

Draft Ministerial Declaration of the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference:“Greener, cleaner, smarter!”

1. We, the ministers and heads of delegation from [number] countries in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) region and the representative of the European Commission meeting in Batumi, Georgia, from 8 to 10 June 2016 in the framework of the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, make the following declaration.

2. We confirm our commitment to improving environmental protection and advancing sustainable development in the ECE region, taking also into account the renewed momentum provided by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) adopted at the United Nation Summit in September 2015. We value the Environment for Europe process as a unique pan-European platform for addressing environmental challenges, improving environmental governance, promoting environmental and cross-sectoral cooperation and information sharing among countries, and as a pillar of sustainable development in the region for 25 years. Furthermore, we reiterate the importance of the active inclusion of civil society in decision-making to improve the environment.

3. We reiterate our commitment to take the lead in the transition to a green economy as a key path to sustainable development and poverty eradication and to direct investments and trade to support a green and inclusive economy. We are committed to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

4. In greening our economies, we will work towards the full internalization of externalities that cause the loss of or damage to natural capital, including through measuring costs and economic instruments, and will enhance ecosystems and ecosystem services as part of ecological infrastructure and improve the sustainable use of natural resources. We will foster a circular economy, transparent and responsible business practice and eco-innovation, and will further work towards cleaner and more resource-efficient production processes. We will develop the human capital for green and decent jobs, including by providing relevant education and training, and increase the availability of such jobs, provide access to essential services and promote effective public participation. And we reaffirm the importance of further strengthening and scaling-up education for sustainable development.

5. We therefore endorse the voluntary “Pan-European Strategic Framework for Greening the Economy” — a tool equipping countries with knowledge about actions and instruments for achieving green economy objectives and, at the same time, contributing to the implementation of the SDGs — and invite ECE member States and other stakeholders to implement it. We welcome the “Batumi Initiative on Green Economy” (BIG-E), which consists of voluntary commitments, and encourage countries and other stakeholders to implement them to facilitate the transition to a green economy, and to report on progress thereon to the Committee on Environmental Policy in accordance with the Strategic Framework. We encourage the promotion of BIG-E through existing knowledge-sharing platforms, such as the Green Growth Knowledge Platform. We commend the good cooperation between ECE and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and invite the two organizations, in cooperation with other relevant international organizations, to support countries in their efforts to green their economies and achieve sustainable development.

6. While praising the good progress achieved in the pan-European region over the past three decades in decreasing emissions of the main air-polluting substances and their impacts, we are concerned that air pollution, both outdoor and indoor, remains the largest environmental health threat and an important risk factor for major non-communicable diseases. We therefore commit to improving air quality for a better environment and human health, including by integrating air pollution reduction measures into financial and development policies, as well as other sectoral policies, as appropriate, and through cooperation to address transboundary impacts and enhanced policy coordination and coherence at the national and regional levels. We commend the good collaboration between ECE and the World Health Organization on air pollution and we invite them, in cooperation with other relevant international organizations, to support countries in their efforts to reduce air pollution.

7. We endorse the voluntary “Batumi Action for Cleaner Air” and welcome the initiatives launched by interested countries and other stakeholders aimed at improving air quality and protecting public health and ecosystems. We invite countries and other stakeholders to implement the Batumi Action for Cleaner Air in close cooperation with the ECE Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution (Air Convention), as appropriate, and to report on progress thereon to the Committee on Environmental Policy. We will also strengthen the role of civil society in addressing air pollution and its impacts, and we commit to ensuring adequate monitoring of and public access to relevant information on air pollution, in particular ground-level monitoring.

8. We appreciate progress achieved under the ECE multilateral environmental agreements and recognize the need to strengthen the participation of civil society and the private sector in their implementation. We invite countries to ratify, implement and provide adequate resources for the relevant multilateral environmental agreements, inter alia, the Air Convention and its three most recent protocols. We recognize the opportunities provided by multilateral environmental agreements to implement the 2030 Agenda.

9. We recognize the important contribution of the ECE Environmental Performance Review (EPR) Programme as an effective and practical policy tool throughout the past 20 years, and highlight the role it can play in supporting the achievement and monitoring of SDGs in the pan-European region. We express our satisfaction with the progress in the third cycle of reviews and encourage countries to benefit from the EPR Programme by undertaking further reviews.

10. While welcoming progress in developing the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) to support a regular process of environmental assessment, we invite countries to continue their efforts and to further develop their national information systems to have SEIS in place in the countries of Europe and Central Asia by 2021. We note the value of UNEP Live and the Group on Earth Observation as global knowledge-sharing platforms. [We welcome the Global Environment Outlook European component, as the pan-European regular environmental assessment product building on the recent State and Outlook Report of the European Environment Agency, as well as other regional, thematic and national assessments. [We also take note of the key messages of these reports and acknowledge the role of these assessments in identifying environmental concerns that need to be addressed in the region.]]

11. We acknowledge progress in implementing the Astana Water Action and encourage interested countries and organizations to continue using this initiative according to their needs.

12. We welcome the work of the Environmental Action Programme Task Force and we invite the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development to continue its activities under its new name, the Green Economy and Environment Action Programme Task Force (GREEN Task Force), in cooperation with relevant partners.

13. We acknowledge the role of regional initiatives in support of the 2030 Agenda and recognize the important contributions of the United Nations system, multilateral development banks and other international and inter-State organizations.

14. We value the role of Regional Environmental Centres in implementing initiatives to improve environmental governance at all levels and encourage them to strengthen their activities and to continue playing a valuable role in the pan-European region by supporting the needs of target countries.

15. We reiterate the importance of civil society participation — including business, women, non-governmental organizations, academia and other groups — in decision-making to improve the environment and promote sustainable development. We appreciate the activities of civil society organizations in the region in this regard and commit ourselves to further develop partnerships with them and create favourable conditions for their operation. We also welcome the contribution of the European ECO Forum to the Environment for Europe process.

16. We invite the Committee on Environmental Policy to convene in 2018 a mid-term review to assess progress in the implementation of the main outcomes of this Conference.

[17. We invite offers of interest from Governments to host the next Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference in 2021, celebrating 30 years of the Environment for Europe process, for consideration by the Committee.]

18. We express our gratitude to the Government of Georgia for having hosted this Conference and we wish to thank it and the people of Georgia for the warm hospitality we have received.