Introducing European Environmental NGOs

Their role and importance in European Union decision-making
Foreword

Eurobarometer public opinion polls consistently show the environment as being one of the issues of most concern to European citizens. It is a concern that belongs easily at the European level given the transboundary nature of many environmental issues, for instance pollution of the air, water and seas. Action by one country acting alone is seldom sufficient to tackle the root causes of environmental degradation.

The widespread public concern felt about the deterioration of the environment and its frequent, adverse effects on public health, the loss of natural diversity and the overall decline in quality of life helps to explain the spectacular growth of the environmental movement in Europe. Membership of the eight largest European environmental groups now stands at over 20 million members, representing at least 5% of the European public. In some countries, of course, the membership of environmental groups as a proportion of the total population is much higher.

European political leaders are expressing increasing concern about the gap opening up between the European citizen and the EU institutions that exist to serve them. This growing public disillusion is expressed, for example, in ever lower turnouts at European Parliament elections and also in the recent referendum result on the Nice Treaty in Ireland. One way of closing this gap, we believe, is to re-discover - and act upon - the core issues that connect European public opinion, and European public concern, to the original European ideals that gave rise to the European Union. The environment, and sustainable development generally, is clearly one such issue.

This booklet aims at providing a picture of who the environmental groups are at a European level, what they do and who they represent. It is intended to shed light on a sector of society that is often in the news but about which many people know very little. It is therefore an important contribution to making NGOs more transparent and ultimately more accountable to their members and supporters, to politicians and to the public at large.

It is also intended to be a useful reference guide. The final section lists the names, addresses and contact details of all the main European environmental groups, including a brief list of the issues they work on. Please keep the document as a handy guide on how to contact the different groups in order to look at their websites, obtain advice or enquire about membership.

We hope that you will find the booklet a useful and invaluable companion in understanding the work of the European environmental non-governmental organisations - the E-NGOs.

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Brussels, August 2001
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1. Who are the European environmental NGOs?

This document describes the work of sixteen European environmental non-governmental organisations (E-NGOs) working at the European level. Eight of these groups have joined together to form the ‘Green G8’. Together, these 16 organisations and networks represent tens of millions of European citizens. Membership of the Green G8 alone is more than 20 million people; that is around five per cent of the population served by the European Union.

The E-NGOs, therefore, have a considerable voice at EU level. They are quite literally the voice of millions; democratic organisations whose expertise is to listen to their members’ and formulate positions and campaigns based on their members’ concerns.

This booklet is an introduction to the E-NGOs who participate actively in European decision and policy making, and who are able to advise the EU institutions on which measures are most appropriate to the goal of improving the quality of life of European citizens while respecting and living within the means of Nature.

The ‘Green G8’

- The ‘Green G8’ are eight of the largest European environmental organisations. They coordinate joint responses and recommendations to EU decision makers, thereby allowing the institutions to have an overview of EU groups thinking without having to consult with thousands of different associations. Members are:
  - BirdLife International
  - Climate Network Europe
  - European Environmental Bureau
  - European Federation for Transport and Environment
  - Friends of the Earth
  - Greenpeace EC-Unit
  - International Friends of Nature
  - WWF European Policy Office

Even though their range of issues is broad, E-NGOs are united in their firm commitment and vision of a Europe pursuing sustainable development, both for its own citizens as well as for the rest of the world.

All the 16 E-NGOs featured here are expert at putting forward arguments and proposals that reflect the public interest. These arguments are presented to the Brussels-based EU institutions, - the European Commission, the EU Council of Ministers and the European Parliament and its members (MEPs) - as well as to the Member States, accession countries and other national and regional level agencies.

As citizens are given a greater voice in the governance of Europe, the policy input and expertise of the E-NGOs and their networks will become increasingly important. This publication is a basic guide to E-NGO activities at the EU level.
2. What the European E-NGOs do?

