



Vision of European Women's Environmental Leaders

Our Common Future Future of Europe



WECF

Views of the Participants
at the "Our Common Future" conference
Budapest, June 2004

Women in Europe for a Common Future

www.wecf.org

WECF
NETHERLANDS
PO Box 13047
3507 LA Utrecht, Netherlands
Tel: + 31 - 30 - 231 03 00
Fax: + 31 - 30 - 234 08 78
wecf@wecf.org

WECF
GERMANY
Blumenstrasse 28
D - 80331, Munich, Germany
Tel: + 49 - 89 - 202 32 390
Fax: + 49 - 89 - 202 32 391
wecf@wecf.org

In June 2004, 80 women from 30 countries met in Budapest to take part in the WECF network conference "Our Common Future". The participants are members of the network "Women in Europe for a Common Future" which helps women to actively take part in making their communities healthier and more sustainable. We propose solutions and ask politicians to take action.



MARIE KRANENDONK
President,
Women in Europe for a Common Future – WECF, Netherlands

As a president of WECF, I have a dream about the future of Europe and that dream is that women will have a much more equal say in how European policy is made and implemented.

We hear from our members that there is too much concern for economical and technical development in European policy and too little concern for the costs of this economic development on our health and social well-being. These issues are being overlooked by politicians.

At the moment, it is clearly visible that differences are growing between those who benefit from the current economically oriented development and those whose well-being is not looked after. An increasing large number of people feel that the EU's development lacks social justice.

Therefore it is important that the women's movement becomes more active in Europe. Women should work hard to communicate their values and their visions. I hope to see Europe as a socially fair economically and environmentally healthy continent. I am sure that we can do it, but women need to take part in the decision making.



MUBORAK SHARIPOVA
"Open Asia" Denmark, formerly from Tadjikistan

The world can be very small, and we are all part of it. We as women have been essential in bringing prosperity and development to Europe. We did it in Europe, so we should also help our neighbours guarantee human rights and a healthy environment for themselves. In my country of birth, Tadjikistan,

we have known five years of civil war. Re-building a civil society is difficult, poverty is high, violence and intimidation makes speaking-up dangerous. We need to support each other to do so. That is why it is so important to cooperate with other women in the European region, as WECF is doing. Being part of an international network also brings some protection for courageous women who have a different point of view.



SABINE BRUECKMANN
Unser-Land, Germany

What is important is to have strong regions in Europe. First and foremost, we should strengthen local communities. Our organization "Unser Land" has done just that. We are a cooperative of farmers, bakers, butchers, supermarkets, churches and non-governmental organisations. Alone, farmers, who want to protect the

environment and people's health, have little possibility to do so. However, together, we have created a regional label and marketing concept. We develop eco-tourism, and support local and fair traded products. This strengthens the local economies and brings back life and a future to rural areas in Europe. Through the WECF network, other rural women's organizations learn from our experience.



DR. ULRIKE ROEHR
LIFE – Frauen Umwelt Netz Germany

The future of Europe is going to be more difficult than it was when we had a European Union with 15 member states. I am afraid that environmental policy and promotion of equal opportunity will be weakened with our European Union with 25 member states.

My organization LIFE, a German women's network, works more at a national level. We deal with different issues like climate change policies from a gender perspective. We cooperate with WECF, who acts as a door to Europe, to bring the women's issues discussed in Germany to the European level and to try and participate in European policy making.



HELEN LYNN
Women's Environmental Network, UK

I am quite optimistic about the Future of Europe. I see a number of policy initiatives that are quite progressive, particularly in the areas of environmental and health protection. But the democracy of Europe is under threat. This is clearly seen from the development of the proposed EU chemical regulation, REACH.

There are thousands of industry lobbyists working in Brussels, who are paid by industry to weaken this legislation as much as possible. This creates a very unbalanced situation. Women's organizations, health and environmental organizations can never spend the millions industry is paying on lobbying. Nevertheless it is crucial that policy makers also hear our voice.

We have had 50 years of a complete void in the area of chemicals legislation. Of the 100.000 substances in regular commercial use, less than 10% have been tested for adverse health effects. Research shows that the chemicals we use in our daily lives are often extremely dangerous to our health. Look at the relationship between chemicals and breast cancer. Since less than 10% of breast-cancer cases can be attributed to genetic factors, scientists are starting to say that one of the major causes of breast cancer, hazardous chemicals, goes unacknowledged.

At least 300 women die as a direct result of breast cancer in the UK – each week! That is the equivalent of a plane full of women crashing every week of the year! And another 2 plane-loads of women each week hear they have the disease.

Within the EU every 2.5 minutes a woman is diagnosed with breast cancer. Every 7.5 minutes a woman dies from the disease. We want to know why!

Today we do not know, because thousands of chemicals enter our body every day, through food, air, cosmetics, clothing and through exposure in the workplace and the wider environment. Many of these chemicals are carcinogenic, toxic to reproduction and can cause problems pre birth in the unborn.

Currently we have no information. We cannot protect ourselves. This needs to change. Industry should play by the rule 'no data, no market'. They should first prove ingredients in their products do not cause cancer, or effect reproduction or affect the unborn. Anything else is just unacceptable.



SVETLANA SLESARENOK
MAMA-86, Ukraine

Ukrainian women are working very hard for the future. I believe that we can help to make sure that we will have safe water and clean air and that we will protect our children's health and future. We help local people to believe in their own capabilities and to take responsibility for themselves. Together with many supportive people in our city in Odessa, we are taking part in

decision-making process, so that decisions respond to the needs of the common people. In the beginning, our authorities were surprised, and not very cooperative. In one dramatic case where inhabitants were poisoned by toxic air pollution, our grandmothers organised a telephone blockade of the town hall. They spent the whole day phoning the town hall so that no calls could go in or out. The authorities have started to understand that often the citizens know very well what is needed and what priorities should be set. Of course, it is an advantage that nowadays we elect our mayors, who more and more are women!

We have shown that citizens participating in policy making can be economically interesting and help the authorities. My organization "MAMA-86 Odessa" carried out a demonstration project on saving drinking water. We discovered that because of leaking taps and toilets in people's apartments, the average water consumption per person was 800 liters a day! We tested the installation of individual water meters in people's flats. The water use went down drastically, often to 100 liters per person per day. But we also discovered that it was almost impossible to get a water meter. The bureaucratic hurdles included an up-front fee of 40 USD. MAMA-86 proposed a change of regulation. Once the regulation was improved, within one year more than 70.000 households installed their water meters! And the city has saved a lot of money!



SASCHA GABIZON
International Director, Women in Europe for a Common Future, WECF, Netherlands

Europe's environmental policies are a great achievement and help to combat poverty. No other region in the world has achieved this. When large cities, like Milan, spill their untreated wastewater into rivers, it creates poverty in the downstream

agricultural communities. But Europe needs to strengthen its democratic governance. An important step forward in the proposed so-called 'EU Constitution' is to have the possibility that citizen's organizations, when they gather 1 million signatures, can propose new legislation. But many other points in the Constitution – which should just have been called another 'treaty' – give too much weight to economic free trade developments and too little weight to developing a Socially Just and Clever-and-Clean Europe.