**Visit of the President of Turkmenistan**

UNECE Executive Secretary Sven Alkalaj met with the President of Turkmenistan, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, on 9 October on the occasion of his visit to the United Nations Office in Geneva.

The Executive Secretary praised Turkmenistan's Position Paper prepared for the 67th General Assembly of the United Nations addressing key issues of the 5 Year Action Plan of the Secretary General, the outcomes of the Rio+20 Summit and the Sustainable Energy for All Initiative. He thanked the President for the Turkmen Chairmanship of the UN Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) since October 2010. He also welcomed the accession of Turkmenistan to the UNECE Water Convention.

President Berdimuhamedov recalled the importance that his country attaches to energy security issues, mentioning the TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline) project and plans to export gas to European markets through the Caspian Sea. He invited UNECE to examine the potential environmental impacts of such a pipeline. Referring to the ancient Silk Road, he said that Turkmenistan supports the development of trans-boundary transit routes through Central Asia. He also said that his country will actively participate in relevant UNECE events, including the Ministerial Conference on Euro-Asian Transport Links that UNECE will host in February 2013 in Geneva.

Turning to environmental issues, the President reiterated his initiative to establish a Regional Climate Change Centre in Ashgabat. He also said that addressing the environmental problems of the Caspian and the Aral Sea are strategic priorities for Turkmenistan.

The Executive Secretary supported the initiative on a Regional Climate Change Centre. He pointed out that by acceding to UNECE's Industrial Accidents Convention and Espoo Convention (Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context) Turkmenistan could more effectively address the environmental aspects of pipeline security.

Both parties emphasized the positive role that SPECA can play in strengthening regional economic ties with Afghanistan as a contribution to the stabilization of the country. President Berdimuhamedov extended an invitation to the Executive Secretary to visit Turkmenistan.

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**Executive Secretary convenes 2nd Town hall meeting**

The Executive Secretary convened a Town Hall meeting on 2 October to brief staff on 4 issues.

**Secretary-General’s 2012 Retreat**

The retreat, which took place in Turin on 7-8 September, gathered 44 Under-Secretary-Generals and Assistant Secretary-Generals around the Secretary-General and the Deputy Secretary-General.

The theme of the retreat was “Operating in a fast moving environment”. The retreat was the occasion for participants to set the priorities of the Secretariat and reaffirm their joint resolve to work as One across disciplines, structures and locations to raise to the challenge of the complex world and its competing demands in various areas.

The Executive Secretary stressed that UNECE is well positioned to contribute fully to the five priorities of the Secretary-General’s action plan:

1. Sustainable Development and progress towards the Millennium Development Goals;
2. Prevention;
3. Building a safer and more secure world by innovating and building on our core tasks;
4) Supporting nations in transition; and
5) Working with and for women and young people.

Proposed Programme Budget 2014-2015
The Secretary-General indicated that the programme budget for 2014-2015 will be at “the same or lower levels than in the biennium 2012-2013”.

The UNECE proposed programme budget for 2014-2015 will be prepared on the basis of the Strategic Framework approved by the Committee for Programme and Coordination. Any changes resulting from the review of the 2005 UNECE reform will be reflected in the next budget.

UNECE's budget proposal should be ready by 30 November.

Status of the review of the 2005 UNECE reform
The review of the 2005 UNECE reform by EXCOM started in autumn 2011. The EXCOM reviewed all subprogrammes, except for Sustainable Energy which is being addressed in a separate consultation process.

The first draft of the review outcome document prepared by the Chairman is currently under circulation for comments from member States. Informal consultations will continue throughout October and most likely November, with the aim to complete the exercise by end-November or early December. The draft outcome document will then be adopted at the Commission session in April 2013.

The Executive Secretary assured the staff of the security of their contracts. The outcome of the review might result in the reallocation of resources in accordance with priorities of member States and subsequent redeployment of some staff within the Secretariat. However, all possible changes will be carried out within the existing budget and will not lead to the loss of jobs.

UNECE Staff Elections
The informed that after discussions with Staff Representatives it had been agreed that election would be held once every two years for the Special Post Allowance and Rebuttal panels, the Joint Monitoring Group and the Central Review Board (Virtual) for the Regional Commissions, all of which requiring both staff-elected and management appointed members. This election will be organized in the coming weeks.

In his concluding remarks, the Executive Secretary thanked the staff for their dedication and high-quality work and called for renewed efforts to identify efficiency gains wherever possible. He assured the staff of his full support to this objective and restated his open door policy.

UNECE welcomes the ratification of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers to the Aarhus Convention by Poland

Poland has been actively engaged in the activities under the Aarhus Convention and PRTR Protocol and has contributed to the promotion of the principles of these two legal instruments both within and beyond the ECE region as, for example, demonstrated by the participation of the Polish Ministry of the Environment at the advisory mission to Ulan Bator, Mongolia, (25–26 April 2012) organized at the invitation of the Government of Mongolia following its expression of interest in acceding to the Convention to promote the Aarhus Convention in Mongolia.

This ratification is timely as it comes shortly before the second Working Group of the Parties to the PRTR Protocol, scheduled to take place in Geneva on 20-21 November 2012. The meeting is expected to review a number of issues, including the progress in implementing the Protocol's work programme and the global promotion of the Protocol. The Working Group of the Parties will also discuss capacity building activities and technical assistance on the basis of survey results that were circulated to national focal points and stakeholders earlier this year.

For further information, please visit: http://www.unece.org/env/pp/welcome.html or contact ella.behlyarova@unece.org.