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INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE DISCUSSED ECO-INNOVATION POLICIES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN TEL AVIV

Eco-innovation can provide an effective answer to address environmental challenges and overcome resource constraints, but public interventions in this area are complex and need to be guided by a consistent long-term vision that encourages the involvement of private investors. This was one of the main messages of the International Conference "Promoting Eco-innovation: policies and opportunities", which the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe organized in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel and the Prime Minister's Office.

The Conference, which was held in Tel Aviv (11-13 July 2011) under the patronage of the Prime Minister of Israel, HE Benjamin Netanyahu, gathered policy-makers, academics and private sector representatives from many UNECE members states, thus providing an opportunity for a wide exchange of views. The Conference reviewed policy experiences in different countries, discussed various initiatives to foster collaboration on eco-innovation and considered how to address the financing problems faced by eco-innovative enterprises.

Eco-innovation can result in significant reductions in the material costs of companies and therefore, represents a source of competitiveness. Gilad Erdan, Minister of Environmental Protection of Israel, stated that "eco-innovation is a source of green growth and jobs" that seeks an optimal use of resources. Hence the importance of "sharing successes" in order to develop workable ecological and environmental solutions.

UNECE Executive Secretary Ján Kubiš also underlined during his intervention the importance of international collaboration, as a way to facilitate technology transfer,

bridge gaps in R&D and disseminate good policy practices. He concluded that "in today's closely interconnected world, there is an obvious need for cooperative approaches that address common challenges while creating better conditions to materialize the opportunities resulting from a global economy".



Brice Lalonde, Executive Coordinator for the UN Conference for Sustainable Development (Rio+20), stressed that many technologies are already available and that the challenge is how to facilitate the diffusion through the world. "Action is required" to translate what we know into effective solutions.

Eugene Kandel, Chief Economic Advisor to the Prime Minister of Israel, noted that innovation and technological change have allowed modern societies to "do more with less", thus overcoming resource constraints. Israel is an excellent example of what can be achieved in this area, providing solutions that could be scaled-up through international collaboration.

Many speakers emphasized the need to embrace a broad concept of eco-innovation, which goes beyond a focus on R&D and industry to include life-cycle considerations and the environmental impact of consumption patterns. This widely shared view stressed the need for policy coordination on many different issues and the use of a wide range of instruments. Eco-innovation policies are not a niche but are increasingly seen as a mainstream strategic concern with multiple ramifications.

The main conclusion of this Conference will be used as an input to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20). □

Presentations made at the Conference are available at:
http://www.unece.org/ceci/documents/2011/icp/conf_icp11.html.

EFFECTIVENESS OF AARHUS CONVENTION COMPLIANCE MECHANISM SHOWN ONCE AGAIN



At their meeting last week (29 June–1 July 2011) in Chisinau, Republic of Moldova, the Parties to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) adopted by consensus a number of decisions concerning compliance, thus confirming the effectiveness of the compliance mechanism.

During the period 2008–2011 the Convention's Compliance Committee received an unprecedented number of communications from members of the public, three times more than in the previous

intersessional periods: 35 communications during 2008–2011, compared to 12 communications from 2005–2008 and 11 from 2002–2005. This is a strong sign of the mechanism's popularity and success.

The Parties concerned and the issues of non-compliance may be summarized as follows: Armenia (adoption of decrees modifying land use designation and zoning — several provisions of the Convention; and mining activities — public participation); Belarus (construction of a hydropower plant — public participation); Kazakhstan (nuclear waste — access to information; construction of a high-voltage power line and construction of a cement factory — public participation; and failure to enforce domestic environmental law — access to justice); Republic of Moldova (contracts for rent of forest lands — access to information); Slovakia (update of permits for the construction of a nuclear power plant — public participation); Spain (urban planning and modification of a protected area to residential — several provisions of the Convention; operation of wine distillery and construction of an oil refinery — public participation and access to justice/legal aid for non-governmental organizations); Turkmenistan (law on public associations — general provisions of recognition and support of public associations promoting environmental protection); Ukraine (protected wetland area — public participation), and United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (access to justice with respect to costs and remedies).

