



# UNECE Weekly

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

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## *It's just happened ...*

### **Floods are a fact of life – we have to learn to deal with it**

As the United Nations marks the **World Water Day** on Monday, 22 March, attention will focus on water and natural disasters. Floods have become a



regular occurrence in UNECE member States, witness the events in south-eastern France last autumn and the flooding in Austria, the Czech Republic and Germany in

2002, which caused €15 billion worth of damage, 80% uninsured. But are floods inevitable and is there anything we can do to protect ourselves? According to Kaj Bärlund, UNECE Environment Director, "floods are now a fact of life, but what is initially a natural disaster can be compounded by 'human error', such as inappropriate land use or clear-cutting of forests." Floods cause billions of dollars worth of material damage, but they also have a high death toll.

### **International cooperation within UNECE**

"This year's World Day for Water is also a challenge for UNECE," says Kaj Bärlund, "as it seeks to promote international cooperation on natural and industrial hazards with environmental consequences. The two are closely linked. The accident at Baia Mare in Romania in January 2000, which severely polluted the river Tisza and the Danube, was triggered by heavy rainfall and rapidly melting snow." That accident led to the negotiation of the Protocol on Civil Liability to two UNECE environment conventions, adopted in May 2003.

Flood protection is never absolute, but it does offer some degree of safety. The question is what degree of safety is available at what price and how much of the remaining risk will

our society have to learn to live with. We need risk management to deal with this challenge.



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### **Joint FAO/ECE Working Party on Forest Economics and Statistics**

At this year's meeting, 15-17 March, the Working Party reviewed the arrangements for market analysis publications and for forest resource assessment, including indicators of sustainable forest management. It reviewed the conclusions of the latest forest sector outlook study (EFSOS), notably the main policy conclusions. These include the need to manage the shift to the



east in the European forest sector, the need to promote the sound use of wood as part of sustainable development of the sector and the growing importance of wood and energy issues. The Working Party acts as the interface between the governmental and technical levels for the forest and timber sector.

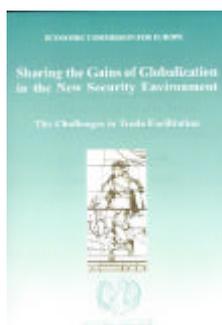
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## *Coming up soon ...*

22-24 March	Meeting of the Specialized Section on the Standardization of Seed Potatoes
24 March	Energy Security Forum Executive Board
24-26 March	Working Party on Genetically Modified Organisms
24-26 March	Joint ECE/ECMT Working Party on Intermodal Transport and Logistics (ECMT, Paris, France)

**Not an official record - For information only**

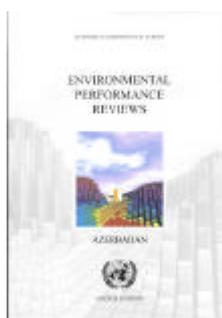
Sharing the Gains of Globalization in the New Security Environment



In 2002 and 2003 UNECE organized two international forums on trade facilitation that brought together representatives of developed and developing countries and small and large enterprises. This compilation of the papers from the 2003 Forum is first and foremost about the idea that policy dialogue is important for the establishment of a system of international trade facilitation, which would contribute to equitable development worldwide. Trade facilitation addresses the problems arising from inefficient trade procedures, which incur high transaction costs. The publication demonstrates just one of the many aspects of how UNECE is contributing to the Millennium Development Goals, in particular the goal to “develop an open, equitable, rule-based, predictable and non-discriminatory multilateral trading system”.

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UNECE examines how Azerbaijan is coming to grips with its environmental problems



The Environmental Performance Review of Azerbaijan, just issued, highlights the serious environmental problems which persist in Azerbaijan after more than a decade of independence. Hazardous wastes from industrial operations, and contamination of agricultural land and groundwater as a result of oil and gas exploration and exploitation, continue to pose a threat to public health. Overfishing and poaching are depleting fish stocks in the Caspian Sea, particularly the valuable sturgeon. But the lack of wastewater treatment is also polluting the Caspian Sea and threatening its biodiversity. However, the *Review* points out that the country is taking its environmental problems seriously. It has set up a Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, drawn up a National Environmental Action Plan and adopted a Law on Environmental Protection. It is making great efforts to clean up contaminated sites, build facilities to store hazardous waste in line with international standards and protect its biodiversity.

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Facts and figures:

Consumer inflation rates <sup>1)</sup>  
selected UNECE economies

	2001	2002	2003					
			Mar	June	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
<b>Eastern Europe</b>								
Albania	3.1	5.3	1.8	3.0	3.1	3.1	3.4	3.3
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1.8	0.9	-0.8	1.1	1.1	0.8	0.9	1.1
Bulgaria	7.4	5.8	-0.2	1.2	3.6	3.4	5.0	5.6
Croatia	4.7	1.8	1.7	2.4	3.1	2.9	2.7	2.4
Czech Republic	4.7	1.8	-0.3	0.4	0.0	0.4	1.1	1.1
Estonia	5.8	3.5	1.9	-0.1	1.3	1.0	1.1	1.2
Hungary	9.2	5.4	4.9	4.5	4.9	5.1	5.7	5.8
Latvia	2.4	1.9	2.2	3.7	3.2	3.3	3.6	3.6
Lithuania	1.5	0.4	-1.0	-0.5	-0.9	-1.4	-1.0	-1.4
Poland	5.5	1.9	0.4	0.6	0.9	1.2	1.6	1.7
Romania	34.5	22.5	17.1	14.1	16.0	15.9	14.6	14.2
Serbia and Montenegro	90.4	19.3	11.0	12.4	7.6	7.6	7.1	8.0
Slovakia	7.0	3.3	7.8	8.4	9.5	9.6	9.8	9.3
Slovenia	8.6	7.6	6.4	6.2	5.1	4.9	5.2	4.7
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	5.2	2.3	-0.5	0.7	2.0	1.5	1.9	2.5
<b>CIS</b>								
Armenia	3.2	1.0	3.1	4.0	7.5	6.9	6.9	...
Azerbaijan	1.5	2.8	2.2	1.8	2.1	2.5	2.5	...
Belarus	61.4	42.8	29.4	28.5	28.4	28.6	27.0	25.5
Georgia	4.6	5.7	3.5	4.9	5.2	4.8	8.6	...
Kazakhstan	8.5	6.0	7.3	5.9	6.2	6.9	7.5	7.0
Kyrgyzstan	7.0	2.1	3.3	1.7	0.9	3.9	5.7	5.5
Republic of Moldova	9.8	5.3	7.8	11.0	16.2	17.3	17.2	...
Russian Federation	21.6	16.0	14.8	13.9	13.2	13.1	12.4	12.0
Tajikistan	38.6	12.2	20.0	17.0	12.7	16.5	16.5	13.7
Ukraine	12.0	0.8	4.3	5.9	6.2	6.9	8.1	8.2

Source: UNECE secretariat estimates based on national statistics

1/ Annual rates show changes, over the previous year, of annual averages of monthly fixed base consumer price indices. Monthly rates show inflation over the corresponding month of the previous year.

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