

European Environment Agency

EUROPE'S ENVIRONMENT

The Dobříš Assessment

Edited by David Stanners and Philippe Bourdeau



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The report on the state of the pan-European environment requested by the environment ministers for the whole of Europe at the ministerial conference held at Dobříš Castle, Czechoslovakia, June 1991.

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Publications
120 Pentonville Road
London N1 9JN
Tel: 44 171 278 0433
Fax: 44 171 278 1142

Publishing Director

**Jonathan Sinclair
Wilson**

Project Manager

Jo O'Driscoll

Project Assistant

Andrew Young

Design and

typesetting

**Paul Sands,
S&W Design**

Cartography and

illustrations

**Gary Haley,
PCS Mapping & DTP**

Editorial work

**Nina Behrman
Caroline Richmond
Audrey Twine
Wolfgang Klar
Georgina Klar
Don Shewan**

Index

Frank Pert

Picture research

**Brooks Krikler
Research**



**European
Environment
Agency**
Kongens Nytorv 6
DK-1050
Copenhagen K
Denmark
Tel: +45 33 36 7100
Fax: +45 33 36 7199

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Foreword

What you have in your hands is the result of more than three years' work following the request of the first Pan-European Conference of Environment Ministers which took place at Dobřiš Castle, near Prague, from 21 to 23 June 1991. This conference called for the preparation of a State of the Environment Report for Europe and invited the European Commission to take responsibility for the work. This was accepted by the then Commissioner responsible for Environment, Carlo Ripa di Meana, and mostly accomplished during the mandate of Commissioner Yannis Paleokrassas who strongly supported the work.

To make progress in solving common environmental problems, a common information base had to be compiled, based as far as possible on comparable and reliable data - as we say now the best available data.

Many goals were identified to be supported by this report:

- to develop a comprehensive Environment for Europe Programme addressing in particular transboundary environmental problems;
- to provide a sound basis for effective measures, strategies and policies to address environmental problems nationally and regionally; and
- to inform the public and raise awareness about our common responsibility for the environment.

Above all it was clear that the report had to become a base-line and reference, for periodic updating and review, to contribute to the "Environment for Europe" pan-European co-operation process. This process is institutionalised by the Conference of Environment Ministers that meets periodically - first at Dobřiš Castle in 1991, then in Lucerne in April 1993, and in October 1995 in Sofia. The preparation of this report has been a key element to the preparation of the Sofia conference. Its findings were already made available to governments and international organisations concerned, interested parties, officials and NGOs, and the report was broadly distributed in proof form, in the months preceding final publication.

Within the European Commission the task of producing the report was given at the time to DG XI (Directorate General for Environment, Nuclear Safety and Civil Protection) then headed by Laurens Jan Brinkhorst who assigned the work to the Task Force

preparing for the European Environment Agency. The Agency officially came into being on 30th October 1993 when the decision was made to locate it in Copenhagen. When the Task Force completed its work in August 1994 the Agency took over from the Commission to finalise and publish the report.

It is a satisfaction for the European Commission and the European Environment Agency to present now this final report for broad public distribution. The report identifies, through the data it makes available, for the first time the key environmental issues which face our continent as a whole. The report certainly has its limitations. It has not been possible in all cases to obtain appropriate data or data of sufficient quality. However, it has provided not only for the compilation of what is considered to be the best available data, and therefore for the best possible base to support the mentioned goals, but also for the building up during the exercise of a network of institutions, official as well as non-governmental bodies, working together. Exposing data and aggregating information, identifying deficiencies and lacuna, is not only an unavoidable task but the guarantee of more sound decision making, now and in the future. The report also forms the basis for periodic reviews and updates of the state of the environment and the supporting information networks. From now on we should only expect to make progress against this base-line.

The report confirms the poor quality of the European environment, particularly, but not exclusively, in parts of Central and Eastern Europe. The report identifies serious threats and stresses on the environment, natural resources and human health which have to be tackled more efficiently. Above all, by performing, for the first time, a global structured review of the situation and trends, and by casting light on the shadows, the report allows the dimensions of the problems to be realised. This is a strong basis for identifying priorities and alternatives for action without losing the global perspective and respecting an integrated approach, something which is paramount in the interrelated environment.

When we evaluate progress in terms of environmental quality, the dimensions of the problems are shown to be much larger than assumed up to now when focusing on specific issues and their progress. While reductions are being achieved in some cases, such as with emission controls, these actions are often insufficient on their own to achieve recovery and