The EU and its laws and policies are having a growing impact on nature conservation, environmental protection and sustainable development not only in Europe but the rest of the world.

The main goals of E-NGOs operating in Brussels’ committees and corridors of power are to ensure that:
- The EU implements and enforces its environmental laws across the Member States
- The EU brings forward new environmental legislation as appropriate
- The integration of environment into other EU policies is ensured
- Sustainable development policies are actively pursued
- The EU plays an environmental leadership role in world affairs, and that
- European citizens, through a rich debate in society, are able to play a full part in reducing damage to the Earth’s ecosystems.

One of the achievements of the G8 has been the enshrinement of the principle of sustainable development in Articles 2 and 6 of the Amsterdam Treaty of European Union, which came into force in 1999.

Other European E-NGOs receiving European Commission funding

- European Cyclists’ Federation
- European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism
- Medforum (Mediterranean NGO Network for Ecology and Sustainable Development)
- Milieukontakt Oost-Europa
- MIO (Mediterranean Information Office for Environment, Culture and Sustainable Development)
- Northern Alliance for Sustainability (ANPED)
- Seas At Risk
- Taiga Rescue Network

Influencing EU strategy

The EEB has campaigned for years for an EU sustainable development strategy. In May 2001, the European Commission published a strategy that was debated at Heads of State and Government level at the European Council meeting at Göteborg in June 2001. The EEB currently is working with the Parliament and the Council with a view to improving and strengthening the 6th Environmental Action Programme.

Article 6 requires the integration of environment and sustainable development in all EU policies, not only in Europe but also where external aid, trade and international relations apply, i.e. all over the world.
E-NGOs are continuously lobbying, monitoring and following up EU policies and legislation to be sure that Article 6 is indeed implemented as the Treaty intended.

The European Commission has set itself the task of promoting new forms of European governance, aimed at giving people a greater say in the way Europe is run. In its communication, Strategic Objectives 2000-2005: Shaping the new Europe, the Commission acknowledges that European citizens have little sense of ownership over the structures that govern their lives.

In bridging this gap, and in assisting the institutions to reach European citizens, E-NGOs can play an increasingly important role, especially in contributing to the integration of environmental protection and sustainable development into all the EU’s policy areas and the enlargement process.

Building NGO Alliances in Central and Eastern Europe

The Northern Alliance for Sustainability (ANPED), a multi-regional network, has developed an excellent network of contacts in non-EU countries. It now has many members in Albania, Armenia, Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Moldova, Norway, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

Milieukontakt Oost-Europa operates exclusively in central and eastern European countries: Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Belarus, Russia, Ukraine, Macedonia, Albania, Moldova, Romania, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

3. Who the European E-NGOs represent?

E-NGOs have a unique role. To defend, uphold and promote a public interest that would otherwise have no voice, and has no economic value attached to it - the environment.

E-NGOs are the only sector of society which undertakes this role in an impartial manner, free of nationalistic concerns, the constraints of short-term legislative cycles and political party vested interests.

Protecting Europe’s sensitive areas

Seas At Risk is the only European federation of E-NGOs working exclusively on marine issues. After campaigning successfully for the adoption of limits on hazardous substances in the marine environment, SAR ensured a similar obligation was included in the EU water framework directive.

The European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism is the only organisation bringing farmers and environmentalists together to develop new models of agriculture and policies which will support changes to the common agricultural policy and as the EU enlarge to central and eastern Europe.
A very important point to most NGOs is democracy. They try to observe a process of decision-making that is as democratic as possible, taking into account views of member organisations, their staff and boards and their active members, sometimes even of individual members. They represent millions of European citizens and thousands of locally-based associations at the European decision making level.

Their national level experience and insights are not governmental or business-dominated and are, therefore, an independent and critical voice representing broader civil society and the environment - balancing short-term interests.

E-NGOs provide a crucial service to society as well as to the environment - lobbying decision and policy makers on citizens’ behalf and informing the public about EU initiatives at an early stage.

