change measures with significant negative impacts on air quality.
- The LRTAP Convention and its protocols set out objectives and commitments the EU has signed up to and implemented over the years. A key priority for the whole EU and for the Convention is to have more Parties to the latest three protocols as amended. We can now announce that the EU instruments for ratification of the 2009 amendments to the POP Protocol and the 2012 amendment to the Heavy Metal Protocol have been sent to the repository in the UN. We are also finalising our internal legislation for the implementation of the 2012 amendment to the Gothenburg Protocol and should therefore be able to ratify that amendment shortly thereafter. This will hopefully pave the way to more ratifications from countries in the region and therefore allow for their entry into force.
- In the EU we have made substantial progress in recent years, adopting new legislation (i.e. a Directive on Medium Size Combustion Plants in 2015) , aiming at reducing air pollution from certain sources, as part of a broader Clean Air Policy Package . We are currently discussing other new legislative measures (i.e. the new National Emission Ceilings Directive) aiming at setting ambitious reduction commitments on several air pollutants for 2030 and beyond. In this respect, the UNECE Convention could play an important role in the areas of capacity building and sharing of experience and tools used in air quality management (e.g. emission inventories, monitoring, modelling...).
- The EU and its Member States welcome the Convention’s newly released scientific assessment report – “Towards clean air” that in a insightful way describes the success and importance of international cooperation on air pollution, while at the same time it addresses the challenges still ahead. This reports strengthens once more our conviction that the EfE can contribute to our common objectives, including through all countries signing up to the proposed actions outlined in the Action Plan before us.

### Key messages

[In conclusion]:

- The EU and its Member States believe that current air quality policy and legislation has to be implemented and respected everywhere in the region as a first step to meet our objective for protection of human health and the environment. Long- range transboundary air pollution concerns us all and measures at national or city level alone will not result in a situation in which the WHO guidelines for air pollution will be met. We in the EU have systematically implemented measures to reduce air pollution and are committed to improving implementation in the future, while still recognising the challenges that remain to improve air quality so as to meet long term objectives for clean air.

- There is a common interest for continuing our cooperation, sharing information and capacity building within the region and we stand ready to contribute to this ongoing process. In this respect the newly released assessment report “Towards cleaner air” constitutes an important stepping stone for future international cooperation to clear the air.
- However, continued commitment to the Convention's various activities, in kind or through financial contributions, from all Parties remains essential to avoid future data-gaps and to be able to continue scientific and technical studies and analysis.
- Policy makers need those inputs to ensure an adequate regulatory framework, but at the same time policy makers need to identify what the most pressing areas for further technical and scientific are so that limited funds can be used most efficiently.
- An integrated approach to air pollution and climate change could lead to significant co-benefits, as well as to reducing the risk of applying climate change measures with significant negative impact on air quality.
- We invite all countries to fully implement the Convention and its protocols and take adequate measures to achieve clean air in the region: the Action Plan resulting from this Ministerial Conference provides an important contribution to that goal.

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### **Agenda item 7: Adoption of the Conference outcomes**

In these past few days here in Batumi we have discussed intensively key issues, from Green economy to Cleaner air, from the role of ESD to the need to have reliable environmental data to inform our decisions and how to move forward in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in our region.

We have adopted a Ministerial Declaration focusing on the two main themes of this Conference, which recognises the importance of our 25 year long cooperation in this forum and reaffirms our commitment to work at national and regional level to improve the environment, as well as the health conditions, in the pan-European region, including through implementing the SDGs and the Paris Agreement. These landmarks Agreements from 2015 provide us with renewed momentum for our actions.

We have endorsed the Strategic Framework on Green economy and many of us have announced important actions undertaken to promote Green economy and improve the Air quality, with beneficial effects not only for the environment but also for health and climate change. Education for sustainable development is a key element in creating awareness.

We have all heard the alarm launched by the UN and by the latest scientific assessments on the significant environmental and health risks of air pollution nowadays, and therefore the need for urgent action.

We have shown, with such an active participation by Governments and by all stakeholders that the Environment for Europe process remains a unique and lively platform to exchange ideas, experiences, but also to acknowledge progress made, for instance in the EPR programme, the Astana commitments and the various important MEAs which we encourage all to ratify, so as to move forward together to address the critical challenges ahead. It should not only stay at words, but implementation and taking action are crucial to achieve tangible results.

This gives us hope and motivation for the years ahead for the EfE and for a greener, cleaner and smarter future

Last but not least, we wish to thank the Government and people of Georgia for their hospitality and their commitment in these past days, and to UNECE and the EfE Secretariat for all the work done in the run up to the Conference and here in Batumi.

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