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Roundtable on the Human Right to Water and the Protocol on Water and Health: making access to water a reality

Thursday, 18 January 2007, 1 p.m. – 2.45 p.m.
Palais des Nations, Room VII

In the past 30 years, since the 1977 Mar del Plata Declaration, there has been growing recognition of the human right to water, both by individual States and by the United Nations as a whole. Recent developments in the UN Human Rights System – in particular general comment No. 15 of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on the right to water and the latest decision of the Human Rights Council on international human rights and access to water – have drawn further attention to this linkage. But the recognition of the human right to water is only the first step towards its implementation. How can this right be translated into reality?

The Roundtable will bring together the human rights, health and environment communities to exchange views and work towards a common understanding of this issue. It will examine progress to date in interpreting the human right to water and the legal, political and practical results of this debate. Finally, the Roundtable will explore the links with the Protocol on Water and Health and how the Protocol can help countries put the right into practice.

With the participation of:

- François Münger* (moderator), Senior Water Advisor, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
- Maria Francisca Ize-Charrin*, Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
- Joaquín de Arístegui*, Human Rights Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Spain
- Bart Ouvry*, Deputy Permanent Representative of Belgium
- Elodie Carmona*, Ministry of Health, France
- Hannele Nyroos*, Counsellor, Ministry of the Environment, Finland
- Anna Tsvetkova*, European ECO-Forum



For more information visit <http://www.unece.org/env/water>.

Deputy foreign ministers meet in Central Asia

* United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia

The Coordinating Committee, composed of deputy foreign ministers of SPECA* member countries and the Executive Secretaries of UNECE and UNESCAP, met on 15 December 2006 in Dushanbe, following the inaugural session of the Project Working Group on Trade. All SPECA member countries except Turkmenistan participated.

Representatives of member countries noted with satisfaction the initial results of the SPECA reform process, started in 2004 upon the initiative of the Secretary-General. The new governing structure, composed of the Governing Council at the level of deputy prime ministers and the Coordinating Committee, provides clear strategic direction to the Programme. Now the 6 Project Working Groups implement projects worth \$4 million and funding is sought for further projects in the ambitious Work Plan for 2005-2007.

The Committee reviewed and approved the recommendations of the Project Working Group on Water and Energy Resources

on strengthening dam safety and invited the Governments of SPECA member countries to undertake the required actions at national and regional levels to facilitate the successful implementation of these recommendations.

Taking note of the emphasis of the International Economic Conference on Tajikistan in the Regional Context of Central Asia, held in 2003 in Dushanbe on the importance of inflow of external resources – first of all FDI – for overcoming poverty through rapid and sustained economic development, delegates decided to devote the 2007 SPECA Economic Forum to this topic. The Forum will be divided into two meetings. The first (in May in Almaty as part of the Asia-Pacific Business Forum) will focus on trade and investment links between central Asia and its main Asian partners. The second (in October in Berlin, co-organized with the German Government) will focus on trade and investment links between Central Asia and its European partners. A team of analysts from local research institutes associated with the

Partnership for Economics Education and Research Support will prepare a background study for the Economic Forum.

While in Dushanbe, UNECE Executive Secretary Marek Belka and Kim Hak-



Su, Executive Secretary of UNESCAP, met with high-level representatives of the new Tajik Government. Prime Minister Okil Okilov, Foreign Minister Hamrohon Zaripov, and Ghulomjon Babaev, Minister for Economic Development and Trade, expressed their full support for SPECA but emphasized that the full potential of the Programme had not yet been realized. ❄

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European countries start common work to improve water management and curb water-related diseases

The main aim of the Protocol on Water and Health under the Water Convention is to protect human health and well being by better water management, including the protection of water ecosystems, and by preventing, controlling and reducing water-related diseases. It entered into force in August 2005 and to date has been ratified by 20 countries. The first meeting of the Parties will be held on 17-19 January, organized by UNECE and the WHO Regional Office for Europe which are jointly servicing the Protocol.

The Protocol is the first international agreement of its kind adopted specifically to attain an adequate supply of safe drinking water and adequate sanitation for everyone, and to effectively protect water used as a source of drinking water.

