

EDITORIAL

In this issue, we continue our reporting on changes taking place within the United Nations following the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20). As noted in EPL 43/2, UN General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution 67/251 confirmed the conversion of the 58-member United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Governing Council into the universal-membership UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) in which all 193 State Members participate directly. The UNGA also adopted Resolution 67/290, outlining the mandate for the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) to replace the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), initiating a process closely followed in recent EPL issues.

Following the conclusion of negotiations on the HLPF, the CSD held its 20th and final session on 20 September 2013, under the chairmanship of Bektas Mukhamedzhanov, Kazakhstan's Vice-Minister of Environment Protection. Convening directly under the UNGA, the HLPF then held its inaugural meeting on 24 September. Following organisational elements, the session included an interactive discussion amongst the presidents, prime ministers, ministers, officials and other dignitaries in attendance. From now on, the HLPF will convene every year under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) for eight days, including a three-day ministerial segment. A session for Heads of State and Government will convene for two days every four years under the auspices of the UNGA. The HLPF will also establish a Scientific Advisory Board, which is to be placed within the frame of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Through sound scientific advice and representation at a high political level, the HLPF has shouldered the task of moving from creation to action and implementing what has been decided. Through its bridging character, the HLPF's purpose is not only to make proposals to the UNGA and ECOSOC, but also to act on the decisions of both bodies. Above all, it is expected make sustainable development a political priority at all levels of the UN. The next session of the Forum is scheduled to take place in late June or early July 2014.

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The two four-year terms of Achim Steiner, as UNEP Executive Director (ED), will come to an end at the beginning of next year. The agenda of the 68th session of the General Assembly includes point 115(e) "Election of the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme". This, however, raises a critical question – is this the right time for such a change? Is it the time to change the rider in the middle of the race? With the new membership structure of UNEP and the start of the HLPF, perhaps it is the wrong time to put someone new in the position. When establishing the four-year election cycle of the Executive Director, it was not expected that two new forums, the Environment Assembly and HLPF, would be evolving at the same time. Perhaps it would be wise to postpone the election of a new UNEP ED until the new bodies are well established. We would be in favour of having the present ED stay on through this important transitional period.

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Wolfgang B. Steiner