### The real cost of transport

The European Commission is now moving towards a European aviation environmental charge based entirely on a new approach towards making aviation pay for its huge impacts on the environment put forward by the European Federation for Transport and Environment (T&E).

The size of E-NGOs varies widely, from a few employees to several hundred working at a European level in the bigger networks. Only a small minority of NGOs still operate exclusively with volunteers, however many are dependent on voluntary contributions of expertise and administrative services.

The presence of E-NGOs in every corner of Europe is down to the excellence of their networks. Members are constantly feeding into the networks, agreeing with and questioning actions, but always supporting the common ultimate goal, to protect nature and improve the quality of life for European citizens in general.

### Advice on regional aid

**Friends of the Earth Europe** helped increase civil society involvement in the allocation of EU structural and cohesion funds to prevent environmental damage and fraud. It also held a conference in Macedonia on the sustainable development of the Balkans.

Most E-NGOs send regular information to their members and supporters. They are among the most active users of newer forms of communications: benefiting, to get their messages across, from targeted computer lists for discussions, e-mail distribution and web sites.

Many NGOs routinely evaluate their projects internally. This ensures that the work is successful, efficient, and within the priorities of the organisation. All E-NGOs featured in this booklet have publicly accessible budgetary reporting.
4. How do European E-NGOs work at the EU level?

The emergence in Brussels of E-NGOs has been brought about by the increasing influence of EU institutions on environmental legislation and policy making. It has been estimated that four out of every five environmental laws in EU countries originates in Brussels.

E-NGOs are normally set up as not-for-profit organisations, with a board, often elected from member organisations and seeking to represent the views of their members.

They work on a broad level, not only to protect the environment but also to promote the necessity of sustainable development.

**Two million signatures**

**BirdLife International** collected two million signatures to stop the modification of the Birds Directive to extend hunting seasons. It presented the petition to the European Parliament President and the European Commission finally withdrew its proposal. Never before was a petition, addressed to the EP, related to the environment, supported so strongly from EU citizens.

This brings them to embrace questions of social and economic development, while ensuring the world’s precious, limited, natural resources can be protected, as well as used, for the benefit of future generations.

Yet there is the growing realisation that environmental laws are not enough to protect the natural environment.

The EU has strong powers in major policy areas like agriculture, fisheries, regional development, world trade and external aid. It is precisely these policy areas which will be decisive in shaping the prospects for protecting the global environment.

NGOs play an important role in offering a public voice to the public debate about these and other policy issues and helping to create consensus between governments, institutions and civil society.

**Climate change lobbying**

Urging entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol by 2002 and promoting sound European policies to reduce greenhouse gases are two of the main areas of work for **Climate Network Europe**.

And they take into account the priorities of the EU institutions - if they are known in advance - so as to be able to provide efficient input.
E-NGO activities at the EU level

- Representing, and bringing the concerns of, European citizens to decision-makers at the European level (especially the European Commission, European Parliament and Council of Ministers)
- Integrating and strengthening environmental content across all sectors
- Monitoring and promoting implementation of EU law by member states and industry
- Communicating European policies to national audiences, bringing citizens closer to the European Union by explaining EU structures, institutions and policies, and by facilitating involvement of citizens in EU issues/policies
- Providing expert political, legal and technical advice to EU institutions and decision-makers regarding environmental issues
- Balancing the input from vested industrial interests
- Awareness-raising, among the public and decision-makers, about current and upcoming environmental problems
- Development of EU public opinion
- Contributing to the building-up and strengthening of civil society, especially within the EU and candidate countries
- Proposing new legislation
- Giving a voice to thousands of locally-based associations, which would otherwise have no access to EU decision-makers, thereby representing the views of civil society and consumers
- Exchanging information with other organisations in different regions of the world
- Training in advocacy skills, policy analysis and implementation among other groups in society.

