

Executive Secretary



Secretary-General appoints Sven Alkalaj of Bosnia and Herzegovina as UNECE head

The United Nations Secretary-General has announced the appointment of Sven Alkalaj of Bosnia and Herzegovina as the new Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).

Mr. Alkalaj served as Foreign Minister of his country and Ambassador in Washington and Brussels, and has dealt with political and economic issues at the national, regional, European, and international levels gaining particular experience in enhancing regional cooperation amongst countries in the Western Balkans as well as the Eastern European and the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) countries.

He will focus on building consensus among various actors and stakeholders at all levels regarding the agenda of UNECE. □

Water Convention

UNECE participates in International Conference "Blue Diplomacy for Central Asia"

Andrey Vasilyev, UNECE Deputy Executive Secretary participated in the International Conference "Blue Diplomacy for Central Asia" organized by the German Federal Foreign Office on 7 and 8 March in Berlin. The Conference marked the conclusion of the first three-year phase of the Federal Foreign Office's Water Initiative and the launching of its second phase. The Water Initiative, which is also called the "Berlin Process", is part of the Water and Energy Pillar of the Central Asia Strategy of the European Union.

UNECE successfully implemented the Euro 1.4 Million regional component of the Programme "Trans-boundary Water management in Central Asia", funded through GIZ by the German Federal Foreign Office under the Water Initiative. Under the Programme Component "Regional Dialogue and Cooperation on Water resources Management in Central Asia" UNECE provided capacity building on international water law, supported the modernization of the legal basis of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS) and assisted in the elaboration of the Third Aral Sea Basin Program and the improvement of water monitoring and data exchange.

High level representatives of the ministries of foreign affairs and ministries of water resources of Central Asian countries participated in the Conference, while Afghanistan took part as an observer. The meeting was also attended by the EU Special Representatives for Central Asia and representatives of the European Commission, France, the OSCE, the Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia and key multilateral and bilateral donors.

Foreign Minister Westerwelle in his opening statement reminded that regional cooperation and agreement on the use of vitally important resources were the basis for Europe's peace and prosperity. For Central Asia water is a strategic resource. A lot can be done at the national level. But in Central Asia, too, water is not stopped by borders. The two most important rivers of Central Asia, the Amu Darya and the Syr Darya cross several borders. This makes necessary cross border cooperation on water. The region also needs to prepare itself for a changing environment. Climate change and the melting of glaciers are putting increasing strain on water resource.

The Foreign Minister underlined that the Federal Foreign Office's Water Initiative, the "Berlin Process" was Germany's contribution to the implementation of the European Union's Strategy for a New Partnership with Central Asia. He thanked implementing partners, among them the UNECE, for their work during the first phase of the Water Initiative. He announced that Phase II of the Water initiative would focus on two challenges: change and multiple uses of water. Change of the environment and social and economic conditions require flexible water politics. Different uses of water – agriculture, energy, communal services – require its rational and just management.

Andrey Vasilyev noted that UNECE was a natural partner in the implementation of the Water Initiative. It is the custodian of several relevant international legal instruments, like the Water, Espoo and Industrial Accidents Conventions. It is actively involved in Central Asia: among others it is supporting National Policy Dialogues on integrated water resources management in the framework of the EU Water Initiative and is the main driver of efforts to



improve dam safety and to develop regional cooperation on water quality.

He underlined that the Programme Component implemented by the UNECE during the first phase of the Water Initiative addressed the most complicated and politically sensitive issue of water resources management: regional cooperation. Thanks to its top-level political mandate by the April 2009 IFAS Summit and the active involvement of several dozens of local experts and policy-makers it produced concrete, tangible results.

The representatives of all five Central Asian countries welcomed and expressed their full support to the second phase of the Water Initiative.

The closing session of the Conference chaired by State Minister of the Federal Foreign Office, Ms. Cornelia Pieper, adopted a Joint Declaration, which states: "The aim of Phase II of the Water Initiative, set to begin in 2012, will remain to strengthen and further develop the cooperation on the sustainable use of scarce water resources with a view to improving the ecological, social and economic situation in the Central Asian region." □

Installing education for sustainable development school plans in every school by 2015

On 1 and 2 March 2012 the seventh meeting of the UNECE Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development was held in Geneva. The Committee adopted three priority action areas in which sets of capacity-building activities would be implemented, agreed to develop a concept for promoting education for sustainable development (ESD) beyond the Strategy's third implementation phase, which ends in 2015, and discussed and coordinated input to the preparatory process for the upcoming United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20 Conference).

Three priority action areas

While member States stressed their dedication to continue working on implementing all aspects of the Strategy for ESD in the third phase of implementation, they decided to adopt three priority action areas: ensuring there was an ESD school plan in every school by 2015; promoting the introduction of ESD into teacher education; and reorienting technical and vocational education and training in support of sustainable development and the transition to a green economy.

It was underlined that the three major priority action areas were not intended to replace other, additional actions supportive of and consistent with the expectations of phase III.

With a view to promoting the three adopted priority action areas, the following means of implementation were emphasized: promotion of cooperation between relevant governmental departments, promotion of capacity-building activities and strengthening of cooperation between the formal and informal sectors.



Capacity-building activities

To support member States in putting ESD policy frameworks into practice, the Steering Committee decided on a set of capacity-building activities, to be implemented under the umbrella of the UNECE Strategy for ESD. Among others, it mandated the UNECE Expert Group on Competences to develop a general workshop concept on competences in ESD and tasked the secretariat to support the organization of workshops on the subregional level, in particular back to back with major educator conferences in the region. Moreover, the possibility of holding "web-inars", i.e., online seminars, would be explored. Finally, the secretariat was tasked to work on developing a twinning concept for capacity-building, which would promote particularly also the bilateral and subregional exchange of experience and knowledge between relevant institutions.



Promoting ESD beyond 2015

The Committee highlighted that already in 2007, at the "Environment for Europe" Ministerial Conference in Belgrade, education and environment ministers reaffirmed their commitment to the further implementation of the Strategy throughout its implementation phases and beyond the year 2015. Since the third phase of implementation ends in 2015, the Committee strongly stressed the need for developing a concept for developing ESD beyond 2015 in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe region, and mandated the Bureau to develop a concept paper to this end. The concept paper will be discussed at length at the eighth Steering Committee meeting.



RIO+20
United Nations
Conference on
Sustainable
Development

Rio+20

Finally, the Steering Committee discussed and coordinated input to the Rio+20 process. It decided on a range of recommendations to the zero draft of the outcome document of Rio+20, which will be circulated to relevant stakeholders as well as to member States. □

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