



EUROPEAN UNION – CENTRAL ASIA WORKING GROUP ON ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE 9TH MEETING

12-13 February 2020 | Brussels, Belgium



SUMMARY BY THE CHAIR

Over one hundred participants from five Central Asian States, including the European Union Institutions and Member States, international and regional organisations, international financial institutions and civil society attended the 9th Meeting of the EU-CA Working Group on Environment and Climate Change (WGECC), chaired by the Italian Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea.

Progress and achievements in EU-CA regional cooperation and EU and CA policies in the area of environment and climate change since the 8th Meeting of the WGECC and the 6th EU-CA High Level Conference on Environment and Water Cooperation were discussed in the course of the two-day meeting taking into account **the new EU Strategy on Central Asia**. The Meeting focused on **the priority issues of Environmental Governance, Circular Economy, Sustainable Consumption and Production, Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation, Water Resources Management and Cross-Cutting Issues**. Moreover, the concept of the new European Green Deal was presented.

The Meeting was opened with welcoming addresses by H.E. Chingiz Aidarbekov (Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic), H.E. Peter Burian (EU Special Representative for Central Asia), Ms Astrid Schomaker (Director for Global Sustainable Development at Directorate-General for Environment, European Commission), Ms Elina Bardram (Head of Unit, International Relations, Directorate-General for Climate Action, European Commission) and Mr Olzhas Agabekov (Director, Climate Policy and Green Technologies Department, Ministry of Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Kazakhstan).

Minister Aidarbekov highlighted CA countries' high vulnerability to climate change, presented activities of the Kyrgyz Republic in the environmental and climate sectors and announced the Green Economy Forum to be held in Bishkek in July 2020. Ambassador Burian (EU Special Representative for Central Asia), pointed out that the Central Asia is on the top of the EU international relations agenda, especially within the framework of climate diplomacy.

Ms Schomaker stressed the need of transition towards new model of low emission, low waste and resource efficient economy. Ms Bardram presented the global cross-sectoral dimension of the European Green Deal. Director Agabekov stressed the importance of environmental and climate in national and international policies.

Mr Boris Iarochevitch (Head of the Central Asia Division, EEAS) presented the broader context of new EU policies towards CA countries in the framework of the new EU Strategy on Central Asia "New opportunities for a stronger partnership" adopted in June 2019.

Mr Johannes Stenbaek Madsen (Head of Cooperation, EU Delegation to Kazakhstan) briefly stated the priorities of the Platform for Environment and Water Cooperation and the activities of its WGECC.



During **SESSION 1** (*Taking stock – Update on progress since the 6th EU-CA High Level Conference and perspectives of future developments*), chaired by Mr Davor Percan (Head of Unit, Directorate-General for Environment, European Commission), the overview of recent developments in the EU, including the EU-CA regional cooperation, was given. The European Commission presented recent policy developments in the field of environment and climate action: Mr Andrzej Januszewski (DG Environment) presented the concept of Green Deal in detail, focusing in particular on Biodiversity, Zero GHG Pollution, Circular Economy, Environmental Nexus of Agriculture, Single-Use Plastics, Water, Sustainable Financing, EIA, SEA.



Ms Stine Rasmussen (Directorate-General for Climate Action) presented the EU's ambition to make Europe the first climate neutral continent (i.e. net emissions must be zero) by 2050 and gave a closer examination on the Green Deal concept. As a follow up to the Green Deal, a new EU Climate legislation is being drafted.

Ms Monica Zsigri (Directorate-General for Energy) shared brief information about the current EU GHG emissions and several opportunities for their reduction. She mentioned that natural gas should be considered as a transition fuel and that special attention must be paid to methane emissions.

UNECE Environmental Performance Reviews (EPR) were introduced by Mr Antoine Nunes (UNECE) and Mr Tolegen Abdulgaziev (State Committee on Ecology and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Uzbekistan). The latter expounded the results of its recent 2019 EPR and its importance for country's environmental policy.

Recent developments in EUWI National Policy Dialogues on Integrated Water Resources Management and Water Supply and Sanitation were presented by Mr Alisher Mamadzhonov (UNECE), who stressed the importance of cooperation with the WECOOP project and informed on CA country specific priorities.

Delegations of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan informed the audience on recent and future developments in the areas of environmental governance, including solid waste management and climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Mr Olzhas Agabekov (Ministry of Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources of Kazakhstan) pointed out that the transition to green economy in Kazakhstan had already started and that an ETS system is in place. The new Environmental Code was prepared in December 2019 and already submitted to the Parliament for review; steps are now being undertaken to introduce BATs in major industries. An SEA and EIA system is already in place.