Without NGO participation, much of the EU’s environmental legislation would be far less effective. It is crucial that EU decision-makers are made increasingly accountable to the public for their actions. Transparency of decision-making provided by E-NGOs contributes to the legitimisation of the European legislative process.

Looking after rivers

International Friends of Nature has river guardianship programmes for schools and environmental work camps for young people.

The E-NGO role of promoting implementation of EU laws and monitoring them is crucial since the EU institutions don’t have enough resources to send inspectors to each member state. Furthermore, national governments often do not want the institutions to have these resources, as they see it as interference. E-NGOs can be of particular help to the Commission’s environment directorate-general, for instance, by ensuring that other directorates-general take up environmental concerns. NGOs monitor directives related to the environment, but also to investment and trade, industry, transport and energy, agriculture, fisheries or development policies affecting the environment.

Dialogue on forests

The Taiga Rescue Network is an international network of E-NGOs and indigenous peoples working for the protection and sustainable use of Europe’s boreal forests. The network works with authorities, governments and the forest industry to find joint solutions for forest protection.
Saving the Oceans

Greenpeace has helped stop pirate fishing and prevented ships from dumping toxic waste at sea, and campaigns for changes in EU policies and measures in these fields.

Other NGOs have provided input into specific initiatives by the institutions, such as the energy renewables directive, the energy efficiency action plan, the green paper on security of energy supply and the common transport policy.

They respond to Commission requests for comments on the implementation of legal instruments such as the water and nitrates directives, and on the development of initiatives such as the 5th and 6th environmental action programmes.

Protecting Nature

WWF plays a crucial role in the implementation of the EU Habitats Directive, for instance in using its European network to identify breaches of this legal instrument and informing the Commission about them. WWF is pushing hard for payments under the EU's structural funds to be withheld from member states who are dragging their feet on the implementation of EU nature protection laws.

NGOs are active on the different committees the Commission organises to obtain expertise from stakeholders. This work is often of long duration and can be quite intensive.

NGOs participate in the European climate change programme working groups, eco-labelling working groups, the energy consultative committee, forestry and cork working group, advisory committees on rural development and tourism, the Commission’s ad hoc committee on waste, its noise expert working and steering groups and those for the Auto-Oil II programme to reduce vehicle emissions and improve air quality.

Cycling to work

The European Cyclists’ Federation strives for replacing short car trips by cycling. It provides cycling to work advice to employers, and educational schemes for safe cycling to schools.

They are also active as regards the European Council of Ministers through their member organisations. Regular meetings take place about the EU agenda between environmental organisations and government ministries in several countries.

In fact, EU institutions are demanding more and more from the E-NGOs, particularly in terms of policy input and expertise.
5. Funding for the European E-NGOs

Recognition of the role E-NGOs play can be measured partially through their success and continued support with societal players.

But at the EU level, much still needs to be done to guarantee the full participation of E-NGOs in European Union decision making.

There are two important areas here, access to information and funding.

A. Access to information

E-NGOs have campaigned for better access to EU information for many years and, along with other civil society groups, have succeeded in seeing citizens’ rights enshrined in new regulations and legislation.

They were instrumental, for example, in persuading the 15-nation EU to sign, along with 24 other countries, the 1998 Aarhus Convention on citizens’ rights in environmental matters, guaranteeing the rights of access to information, public participation in decision-making, and access to justice in environmental matters.

E-NGOs campaigned for an open system of new law guaranteeing access to documents in the EU institutions. A regulation was passed in the European Parliament in May 2001, but with many reservations over secrecy clauses insisted upon by the Commission and the Council of the EU.

B. Funding

Given the growing number of demands on E-NGOs and the resulting rise in activities, there is a need for increased funds.

The European E-NGOs all receive European Commission core funding, apart from Greenpeace, which requests none.