It is therefore a pioneering agreement linking social and environmental aspects and addressing health, development and poverty issues. As such, the Protocol is closely linked to the Millennium Development Goals, in particular Goal 4 to

reduce child mortality and Goal 7 to ensure environmental sustainability.

But it does even more: it offers a platform to go beyond the target of halving the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking-water and basic sanitation by 2015, since it aims to grant access to drinking water and sanitation to everybody.



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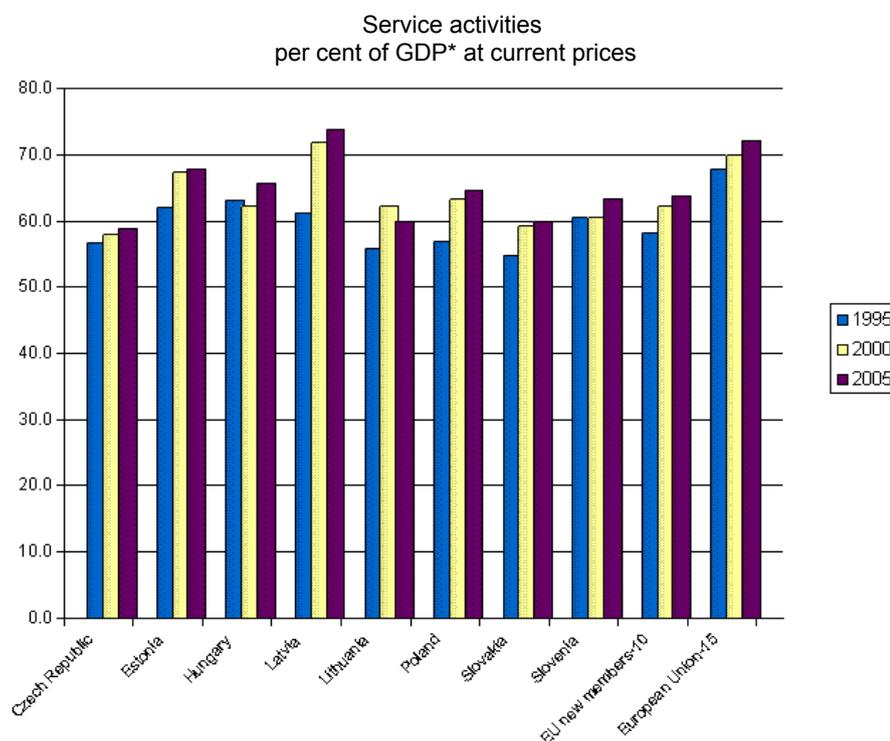
The Protocol displays innovative features of modern environmental law that will be strong assets for its implementation:

➤ *It requests Parties to establish targets and target dates, tailored to their environmental, social and economic conditions, to reduce water-related diseases and promote sustainable water management. The Protocol also provides for the establishment of a mechanism for review of compliance of a non-confrontational, non-judicial and consultative nature.*

➤ *It includes provisions for international cooperation and international support for national action to support its implementation. The Protocol provisions on international cooperation could offer opportunities for the creation of a forum where low and middle-income countries can review the effectiveness of their investments in the areas related to the Protocol, and where donor countries can assist low and middle-income countries in meeting their self-defined needs.*

Facts and figures

Services grow more important in the new EU countries



The share of service activities out of total economic activity (GDP) in the new EU member countries has increased over the last ten years; today these countries structurally resemble the developed market economies with a high share of service activities. In 2005 service activities in the ten new EU countries accounted for 63.6% of GDP while the share in the EU-15 region was 72.1%. The upward trend is the result of the relative growth of output and prices in services production compared to the development in the other sectors of the economy. Hungary in 2000 and Lithuania in 2005 were exceptions, as industrial output in these two instances grew faster than services. Among the selected countries, Latvia demonstrated the most impressive growth of the share of services: from 61.2% in 1995 up to 73.8% in 2005, higher than the EU-15 average.

* Gross Domestic Product at basic prices. The above results present GDP sections of ISIC activity classification.

Source: UNECE Statistical Database.

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