Ms Aizada Kiiazova (State Agency on Environment Protection and Forestry of Kyrgyzstan) presented the national priorities in the field of environmental governance, including green economy development, the waste management programme based on waste inventory, the environmental quality management plan for Bishkek and the national air quality strategy. Kyrgyzstan adopted its INDC and the national adaptation strategy is under development.

Mr Mahmud Safarov (Committee for Environment Protection under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan) mentioned the ratification of the Paris Agreement and the adoption of

the INDC, highlighted the importance of water resources in Tajikistan, and also shared brief information about other strategic documents on climate and environment as well as pilot projects on climate adaptation.

Mr Magtymguly Akmyradov (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan) stated that climate change and desertification are priorities for Turkmenistan and that national sustainable development and climate plans are currently in place. He also stressed that the issue of desertification requires a regional approach to cooperation, therefore it will be addressed in an international conference to be held in 2021.

Mr Tolegen Abdulgaziev (State Committee for Ecology and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Uzbekistan) emphasised the importance of adaptation measures and reported on the strategic documents adopted in 2019 in Uzbekistan (environmental strategy till 2030, waste management strategy, biodiversity strategy). He also reported on the finalisation of the 3rd UNECE EPR, the status of ratification of conventions and protocols and the numerous activities related to the Aral Sea. A new Environmental Code is currently under development.

IFAS underlined the importance of a regional approach to climate change (regional working group and national working groups) with a focus on regional mitigation and adaptation strategies, as well as of a regional environmental rehabilitation plan to tackle common environmental problems.

Mr Arslan Berdiyev (NGO "Yashyl Shohle", Turkmenistan) briefed the audience on the activities of NGOs in Central Asia, a region with 30 000 NGOs (180 in Turkmenistan). He highlighted the difficulties encountered, the problems of getting relevant funding and also the problem of a still limited public participation in some cases.



SESSION 2 (Enhancing CA policies – recent developments in environmental policies and available tools to support environment, climate change and water policies in the CA region), chaired by Mr Johannes Stenbaek Madsen (EU Delegation to Kazakhstan),

presented the recent EU policies in the fields of air quality assessment/management and circular economy.

Mr Luca Perez (DG Environment) introduced the latest developments concerning Circular Economy, including its broader relations to the Green Deal paradigm, such as the Plastic Strategy followed by the Plastics Directive, the Eco-design and eco-labelling. By 2030, 70% of packaging waste will have to be recyclable while the share of landfilled waste should not exceed 10%.

Ms Susanne Lindahl (DG Environment) presented the EU policy on clean air. EU legislation is based on 3 pillars: Air Quality Framework Directive, National Emission Ceilings Directive and “source specific standards” (Industrial Emissions Directive, Medium Sized Combustion Plants, Road Transport, Non-Road Machinery). It is strongly recommended to CA countries to ratify recent protocols under the UNECE Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution (CLRTAP).

Questions from the audience included methodology of emission inventories, air quality monitoring, estimates of health impacts from air pollution and waste burning.

Issues related to the improvement of access by CA countries to IFIs investments as well as progress in the tailor-made support to CA countries were discussed. Activities by relevant international institutions (UNDP, Green Climate Fund, UNECE, OSCE) were presented as well as ongoing EU-funded projects (CAWEP, NEXUS, SWITCH Asia/Central Asia, WECCOOP) and the new German Initiative “Green Central Asia”.

UNDP (Ms Barbara Pesce-Monteiro) informed about the recent developments in the field of SDGs, adaptation and mitigation, water, biodiversity as well as sustainable production and consumption.

The Green Climate Fund (Mr Urvaksh D. Patel) illustrated its involvement in the region through projects worth USD 630 million (plus USD 3 billion of additional funding leveraged). Questions from the audience were focused on details of potential financing. UNECE (Ms Sarangoo Radnaaragchaa) presented its activities in the region, including technical assistance and gave an overview of CLRTAP and its protocols (none of CA countries is a party to the protocols). Combination of legally binding requirements and voluntary actions (BACA) is in place. Other UNECE conventions were also mentioned briefly.

OSCE (Mr Ralf Ernst) presented the ongoing project on climate change impact on security, which identified 11 hot-spots for which

mitigation and adaptation strategies are being developed, and projects in the Caspian Sea Region, including uranium legacy remediation, Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) or the establishment of Aarhus centres.

The CAWEP was presented by the World Bank (Mr John Bryant Collier): focused on water and energy security, the programme established a CA water and energy data platform and an interactive database and provides support to Hydromets among the activities related to environment and climate change.