Demands and tasks for European E-NGOs have at least doubled over the past five years and will continue to increase dramatically in the future, not least because of the EU institutional demand for their sustained and high-quality input.
Why the workload of E-NGOs is increasing

EUROPEAN GOVERNANCE. A key objective the Commission has set itself is promoting new forms of European governance. This means giving people a greater say in the way Europe is run, building new forms of partnership between different levels of governance in Europe and making the institutions work more effectively and transparently.

THE COMPLETION OF THE SINGLE MARKET. Now a large part of national policy-making is being shifted to Brussels. Civil society needs to be as involved as it was at national level. All kinds of cultural, linguistic and financial barriers, etc., complicate this, however. There is no EU society; it is not carried by common values or media, for example. Thus, NGOs who organise themselves at the EU level are an essential bridge and catalyst for making Brussels decision-makers more accountable, visible, and responsive to civil society’s needs.

INCREASED PARTICIPATION IN ADVISORY BODIES. The number of environmental issues has increased enormously. Environmental NGOs are more and more involved in advisory bodies, technical committees, etc.

EU ENLARGEMENT. EU enlargement is on the way. The people of central and eastern Europe may have some of the most polluted environments in Europe, but they also possess some of the most pristine natural environments found anywhere on the continent. The enlargement process is highly complex and mistakes that could lead to social and environmental problems must be avoided. Civil society in the accession countries must be involved in the process from the very beginning.

INTEGRATION PROCESS. The integration of environmental protection and sustainable development into all policy areas of the EU is a key demand of the Amsterdam Treaty. It implies that today environmental organisations deal with nearly all aspects of European policy. This includes policy areas with obvious environmental effects such as transport or energy, just as much as other areas such as development policy or taxation issues.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT. The Sustainable Development Strategy produced by the European Commission in May 2001 presents a formidable challenge for NGOs. Following the EU Heads of State meeting in Göteborg in June 2001, the EU is now embarked on a radical new agenda to decouple economic growth from resource use, to begin cutting pollution levels through a proper pricing and charging policy and to implement the Kyoto climate change targets.

In the 6th Environmental Action Plan published in January 2001, the Commission pledges to continue providing financial support to E-NGOs through helping to meet part of their core funding needs as well as contributing to project funding.

It should be emphasised that increased and adequate funding will not mean the E-NGOs are more dependent on the EU institutions. Their policy independence of the Commission is jealously safeguarded at all costs, a requirement recognised by both sides.

If the funding structure is clear and transparent, ensuring the recipients are not required in any way to represent European Commission positions, the support will serve to bring the EU closer to its citizens.
6. E-NGOs Services and Advice

Contact us for information about the following:

1. Trade & Investment
   • EU trade policy affecting sustainable management of natural resources
   • Lobbying on WTO issues
   • Lobbying international financial institutions

2. Development Policy
   • Integration of environment into EU development cooperation
   • Development Council working group
   • Balkan environmental reconstruction programme

3. EU Enlargement
   • Monitoring harmonisation with the acquis communautaire
   • Helping to build civil society capacity to engage with the enlargement process
   • Promoting sustainable development principles

4. Mediterranean Policy
   • EuroMediterranean Partnership participation
   • Effects of EU foreign direct investment
   • Sustainable development & coastal zones management

5. Water
   • Greening EU funding for hydrological projects in EU and central and eastern European countries (CEECs)
   • Mine waste and its impact on the freshwater environment
   • Conservation and wise use of wetlands
   • Proper implementation of the Water Framework Directive

6. Habitats, Biodiversity & Biotechnology
   • Birds Directive implementation
   • Habitats directive implementation
   • Establishment of Natura 2000 ecological network
   • Environmental liability
   • Management and funding needs for nature conservation
   • Legislation on and information about the release of genetically modified organisms.

