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UNECE water activities

Over the past years, UNECE has intensified its engagement in Central Asian water issues. The situation in the region is difficult – the Aral Sea is still shrinking, upstream and downstream countries are not agreeing on water release regimes and water distribution, energy and irrigation sectors are competing, water ecosystems are deteriorating further, and climate change may decrease even more the water availability irreversibly for the future. It is likely that Afghanistan will use more water from the AmuDarya river in the future.

The stabilization of the Northern Aral Sea is one positive development – a more stable ecosystem and possibilities for the population to develop fisheries as a source of income. This is the result of Kazakh efforts to build a dam for the inflow from SyrDarya.

UNECE work to improve water management and cooperation in Central Asia builds on two pillars; the SPECA Water and Energy programme of work and the application of the UNECE regional Environmental Conventions.

The SPECA working group on energy and water resources in Central Asia produced in 2004 a Regional Cooperation Strategy to promote the rational and efficient use of water and energy resources in Central Asia. This strategy, approved by four of the five Central Asian States, outlines the needs for action in the water and energy sectors in the longer and shorter term for the benefit of the whole region.

The UNECE regional Environmental Conventions establish rules for cooperation between neighbouring countries on the environment and shared natural resources. The Water Convention is of particular importance as the basic international legal framework for transboundary water cooperation. Recently Uzbekistan ratified the Convention, but this was only the second ratification in Central Asia after Kazakhstan.



Toktogul Dam on the Naryn River, Kyrgyzstan

The UNECE Transport Division is organizing a Meeting of Transport Ministers from countries in the Euro-Asian region in the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on 19 February 2008.

This event is the first of its kind in UNECE's history. With the increasing port saturation becoming a serious impediment to global trade, the Ministerial Meeting is aimed at developing efficient, safe and secure inland transport links between Europe and Asia.

Transport Ministers from 19 countries (Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, China, Georgia, Greece, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan) are expected to confirm their continued support for the joint UNECE-UNESCAP Euro-Asian Inland Transport Links project by endorsing the identified Euro-Asian routes and their priority development as well as the creation of a mechanism ensuring the efficient coordination and monitoring of project related activities.

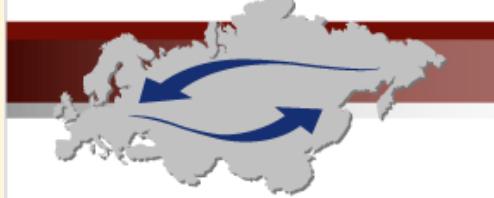
The Minister of Transport of Mongolia is also expected to attend the Meeting, representing a country that expressed interest in being associated with the future work on developing Euro-Asian transport links. ■

For more information visit: www.unece.org/trans/MinisterialITC70/index.html or contact Michalis P. Adamantiadis (michalis.adamantiadis@unece.org).

70th Session of the UNECE Inland Transport Committee

Euro-Asian Transport Links Ministerial Meeting

19-21 February 2008 | Geneva, Switzerland



UNECE activities in Central Asia are developed in close cooperation with the authorities in the region and with international organizations and other actors. OSCE, UNDP and UNEP in the Environment and Security Initiative are particularly important partners, as is UNESCAP, the International Fund for the Saving of the Aral Sea (IFAS) and Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC). In collaboration with the EU Water Initiative and the European Commission, UNECE will also be involved in national work to promote integrated water resources management in several of the Central Asian countries.

All UNECE projects in the region have extrabudgetary funding from different donors. ■

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This is an extract from the forthcoming issue on UNECE and Water Management in Central Asia, in the What UNECE Does series

Off the Press

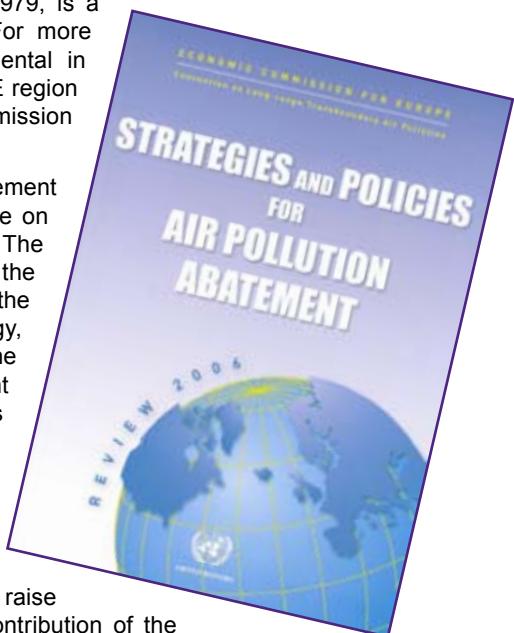
The Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution, signed in Geneva in 1979, is a landmark international agreement. For more than 25 years it has been instrumental in reducing emissions contributing to transboundary air pollution in the UNECE region through coordinated efforts on research, monitoring and the development of emission reduction strategies on regional air pollution and its effects.

