

EU – Central Asia Strategy for a New Partnership Platform for Environment and Water Cooperation



Fifth EU-Central Asia High Level Conference on Environment and Water Cooperation

Milan, Italy (12 – 13 October 2015)

Joint Communiqué

We, Ministers and Heads of Delegation in charge of environmental, climate change and water policies:

UNDERLINE the importance of addressing environmental challenges as an essential condition for sustainable development, natural resources protection and their sustainable use, as well as prosperity and stability;

STRESS the concern about global and regional environment and water resources issues, and notably the urgency to address water challenges;

RECOGNISE the serious and urgent need to address challenges posed by climate change and its effects on the environment;

RECONFIRM our countries' adherence to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) thus aiming to achieve social progress and equality, environmental protection, conservation of natural resources and biodiversity, and stable economic growth allowing prosperity for current and future generations;

RECOGNISE the relevance of the themes of the EXPO Milan 2015, in particular the development of sustainable lifestyles and the use of the best innovative technologies to create a balance between the availability and the consumption of resources;

REAFFIRM the commitment to strengthen the mutually beneficial cooperation in the context of the European Union Central Asia Strategy for a New Partnership and the high value of dialogue and cooperation between the European Union (EU) and Central Asia (CA) countries on environmental, climate and water issues;

RECALL the joint conclusions reached at the Third and Fourth EU-CA High Level Conference in Rome (2009) and Bishkek (2013) and the recommendations developed within the framework of the EU-CA Working Group on Environmental Governance and Climate Change (WG EGCC), as well as within the European Union Water Initiative.

NOTE the engagement and progress achieved by CA partners in these areas, including with support from the EU Regional Environmental Cooperation Programme, notably on integrating environmental goals into economic and sectoral policies, addressing climate change impacts, and improving national water policies due to the adoption of a river basin and integrated water management approach.

STRESS the importance and our interest, within the framework of the EU-CA Platform on Environment and Water Cooperation and related national policy action, to:

- recognise that sustainable and integrated management of natural resources, environment protection and climate action play an important role in ensuring sustainable, low-carbon and climate-resilient growth, as well as prosperity and stability;
- develop a circular economy and sustainable consumption and production in order to reduce and better manage pollution, waste, and environmental impacts more generally, increase resource and energy efficiency, while also improving competitiveness and productivity;
- achieve SDGs implementation by improving environmental governance, by taking climate action and by promoting sustainable water resources management based on generally accepted norms of international law and a nexus approach;
- reduce the risk of natural and technological disasters thus protecting people and the environment;
- integrate environment, water, and climate related goals into all policy areas and national development strategies and plans;
- further align the relevant policies with good international practices and standards, as well as make environmental, water and climate policies operational.

DECLARE our joint commitment, within the framework of the EU-CA Platform on Environment and Water Cooperation and related national policy action and institutional structures, to:

As regards *Environmental Governance, Sustainable Production and Consumption*:

- improve regulatory requirements, and positive economic and other incentives for catalysing sustainable consumption and production while taking account of heterogeneous economic and social conditions in Central Asia;
- strengthen policy planning by gradually adopting and carrying out regular Strategic Environmental Assessments of development and sectoral policies, strategies, programmes, and plans and Environment Impact Assessments of projects, as well as by applying cost-benefit analysis of environmental policies and valuation of ecosystem services;
- ensure that governance arrangements help mobilise water and other environmental relevant finance;
- ensure that a sound environmental, notably water framework is effectively implemented and enforced in pursuit of the public interest by transparent, non-discriminatory, participative and easy to understand rules and processes;
- improve national capacity for environmental monitoring and implement the principles of the Shared Environmental Information System;
- develop in practice better regulation principles and strengthen tools that aim to promote environmental compliance, especially those targeted at supporting small and medium-sized enterprises;
- strengthen compliance monitoring and fair, consistent and swift enforcement of environmental legislation;
- improve the general public's environmental awareness and access to information, public participation and access to justice in decision-making in line with national legislation, Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration and for the countries concerned the Aarhus Convention, and develop capacity of state and non-state actors including civil society organisations;

- promote and prioritise the development of environmentally-sustainable and low carbon and resilient infrastructure, and identify and mobilise sustainable financing from all possible sources;
- consider the possibility to ratify, where pertinent, and ensure a full implementation of the relevant global and regional Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), including the UNECE conventions, by aligning the national legislation.

