European Meeting in Preparation for the Ottawa Conference on the World Conservation Strategy, held in Brussels, Belgium, during 21–22 April 1986

As a major actor in the world economy, Europe is heavily involved in causing ecological problems in the Third World, where deforestation, erosion, drainage of wetlands, pollution by pesticides, and dangerous industrial developments, often result from European trade, aid, and investment. Moreover because of acidification and other pollution, the building of large infrastructures for transport, and unwise industrial and agricultural techniques, Europe itself is becoming more and more of an ecological ruin.

These issues were addressed by a meeting of Europeans actively involved in the implementation of the World Conservation Strategy (WCS) in their countries or at the European level. Convened by the European Environmental Bureau, Brussels, the European Committee for National Conservation Strategies (EC–NCS), and IUCN's Commission on Environmental Planning, it was chaired by Richard C. Steele, IUCN Regional Councillor for Western Europe and Director-General of Britain's Nature Conservancy Council. In his message transmitted to the participants, Dr Kenton R. Miller, Director-General of IUCN, urged the peoples and nations of the North to search for and find sustainability; this can only be accomplished if they have an understanding of their interrelationship with other nations and the will to implement solutions at home: 'Challenges lie not only within nations. As important, [and often] more complex and evasive, are the problems *among* nations.'

Out of the meeting came strong commitments to have and to pursue national conservation strategies, addressing also economic issues, consumption patterns, education processes, and not refraining from discussing the population–resources issue. In the end, National Conservation Strategies (NCSs) should be supported by governments, industry, NGOs, and the public at large. Moreover, NGOs should cover the international aspects, e.g. the ecological effects of trade and aid relations between European countries and institutions and the less-developed world.

For the European Economic Community, a Community Conservation Strategy should *inter alia* aim at rehabilitating ecosystems that have become degraded as a result of European trade. As an example, EEC levies on the import of tapioca from Thailand should be used to rehabilitate the Thai ecosystems that have become exhausted by the cassava (tapioca) production for European, especially Dutch, pigs. Similarly, the Botswana pastures could be protected from overgrazing by cattle, whose meat is going to be sent to the EEC—only to add to an already-existing surplus.

Finally, the need for a European Conservation Strategy was expressed, supplementing the NCSs by providing a framework for their common problems inside and outside Europe, and implementing the World Conservation Strategy at a regional level. The participants were informed about the comparable effort of the UN Economic Commission for Europe, working at a long-term strategy for environmental protection and rational use of natural resources up to the year 2000 and beyond (with a first draft to be prepared by March 1987), and another of the Council of Europe, to be launched in June 1987 on the occasion of the 5th European Ministerial Conference on the Environment, in Lisbon, Portugal. Further information on the above developments and prospects may be obtained from the undersigned.

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International Conference on Acidification and its Policy Implications, held in the Marriott Hotel, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, during 5–9 May 1986

The Conference was organized jointly by the Netherlands and the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) of the United Nations. The decision to hold it had been taken in 1984, in Munich, West Germany, at the Multilateral Conference on the Causes and Prevention of Damage to Forests and Waters by Air Pollution in Europe, and in the end more than 20 delegations from North America and Western and Eastern Europe participated.

The Conference consisted of both scientific and policy sessions. On the Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, research workers reported on the effects of acidification. Models for the development of international control scenarios were also discussed. During the second part of the Conference—Thursday and Friday—delegations from the various countries presented their national policies and research programmes in the area of acidification. Finally, international policy conclusions were drawn up. Professor Donald J. Kuenen, Chairman of the Council for Environmental and Nature Research in the Netherlands, was Chairman of the Conference.

Scientific Sessions

In his opening remarks Dr P. Winsemius, Netherlands Minister of Housing, Physical Planning, and Environment, posed a number of questions which he hoped would be brought closer to an answer during the Conference:

- What directions are emerging in the research?
- Is there now more certainty and new information over the extent of effects?
- Is there now more information about the causes, substances, and elements, that play the major role?
- Is there now more insight into the tempos at which the effects strike? Does this make it necessary to adjust the pace of the abatement effort?
- Is there more clarity now about the levels of substances at which possible effects appear and the levels that are acceptable?
- Is recovery of damaged ecosystems still possible?
- What is the situation with our cultural monuments?

The Minister stated that there is no longer any doubt that acidification is an international problem. The underlying precept—protection of the weakest link in the environment—lays responsibility on both science and politics. Science must find the weakest link. The question asked of politics is 'are we willing to act?'. Two points play a role, namely how do we deal with the uncertainties—do we postpone action if we do not have 99% certainty—and what do we do if the costs of control must be incurred in one country and the benefits, namely less acidification, are enjoyed elsewhere?

The Minister asked for particular attention to be paid to the need for international control of NO_x. The oxides of nitrogen are a key component, that not only contributes to soil and water acidification but is also responsible for the formation of ozone.

Mr K.A. Sahlgren, the Executive Secretary of the ECE, subsequently emphasized that acidification is now considered the major environmental problem in the ECE region. The 1979 ECE treaty on long-range transboundary air pollution forms the basis for international action to control air pollution. In 1985 a protocol on the reduction of sulphur emissions or their transboundary fluxes by at least 30% was signed in the framework of the treaty. Now attention is increasing on nitrogen dioxide (NO_2), which is responsible for approximately a one-third share in acidification. Pro-