The Committee will work with the Parties that were found to be in a state of non-compliance to bring their legislation and practice in compliance with the Convention. Parties are called to report regularly to the Committee on their follow-up with the Meeting's decisions. During the next three years, the Committee will assess the steps undertaken by individual Parties and will report on their progress to the next session of the Meeting of the Parties.

This collaborative approach between the Committee and Parties has proven to bear fruit. Indeed, Albania and Lithuania, which were requested by the decisions of the

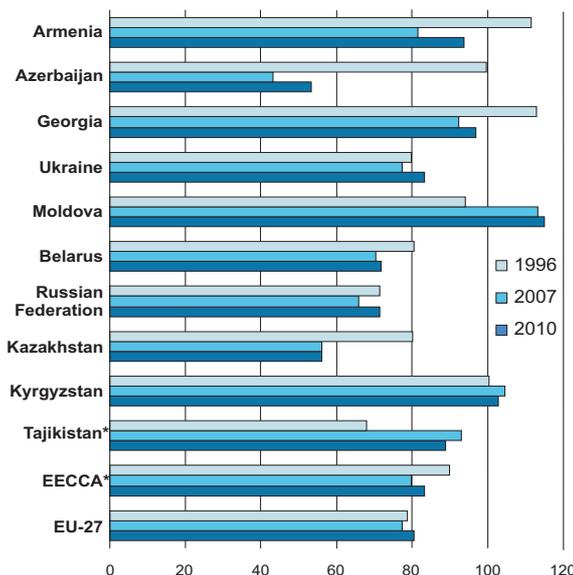
Meeting of the Parties in 2008 to follow the Committee's recommendations, had taken action and worked with the Committee in a constructive manner to bring their legislation and practice in compliance with the Convention by 2011. Also, while the Meeting adopted decisions concerning Armenia, Turkmenistan and Ukraine, all three have demonstrated significant progress in following the Meeting's decisions of 2008.

The Meeting also bid farewell to three members of the Compliance Committee, Mr Veit Koester, Mr. Merab Barbakadze and Mr Vadim Nee, whose term of office expired at the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties, and elected three new members. The Chair of the Committee, Veit Koester, has served for nine years. The end of his membership meant the end of a very long journey; a journey that started in Rio in 1992 with the adoption of principle 10 of the Rio Declaration, the origin of the Aarhus Convention. In 1998 he was a member of the Danish delegation when the Convention was adopted and signed in June 1998 in the Danish city of Aarhus and later he was in charge of the negotiations of the intergovernmental meetings that paved the way for the entry into force of the Convention in 2001, including the hard negotiations on the compliance mechanism. □

The Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee was established in October 2002 by decision I/7 of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention. It is composed of nine individuals who serve in their personal capacity. The compliance mechanism may be triggered in four ways: Party self-submission; Party-to-Party submission; referral by the secretariat; and communications from members of the public. In addition, the Committee may examine compliance issues on its own initiative and make recommendations; prepare reports on compliance with or implementation of the provisions of the Convention at the request of the Meeting of the Parties; and monitor, assess and facilitate the implementation of and compliance with the Convention's reporting requirements. Findings of the Committee are endorsed by the Meeting of the Parties.

For further information, please visit: <http://www.unece.org/env/pp> or contact the Secretariat at: public.participation@unece.org.

Share of final consumption in GDP, %



Source: UNECE Statistical Database (www.unece.org/stats/data).
* Data for 2010 refer to 2009. EECCA aggregate includes ten countries in the chart.

CONSUMPTION MAKES UP BIGGER SHARE OF GDP IN THE EECCA REGION

Data for 2010 show an increase in the share of final consumption expenditure in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) compared to 2007 for most of the countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) as well as for the European Union (EU27) countries.

The share of final consumption in GDP in the selected EECCA countries amounted to 90 per cent in 1996. After a decade of relatively strong economic growth the share of consumption in GDP had fallen to 80 per cent in 2007. After the outbreak of the economic crisis it increased to 83 per cent in 2010, mainly as a result of an increase in households' consumption/income ratio and expansionary fiscal policies in a number of countries that resulted in increased expenditures on e.g. health and social security. Countries may consume more than they produce, like Armenia and Georgia in 1996 and Moldova and Kyrgyzstan in 2010. This is reflected in a corresponding deficit on the foreign trade balance. □

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