



Recommendation 1637 (2003)¹

Pan-European environmental co-operation: the Council of Europe's role after the Kyiv Ministerial Conference and the Johannesburg Summit

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 recognised the need for a regional approach in implementing the provisions of the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21. This need was more recently endorsed at the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg in 2002.
2. Guided by the political changes in the countries of central and eastern Europe and the subsequent opening up of new opportunities for joint action, Europe has been the first to respond to this global call for regional commitments, in particular through the "Environment for Europe" (EfE) process, which was set up to enable countries in transition to achieve a degree of environmental protection equivalent to that of developed countries in the pan-European zone.
3. The fifth pan-European ministerial conference, Environment for Europe, held in Kyiv from 21 to 23 May 2003, was the first high-level meeting to address environment and sustainable development issues since the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development, and had particular responsibility for integrating and adapting the objectives and means established at the global level to the circumstances of the European landscape. The Parliamentary Assembly welcomes the fact that the political will for implementing the decisions of the Johannesburg Summit to "strengthen the environmental pillar of sustainable development at the global, regional, sub-regional and national level" was strongly felt at that important conference.
4. The Parliamentary Assembly has taken a close interest in the pan-European ministerial conferences since the inception of the EfE initiative in Dobris in 1991. Furthermore, it has continuously expressed its full political support and endorsed the relevance of pan-European co-operation in securing peace, stability and sustainable development in Europe and beyond. To this end, [Recommendation 1284 \(1996\)](#) and [Resolution 1076 \(1996\)](#) were adopted by the Assembly after the third ministerial conference, held in Sofia in October 1995, which stressed the need for specific actions by governments and underlined in particular the role of national parliaments and parliamentary assemblies and the useful contribution they could make towards more effective environmental protection and management.
5. The Assembly notes with satisfaction that, twelve years after the first pan-European ministerial conference, Environment for Europe, in Dobris Castle (in the former Czechoslovakia), the state of the environment across Europe has improved in several respects and that European co-operation to protect the environment and promote sustainable development has expanded significantly.
6. It is also pleased that the EfE process offers ministers of the environment the opportunity to tackle the serious environmental problems facing the countries of central and eastern Europe in particular and to link the many different actors and initiatives.

1. (see [Doc. 9985](#), report of the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs, rapporteur: Mr Meale). Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 25 November 2003



7. Thus, the Assembly welcomes the development of the EfE framework into an important platform for dialogue and co-operation, not only among governments but also for international organisations, non-governmental organisations and the private sector. In this respect, it appreciates the efforts made in Kyiv to renew the structures for co-operation taking account of these new opportunities.

8. The Assembly also welcomes the publication of the Kyiv Assessment Report by the European Environment Agency (EEA) and the “Ten Years of UNECE Environmental Performance” reviews, as well as the signing of three legally-binding multilateral protocols on pollutant release and transfer registers (Aarhus Convention); strategic environment assessment (Espoo Convention); and civil liability and compensation for damages caused by transboundary effects of industrial accidents on transboundary waters; and of the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians.

9. However, the Assembly believes that while progress has been made in many countries to strengthen national capacities for the development and implementation of effective environmental policies and the integration of environmental considerations into other policies, numerous concerns and problems remain. These have arisen in the decade between the Rio World Summit in 1992 and the Johannesburg Summit in 2002 and require firmer political action by countries, particularly European countries, in order to tackle environmental issues and create more sustainable societies, following the guidelines and commitments undertaken at the recent Johannesburg Summit.

10. In this context, the Assembly reiterates its concern expressed in [Recommendation 1594 \(2003\)](#) that the Johannesburg Declaration and its accompanying Plan of Implementation pay very little attention to the problems of environmental protection and set no real specific targets other than in relation to water.

11. The Assembly believes that political statements and declarations alone are today no longer enough to guarantee an approach to sustainable development based on balanced and mutually reinforcing environmental, social and economic policies. What is needed are specific targets and concrete action by states, regions, local authorities and civil societies to implement the provisions of the recent Johannesburg Declaration and its Plan of Implementation, and the setting up of a proper monitoring mechanism to induce the contracting parties to honour their commitment to the EfE and Johannesburg processes.

12. The Assembly is therefore convinced that Europe must keep up the momentum and step up its role as an initiator and leader. The political will that was lacking in Johannesburg must be displayed in Europe. Europe needs a truly pan-European policy aimed at harmonising environment quality and environmental policies and securing peace, stability and sustainable development throughout the continent.

13. Likewise, the current inadequate legislative base, poor implementation and a weak institutional framework urgently require the streamlining of European environmental processes and the improvement of pan-European environmental policy.

14. The Assembly recognises the enormous, important work that the Council of Europe has done over the last thirty-five years for the environment to be included on the political agenda of its member states, wholeheartedly supporting the involvement of the intergovernmental sector in the process of initiating, within the EfE framework, the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy (PEBLDS) - a strategy offering a comprehensive European approach to the protection of biological and landscape diversity and its integration in the global context of sustainable development.

15. The Assembly also believes in the importance of pursuing the objectives of the Kyiv Biodiversity Resolution by adopting the ambitious objective of reducing the volume of biological and landscape diversity losses by 2011.

16. The Assembly is committed to the implementation and further development of the Council of Europe instruments for improving the natural heritage and quality of life, such as the Bern Convention and other regional instruments of co-operation for the conservation of biological diversity.

17. The Assembly also affirms its commitment to the Environment for Europe (EfE) process and underlines the role national parliaments and parliamentary assemblies can and do play in providing better environmental protection and management, especially by promoting the necessary mechanisms and co-operation with civil society organisations.

18. Against this background, the Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers:
- 18.1. call upon the governments of member states to follow up and implement the decisions taken at the Johannesburg Summit on Sustainable Development and the fifth pan-European ministerial conference, Environment for Europe, to strengthen the environmental pillar of sustainable development at the global, regional and sub-regional levels and to promote partnerships in support of the goals of the Johannesburg Declaration and Plan of Implementation and the Kyiv Declaration;
 - 18.2. promote activities in all sectors of the Organisation related to the objectives of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation to establish appropriate monitoring and implementation mechanisms;
 - 18.3. organise the Council of Europe intergovernmental sector on the environment in such a way as to enable the Organisation to continue to play its full part in implementing the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy and to contribute to the follow-up to the Johannesburg Summit;
 - 18.4. call upon the governments of member states to encourage the signature and ratification of relevant international and regional legal instruments for the conservation and sustainable use of natural and cultural heritage, and in particular the Council of Europe conventions on protection of the environment;
 - 18.5. encourage member and Observer states to favour environmental ethics through the drawing up of a European charter of general principles for environment protection and sustainable development.