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Save water, grow green!

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY AGREES ON THE AGENDA FOR THE ASTANA 2011 "ENVIRONMENT FOR EUROPE" MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE

The Committee on Environmental Policy met in Geneva from 2 to 5 November 2010 to advance the preparations for the seventh "Environment for Europe" (EfE) Ministerial Conference, which will bring together ministers and representatives of civil society and business in Astana (Kazakhstan), from 21 to 23 September 2011. Two major themes will drive the Conference agenda: "Sustainable management of water and water-related ecosystems" and "Greening the economy: mainstreaming the environment into economic development".

Three multi-stakeholder round-table discussions will take place during the Conference:

- A first round table will consider how to ensure effective policies to protect water-related ecosystems and to address human health issues related to water quality and quantity, and will discuss in particular priorities and challenges in adapting management of water to extreme weather events and climate change.
- A second interactive discussion will aim to identify policy mixes and tools that are most effective to improve water efficiency by different users, and ways to encourage investors to take into account the impacts on water quality and quantity, energy and resource efficiency, and vulnerable populations.
- A third round table will debate policy mixes for enabling a green, inclusive, and competitive economy through an integrated approach, as well as approaches to resource efficiency, research, innovation and investment to help the transition towards a green economy.

Outcomes of the round-table debates will be considered at the end of the Conference and will feed into the Chair's Summary.

Europe's Environment Assessment of Assessments report, prepared by the European Environment Agency in cooperation with UNECE and other EfE partners, will support the work of the Conference. The report will assess existing environmental assessments, processes and practices identifying gaps, needs and priorities;



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evaluate capacity to measure progress on targets and implementation of Conventions and agreed actions; and contribute to the development of a shared environmental information system within the European Union and across the pan-European region. In addition, background papers on each of the two Conference themes are being prepared by UNECE jointly with EfE partners to support multi-stakeholder discussions during the Conference and to facilitate decision-making.

The Conference outcomes will include a two-page Ministerial Declaration focused on follow-up and further actions required for a sustainable management of water and greening the economy in the region, as well as a number of initiatives that are expected to be proposed. In connection

with the latter, Kazakhstan, as the host country of the Conference, has put forward the Astana "Green Bridge" initiative, focusing on a Europe-Asia-Pacific partnership for strengthening cooperation on green development.

The "Green Bridge" initiative has already been endorsed at the ESCAP Sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific, which took place in October 2010 in Astana. In addition, upon the initiative of the Bureau of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, a Toolbox for Action on Sustainable Management of Water and Water-related Ecosystems will be developed by all interested stakeholders to guide and support Governments' efforts in addressing this issue. The Conference remains open for other similar initiatives and policy tools at both regional and subregional levels.

The Committee on Environmental Policy also approved recommendations for the second Environmental Performance Review of Azerbaijan and of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and considered the launching of a third cycle of Reviews at the Astana Ministerial Conference.

The Committee also decided on the environmental sector representation for the European Environment and Health Ministerial Board and appointed Ministers of Environment from Azerbaijan, Belarus, Romania and Turkey for the first term of the Board (2011–2012). □

Documents and materials of the seventeenth session of the Committee on Environmental Policy are posted at:
<http://www.unece.org/env/cep/17thsession.html>.

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3RD MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP ON AGEING 22-23 NOVEMBER 2010, GENEVA

On November 22 and 23 the UNECE Population Unit will host the third annual meeting of the Working Group on Ageing. This group comprises national focal points on ageing and other representatives of member states, whose aim is to shape and direct the work programme of the Population Unit and monitor its implementation. Its central goal is to ensure that the internationally-agreed commitments of the 2002 Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) and the Berlin Regional Implementation Strategy (RIS) are adhered to, and that these form the guiding framework of the Population Unit's work.

First convened in December 2008 as part of the first five-year cycle of review and appraisal of MIPAA/RIS, the Working Group on Ageing was formed in recognition of the growing salience of issues related to ageing in the UNECE region. As the 21st century progresses, ever greater proportions of people in the region are living well into their seventh decade or beyond. In the region as a whole, 20% of the population is aged 60 or above, and this proportion rises as high as 25-27% in some countries (Italy, Germany, Sweden, Finland). In other countries, such as those with economies in transition, the proportions of older persons are not yet as high but rapid increases in longevity are taking place simultaneously with large-scale emigration of younger people to find work, falling fertility rates, and difficult economic times.

While population ageing often presents social and economic challenges, the goals of the Working Group on



Ageing are not only to find ways to mitigate these challenges, but also to recognise, celebrate and assist societies in benefiting from the numerous opportunities offered by population ageing.

On the Working Group's agenda this year:

- Production of two new issues of the series of 'Policy Briefs on Ageing' on the topics of 'Tapping the Potential of Volunteering' and 'Age-Friendly Employment: Policies and Practices'. These policy briefs are designed to provide strategies for policy action and good practice examples from throughout the region, incorporating the latest research and data to help guide countries in their approaches to issues surrounding older people.
- The development of 'Road Maps for Mainstreaming Ageing' in Armenia and in the Republic of Moldova, through which UNECE helps countries to formulate comprehensive and concrete plans to mainstream a consideration of ageing into all policy areas.
- Production of a short documentary film exploring the difficulties and potentials of older persons in Armenia.
- The collection and analysis of a broad spectrum of indicators measuring the success of efforts to mainstream ageing –in particular, this year, on gender issues and long-term care.
- Planning ahead for the 2012 Regional Ministerial Conference on Ageing, to be held in Vienna, Austria, as the culmination of the second cycle of review and appraisal of MIPAA/RIS. □

For more information, please visit: <http://www.unece.org/pau/age/welcome.htm>
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SPECA INVITED TO JOIN THE CORE GROUP OF REGIONAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION CONFERENCE ON AFGHANISTAN

Speaking at the SPECA Economic Forum in Geneva on 18 October Mr. Eklil Ahmad Hakimi, Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan underlined that the countries of the region would benefit from closer coordination and cooperation between the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA), the Core Group of the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA) and the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation program (CAREC), a coordination framework for major international financial institutions. SPECA was invited to participate in RECCA IV, hosted by the Government of Turkey on 2 and 3 November in Istanbul.

The Istanbul Declaration adopted at the Conference noted the significant contribution of regional organizations and financial institutions and welcomed the positive role played and the support provided to Afghanistan by these organizations, including the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia and appreciated the agreement of these organizations to establish the Core Group for the enhanced coordination of Afghanistan's regional engagement.

SPECA was invited to present further concrete project proposals that would facilitate closer economic cooperation between Central Asia and Afghanistan. Upcoming high-level events, including the follow-up conference of the SPECA Economic Forum to be hosted in the first half of 2011 in Ashgabat by Turkmenistan, the country presently chairing the Programme or the next RECCA meeting to be organized by Tajikistan, will offer a suitable framework for the presentation of project proposals and initiatives to be implemented in the SPECA framework. □

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