7. Agriculture & Land Use
   • CAP reform
   • Agenda 2000
   • Capacity building in CEECs and Mediterranean countries on EU agriculture and rural development policy
   • Sustainable agriculture and food production
8. Forests
- Certification
- Impact of enlargement policy
- Eco-labelling (tissue, paper and furniture)

9. Fisheries
- Access to information on subsidies
- Subsidies reform in FAO, OECD and WTO
- Marine species & habitat protection

10. Climate Change And Energy
- Greenhouse gas emissions
- Kyoto Protocol and the Climate Convention
- Co-generated heat and power
- Europe-wide policy for reducing heat consumption in homes and offices
- Increasing energy efficiency

11. Transport
- Replacing short car trips by cycling
- Aviation and the environment
- Air quality - Auto-Oil programme to reduce vehicle emissions
- Encouraging road to rail and urban intermodality

12. Tourism
- Sustainable Tourism Strategies for Europe
- Natura 2000 and tourism
- Eco-labels for tourism accommodation and destinations
- Indicators for sustainable tourism development

13. Sustainability
- Europe’s environmental responsibility and impact of EU policies on the world’s carrying capacity
- Commission’s five-year programme priorities
- Precautionary principle
- Promoting strategic impact assessment of plans and policies

14. EU Institutions
- Institutional reform
- Greening the Treaty, part III: proposals for the 2000 Intergovernmental Conference (Treaty of Nice)
- Greening the EU budget

- Environmental impact assessments
- Public procurement
- Phasing out hazardous chemicals
- Promoting physically active modes of transport
- Health impact assessments of transport policy and projects.
7. How to Contact the European E-NGOs?

A. The Green 8

BirdLife International (European Community Office)
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Issues: Biodiversity; Funding for Nature; Common Agriculture Policy; Common Fisheries Policy; Enlargement; Environmental Impact Assessment; Strategic Environmental Assessment; Environmental Liability; Water policy; Environmental Policy Integration; Sustainable Development; Indicators to measure integration & sustainability.

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Issues: Kyoto Protocol; Climate Convention; science of climate change; energy efficiency; renewable energy; energy taxation; greening public procurement; security of energy supply; green electricity; emissions trading; nuclear power; EU enlargement.

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Issues: Aarhus Convention, agriculture, air pollution, biodiversity, chemicals, eco-efficiency, ecological product policy, enlargement, environmental policy integration, environmental tax reform, European eco-label, GMOs, industry policies, noise, sustainable development, standardisation, tourism, transatlantic environmental dialogue, waste, water.

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Issues: Integration of environment and transport; transport pricing; urban transport; transport and the economy; air quality and technical standards; noise; health; European Climate Change Programme; transport and EU enlargement; aviation; shipping; rail policies; road transport and climate change; transport and developing countries; sustainable mobility development; behavior in transport, Common Transport Policy, infrastructure funding.
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**Issues:** Food, GMOs, Agriculture, Nuclear Power, EURATOM, EU Enlargement, Sustainable Use of Pre-Accession Funds, EIB (European Investment Bank), WTO, MFTZ (Mediterranean Free Trade Zone), Euro-Med Partnership, Climate Change, Chemicals, Environmental Tax Reform, Sustainable Development Strategy of the EU, WSSD (World Summit on Sustainable Development)

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New address from 1 January 2002:  
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**Issues:** Climate change, renewable energy, toxic chemicals, GMOs, forests, fisheries, sustainable development, trade and environment, maritime pollutions, enlargement.

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**Issues:** Sustainability, sustainable tourism, rural and urban development, land-use, biodiversity, water, enlargement, development policy, environmental education.

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**Issues:** Sustainable development; Europe’s global impacts including trade, aid and external relations; EU Mediterranean Partnership; Common Agriculture Policy; Common Fisheries Policy; Forests; Structural Funds; EU Enlargement; Climate Change; Nature conservation and global biodiversity protection; EU water policy; toxic chemicals; EU Funding Policy.
B. Other networks

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This brochure is jointly produced by the Green G8. See inside for contact details.