As regards *Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation*:

- work together under the UNFCCC framework towards the conclusion this December in Paris of an ambitious and durable legally binding Agreement on climate change that is universal, robust, inclusive, dynamic, and putting the world on track to limiting the increase in global average temperature to below 2°C above pre industrial level;
- consider the possibility to implement concrete initiatives at COP21 under Lima Paris Action Agenda and particularly on water and adaptation to climate change;
- promote the use and generation of better knowledge of the shared climate change challenges across the region, in order to address regional, national and local issues;
- foster the elaboration, timely submission and implementation of ambitious contributions to the 2015 global climate Agreement, *inter alia* the monitoring, reporting and verification elements of the Agreement; Low Emission Development Strategies including mitigation policies; Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions; National Adaptation Plans and adaptation policies, including scenario development and impact assessments; and, where relevant, in close synergies with disaster risk management actions, to enhance prevention and preparedness for natural disasters and industrial accidents;
- implement regional and national priority actions on adaptation and mitigation, taking into consideration the transfer of available approaches and technologies and financial and technical assistance from donor countries;
- facilitate the development and implementation of projects and initiatives aimed at low-carbon and climate-resilient development; and mobilise financing for related investment;
- further improve climate-relevant work of governmental and local authorities, as well as civil society and the private sector, including the Covenant of Mayors on sustainable cities initiatives in participating countries;
- spur regional cooperation and domestic action for the implementation of robust climate change mitigation and adaptation policies.

As regards *Water Resources Management*:

- continue to support the EU Water Initiative and other regional projects in Central Asian countries involved that assist in improving water resources management practices at basin level, drawing on international and European experience, law and policies, to ensure that core water use demands are met considering the water needs of ecosystems in an environmentally sustainable way and thus contribute to the green growth;
- consider the possibility to sign the Paris Pact on water and adaptation to climate change in the basins of rivers, lakes and aquifers;
- improve water management and ensure sustainable development of water infrastructure, including for water supply and sanitation; improve technical, including resource and energy efficiency, and economic performance of the water utilities to allow continuous and affordable services to the population;
- strengthen national dialogue and cooperation between stakeholders from various sectors of the economy in determining the efficient and fair use of water resources and promoting the application of the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus approach;

- strengthen water quality regulation and harmonise water quality classification systems at basin scale, aligning them with good international practice, where applicable; promote better national-level water accounting and improved statistical reporting from water users and monitoring; promote further access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation, especially in rural areas;
- consider the possibility to adopt technical arrangements on transboundary rivers based on the EU-Central Asia exchange of experience, and to develop comprehensive strategies on adapting water management to climate change, including disaster risk management;
- support the implementation of international agreements on transboundary river basins to which countries are a Party and the further improvement of regional cooperation—including where appropriate within the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea, inter alia, building on the latest relevant Joint Statements of the Heads of State;
- Encourage activities to improve the environmental situation and adaptation to climate change in national and transboundary rivers basins and the Aral Sea Basin, and to improve the monitoring considering the possibility of exchanging data relevant for water resources management, as well as awareness and early warning systems.

As regards *Cross-cutting Issues*:

- Promote measures and policies required to address environment, water and climate challenges by integrating them into the national development strategies and plans and their provision with adequate resources This will provide a clear message to donors, including International Financial Institutions (IFIs), and the private sector about the importance of their contribution, alongside national resources, to the implementation of the investments required;
- emphasise the relevance of the EU assistance in advancing the implementation of environmentally sustainable measures taking account of regional synergies as well as of the policies and needs of each Central Asian country and facilitating green investment by IFIs through blending;
- strengthen efforts to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation, including by phasing out measures that are obstacles for environmental sustainability;
- improve national institutional settings for green economy mainstreaming, coordination and progress assessment, and raise the institutional profile of environmental authorities within the government;
- support research, innovation, education and training needed for a green and competitive economy;
- recognise the important role of women in tackling climate change and foster their empowerment.

As regards the *Governance of the Process of EU-CA Cooperation*:

- task the Working Groups supporting the Platform to prepare Working Plans and to monitor plans implementation;
- ask the Working Groups to enhance their cooperation with national, regional and international organizations, the civil society actors and the private sector;
- change the name of the WG EGCC into Working Group on Environment and Climate Change.

DECIDE to meet again in a country in Central Asia in 2017 to assess progress in reforming relevant policies and making them operational and to establish priorities and practical steps for the next period of cooperation.

EXPRESS gratitude to the Italian Republic for its warm hospitality and its dedicated support in organising this high level meeting.