



# UNECE Weekly

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## Berlin Conference signals more active UNECE support to cooperative water management in Central Asia

As repeatedly proposed during the discussions on its reform, UNECE is making efforts to provide more active support to its member States in areas where they face increasing strategic challenges. One such area is water. The report *“Climate Change and International Security”* by the High Representative and the European Commission to the European Council warns that climate change will heavily affect Europe’s natural environment and nearly all sections of society and the economy. According to the report, “Central Asia is another region severely affected by climate change. An increasing shortage of water, which is both a key resource for agriculture and a strategic resource for electricity generation, is already noticeable. The glaciers in Tajikistan lost a third of their area in the second half of the 20th century alone, while Kyrgyzstan has lost over 1000 glaciers in the last four decades. There is thus considerable additional potential for conflict in the region whose strategic, political and economic developments as well as increasing transregional challenges impact directly or indirectly on EU interest.”

The Government of Germany and UNECE – encouraged by the success of their jointly organized conference last November in Berlin “Central Asia and Europe: a New Economic Partnership for the 21st Century” – co-organized another high level conference on 1 April in Berlin, *“Water Unites—New Prospects for Cooperation and Security”*. The Conference – with the active participation of five Central Asian States – launched an initiative that is expected to bring a holistic approach to water management in Central Asia, covering quality issues, water security, climate change and hydroenergy. The security and foreign policy implications of increasing shortages of this vital



Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Federal Foreign Minister of Germany, and Marek Belka, UNECE Executive Secretary

resource are an important focus of the new initiative. To avoid disputes between countries and regions over water resources and to ensure they are fairly shared among all consumers, there is a need to develop mechanisms that will help promote multilateral cooperation.

Federal Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier in his opening statement emphasized: “At today’s conference we don’t want to simply analyse the problems but also to look ahead. On the basis of the EU’s Central Asia Strategy, we want to identify and discuss prospects for greater regional cooperation in the water sector.” He put forward a five point action plan for German assistance to water management in Central Asia. Executive Secretary Marek Belka presented an ambitious UNECE programme

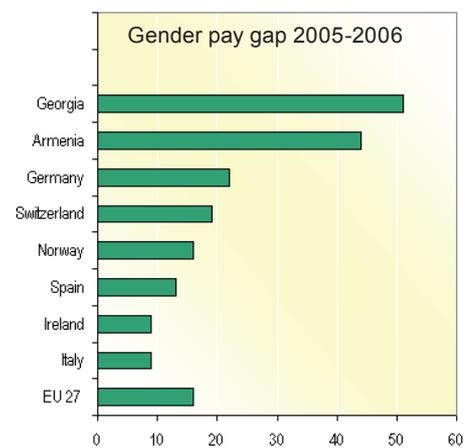


## Engendering economics.....

### ... to reach the Millennium Development Goals in the South Caucasus

Poverty reduction is high on the policy agenda in all countries in the South Caucasus. The State programme *Georgia without Poverty* aims at reducing poverty by 25 per cent during 2008-2012 through the creation of 200,000 new jobs and attracting foreign investments. “In order to be effective, poverty reduction strategies have to be gender sensitive”, said Mr. Alexander Kvitashvili, Minister of Labour, Health and Social Security at the opening of a regional conference on the challenges of engendering economic policies, held in Tbilisi on 1 April. Government officials, economists and gender experts from Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia discussed how to engender employment policy, public finance and budgets based on good practices from Germany, Italy and Ireland. “We already have some experience in this field and have done some work in the South Caucasus region”, underlined Gylnara Hovhahesyan, Director of the Institute of Labour and Social Research of Armenia and Charita Jashi, lead expert on gender economics in Georgia.

The message from the conference was that introducing a gender



Source: UNECE Gender Statistics Databases and Eurostat

Difference between average gross earnings of male paid employees and of female paid employees as a percentage of average gross earnings of male paid employees

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of assistance to Central Asia, including increased technical assistance to facilitate the early accession of these states to relevant UNECE conventions, new projects in areas where conditions are ripe and support to increased energy efficiency through a series of new projects. He proposed that UNECE would organize a follow-up event to the Berlin Conference in the autumn in Central Asia – in cooperation with the Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs and GTZ<sup>1</sup>. UNECE and GTZ will work with the Federal Foreign Ministry on translating the “Berlin Water Initiative” into concrete action.

### Importance of more effective support

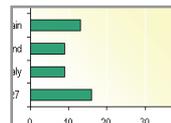
Speakers from the Council of the European Union and the European Commission underlined the increased conflict potential over water-related issues and the importance of more effective support to cooperative regional water management. The Chairman of Session II, Johannes Linn, Executive Director of the Wolfensohn Initiative and Chief Adviser of CAREC (Central Asia Regional Cooperation) in his summary of the discussion suggested that SPECA<sup>2</sup> should play a coordinating role in water-related activities in Central Asia.