The NEXUS project was presented by CAREC (Mr Zafar Makhmudov): focused on establishing an enabling environment for sustainable and climate-resilient multi-sectoral investments to increase water, energy and food (WEF) security in Central Asia, during its first phase (Budget: EUR 1.52 million; Duration: December 2016 – December 2019) the project integrated the WEF Nexus approach into the Regional Environmental Programme for Sustainable Development in Central Asia (REP4SD-CA) and the Aral Sea Basin Programme (ASBP). It also developed a portfolio of 7 regional WEF Nexus investment project concepts that were endorsed by the CA countries for inclusion into the ASBP-4. The second phase of the NEXUS project will start in 2020 and will be focused on practical application of Nexus tools, methods and techniques through implementation of WEF Nexus pilot projects and to identify optimal trade-offs to reduce the overall cost and increase mutual benefit.

The SWITCH project (Ms Alessandra Lepore) is focused on support of Sustainable Production and Consumption in 24 countries, including CA. Transition to green economy/circular economy is a priority for CA.

Mr Valts Vilnītis (WECCOOP Team Leader) presented the third phase of the WECCOOP project, which started in October 2019 and will continue until October 2022. The project is focused on the enhancement of environmental, water and climate policies in CA and the promotion of EU approaches. The project also provides logistical support to the WGECC and technical assistance to the CA countries, including capacity building and tailor-made support.

Ms Mareike Well (Federal Foreign Office, Germany) presented the new German initiative “Green Central Asia”, launched in January 2020 to cover climate and security issues in CA and Afghanistan during the following 5 years.

Questions raised by the participants were focused on coordination of activities implemented under particular programs/projects.





The issue of extension of scope of the WECOOP project was raised. More focused concrete support is requested by the CA delegations.

SESSION 3 (*Adoption of the Terms of Reference of the WGECC and the Rules of Procedure for the Coordination Committee*) was chaired by Ms Alessandra Fidanza (Sogesid spa/ Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea, Italy). During the session the new ToR for the WGECC and the Rules of Procedure for the Coordination Committee (which will facilitate the work of the WGECC) were presented by Mr Giovanni Brunelli (Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea, Italy) and subsequently adopted by the Working Group.

The issue of a formalized participation of NGOs in the WGECC had been raised and solved through the ToR of the WECOOP project.

SESSION 4, chaired by Mr Giovanni Brunelli (Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea, Italy), was focused on the *Next steps and future developments*.

The Work Programme of the WGECC was briefly introduced by Mr Johannes Stenbaek Madsen (EU Delegation to Kazakhstan). The main priorities will include environmental and climate acquis, capacity building, development of legislation, implementation of recommendations presented in environmental performance reviews (EPR), consultations with IFIs, national dialogues on water policy and support to dialogue with EU MS governments and agencies.

The participants agreed to include the consideration of the conservation of biodiversity and to include a point of the Work Programme related to the facilitation of the dialogue among CA

countries and EU Member States. The Working Group adopted the amended document.

Mr Valts Vilnītis (WECOOP) presented the draft Work Plan of the new phase of the project launched in October 2019. Representatives of CA countries presented their additional needs. All five CA countries require support in drafting legislation while Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan would require technical assistance in water quality monitoring; Tajikistan and Turkmenistan – capacity building of national experts in various aspects; Uzbekistan – technical assistance in improving environmental governance.

It was suggested that WECOOP should pay particular attention to the development of training materials which could be used for e-learning. CA countries' representatives were invited to present their additional needs in writing.

Closing remarks of the WGECC meeting were presented by Mr Johannes Stenbaek Madsen (EU Delegation to Kazakhstan), who appreciated the strong representation of both CA countries and the European Union Institutions and Member States, as well as of other participating agencies and bodies.

Ms Alessandra Fidanza addressed her best wishes for the continuation of the fruitful work in the framework of the renewed WGECC, and Mr Giovanni Brunelli highlighted the importance of strengthening the dialogue between EU and Central Asia and to implement concrete activities.

In line with the new ToR for the WGECC adopted by the Meeting participants, it was agreed to hold the 10th meeting of the WGECC in 2021 in Kazakhstan.

Documents adopted at the meeting:

Terms of Reference of the WGECC:

<https://wecoop2.eu/sites/default/files/documents/9WGECC/WGECC%20ToR%20bilingual%20final%20130220.pdf>

Rules of Procedure for the Coordination Committee:

<https://wecoop2.eu/sites/default/files/documents/9WGECC/WGCC%20RoP%20bilingual%20final%20130220.pdf>

Work Programme of the WGECC:

<https://wecoop2.eu/sites/default/files/documents/9WGECC/Draft%20WGECC%20Work%20Programme%20EN%20final%20130220.pdf>