The 2006 summary review of strategies and policies for air pollution abatement is based on replies by Parties to the Convention to the 2006 questionnaire on strategies and policies as well as other information provided by Parties. The questionnaire asked Parties for information on their implementation of the protocols to the Convention as well as general policy information related to the integration of air pollution mitigation policies with economic, transport, energy, waste management, spatial planning and other policy frameworks. Each of the protocols (on nitrogen oxides, volatile organic compounds, sulphur, persistent organic pollutants, heavy metals and the Gothenburg Protocol) includes reporting obligations by Parties.

The overall aim of the reviews of strategies and policies is: (a) To assess the progress made by Parties and the region as a whole in implementing obligations under the Convention and its protocols and to further their implementation; (b) To facilitate the exchange of information between Parties, which is foreseen in the Convention and its protocols; and (c) To raise awareness about the problems of air pollution, as well as to make the contribution of the Convention and successful abatement strategies more visible.

As of 15 September 2007, 51 member countries of UNECE and the European Community were Party to the Convention. The review reflects the continued efforts made by Parties to comply with their obligations under international environmental agreements, and to contribute to a cleaner environment in the region. ■

For more information see the Convention's website <http://www.unece.org/env/lrtap/welcome.html> or contact Keith Bull (air.env@unece.org).



Facts and Figures

Price levels vary significantly across UNECE member countries

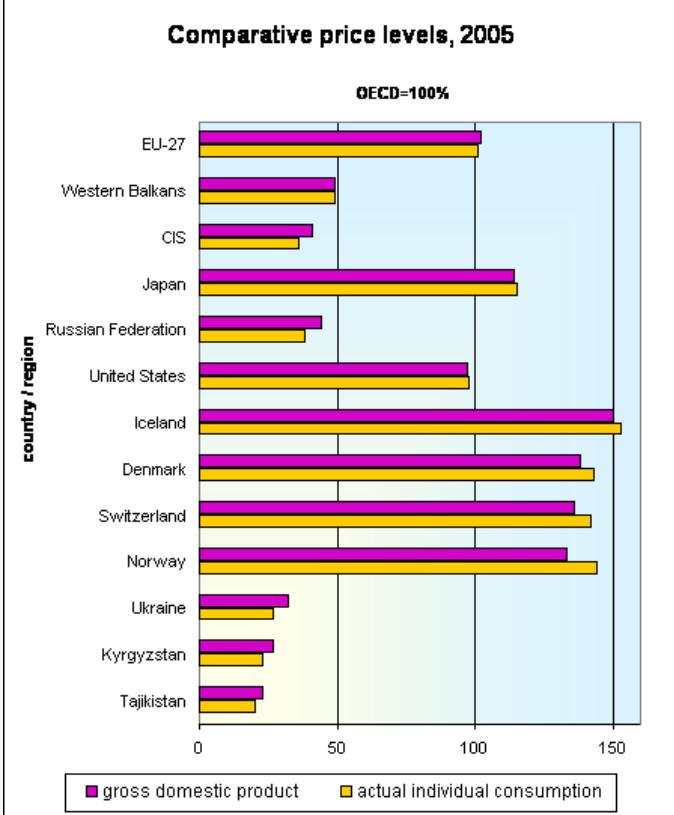
OECD recently published the 2005 International Comparisons Programme (ICP) results for OECD member States, EU-27, Western Balkans, CIS countries, and Israel. The graph shows the comparative price levels* for selected economies and regions, with OECD average equal to 100%. GDP price level in the Western Balkan countries is approximately half that of the OECD States, and in the CIS** it is even lower (41%).

Among countries, Iceland faces the highest level (150%), followed by Denmark (138%) and Switzerland (136%). On the other side, the lowest levels are estimated for Tajikistan (23%), Kyrgyzstan (27%) and Ukraine (32%).

A similar picture is presented for the Actual Individual Consumption (AIC), which is a measure of the real prices consumers pay in different countries. Iceland takes the lead with a price level of 53 % above the OECD average, while in Tajikistan it is 80% below. In other words, in 2005 in Tajikistan a consumer paid, on average in real terms, a price almost 8 times lower than in Iceland. ■

* Comparative price level is defined as the ratio between the purchasing power parity (PPP) and the exchange rate for a given country, both measured in national currency per base currency unit (in this case - US\$). If it is larger (smaller) than 100, residents' purchasing power is lower (higher) than suggested by exchange rate conversion.

** Excluding Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.



Source: OECD