### Proposals from representatives

High-level government representatives from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan made a series of important comments and proposals. Many of them warned that the legal base of regional cooperation in the area of water management was obsolete and pointed to the need to base this cooperation on international legal documents and norms. Several speakers mentioned as a positive example the efforts to create a water-energy consortium within the EurAsEC<sup>3</sup> framework and emphasized the need to develop long-term water distribution agreements and improve water efficiency. Central Asian representatives also underlined the need to ensure implementation of decisions taken by inter-state bodies. The Representative of Kyrgyzstan made a proposal to establish a Central Asian Water Academy in Bishkek. The Representative of Turkmenistan proposed to involve the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy in Ashgabat in the cooperative solution of water issues. Several speakers said it was essential to take the International Fund to Save the Aral Sea and the Interstate Commission on Water Cooperation under a United Nations umbrella to increase their effectiveness - following the successful example of the “Mekong model”. \*

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<sup>1</sup> Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit GmbH  
<sup>2</sup> United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia  
<sup>3</sup> Eurasian Economic Community



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perspective into budgetary processes is a key tool to reduce poverty through improving efficiency, transparency and accountability of public finance. One of the tasks of the Regional Network on Gender Responsive Budgeting for the South Caucasus, officially established as a result of the Conference, is to prepare pilot gender budget initiatives at municipality level using lessons learned from the gender budgets of Berlin and Naples. “Knowledge of the experience of EU member countries is also relevant for strengthening economic relations with these countries under the EU neighbourhood policy process”, said Tamara Berushashvili, Deputy Minister for Euro-Atlantic Integration of Georgia.

The conference, organized jointly by the UNDP<sup>1</sup> office in Georgia (under the project funded by SIDA<sup>2</sup>), UNECE and OSCE ODIHR<sup>3</sup>, is an example of good interagency cooperation under the One United Nations approach, built on the comparative advantages of each organization. The UNECE contribution included in-house expertise on engendering economics, expertise of international experts from UNECE member countries and gender-disaggregated data in the economic area. \*

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Development Programme  
<sup>2</sup> Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency  
<sup>3</sup> Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

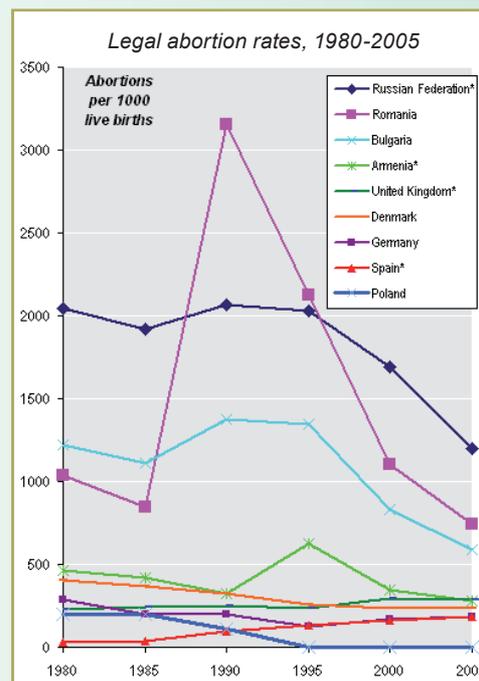
## Facts and Figures

### Abortion rates on decline but still high in Eastern Europe

Abortion rates in East European and CIS countries, historically very high, declined after 1995. However, they still remain much higher than in Western and Central Europe, where the rate is between 200 and 400 abortions per 1000 live births.

During the communist period, abortion without legal restrictions was used as a primary means of birth control in these countries. In the 1980s, there were over two abortions per live birth in Russia and about 1.2-1.4 abortions per live birth in Bulgaria. In Romania, under the Ceausescu regime there were some restrictions, resulting in the lower rate, but after the regime's downfall in 1989, abortion became legal and the rate jumped to over three abortions per live birth.

Levels and trends depend not only on abortion policies, but also on cultural and religious traditions. In Poland, for instance, abortion was legal under the communist regime, but since 1993 it is illegal. In Spain, abortion became legal only in 1985 and under specific circumstances. In both countries, however, abortion levels have always been relatively low, also due in part to the influence of the religious tradition. \*



Source: UNECE Gender Statistics Database (<http://www.unece.org/stats/data/>), and Eurostat.  
\* Data refer to 2004 instead of 2005