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EXECUTIVE SECRETARY MEETS WITH SERBIAN PRESIDENT



UN Photo/Pierre Albouy

Ján Kubiš, UNECE Executive Secretary, met with H. E. Mr. Boris Tadić, President of the Republic of Serbia, on Tuesday, 10 January 2012, to discuss issues of mutual interest.

The discussion touched upon the various activities where UNECE and Serbia already cooperate closely, in particular in the fields of energy, transport and environmental issues. Concrete examples such as Trade facilitation and the Single Window, agricultural standards and harmonization of vehicle regulations, among others, were highlighted as well as the successful launch of the UN Road Safety Decade in the UNECE region last April in Belgrade in cooperation with the Serbian Road Traffic Safety Agency.

Ján Kubiš stressed the excellent cooperation between the secretariat and Ambassador Zvekić, Chair of the Commission and of UNECE's Executive Committee. He said that this was especially important at the current juncture, with the on-going review of the Commission's reform

process. He also said that UNECE was looking forward to strengthening its cooperation with South-East Europe and assisting member States in their efforts towards greater regional cooperation that would contribute also to their enhanced cooperation with the European Union.

President Tadić said that Serbia welcomed increased cooperation with UNECE. He stressed that Serbia's geographical situation at the centre of South-East Europe made transboundary cooperation on a variety of issues where UNECE is active extremely relevant. For instance, he noted that the shortest communication ways between Turkey and various EU member countries is through Serbia.

Attending the meeting were Andrey Vasilyev, Deputy-Executive Secretary, Parisudhi Kalampasut, Chef de Cabinet and Secretary of the Commission, for UNECE, and H. E. Mr. Uglješa Zvekić, Ambassador, Head of the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Serbia to the United Nations and other international organizations in Geneva, and Chair of the Commission and of UNECE's Executive Committee; Vesna Arsić, State Secretary, Ministry of Economy and Regional Development; Jovan Ratković, Political Adviser to the President, and Aleksandar Knežević, Officer for Political Affairs, President's Cabinet. □

VIDEO INTERVIEWS ON EU WATER INITIATIVE NATIONAL POLICY DIALOGUES IN CENTRAL ASIA

UNECE organized an International Conference on "Europe-Asia transboundary water cooperation" from 15 to 16 December 2011 in Geneva, to promote dialogue and cooperation on the management and protection of transboundary waters.

The European Union Water Initiative (EUWI) National Policy Dialogues (NPD) programme on Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) is one of the tools used to promote such dialogue and cooperation. This programme is being successfully implemented and the process is still ongoing in many countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. In the context of the conference, UNECE interviewed representatives of the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan on the progress of the EUWI NPD on IWRM implementation in their countries.

In the Kyrgyz Republic, according to Chyngyzbek Uzakbaev, Deputy Head, Water and Melioration State Committee, the disunity existing at the time of NPDs' initiation between national water authorities was an obstacle for water resources management. The EUWI NPD programme helped to identify problems in water sector, i.e. water-related health issues, implementation of IWRM,



monitoring and protection of water resources, etc. The NPD programme gave an opportunity to discuss these problems among water sector authorities. Chyngyzbek Uzakbaev also gave information on the progress of the ongoing pilot project in the transboundary Chu River Basin.

Sulton Rahimov, First Deputy Minister, Ministry of Melioration and Water Resources of Tajikistan, said that NPDs made it possible to create a general framework of the water sector reformation programme in Tajikistan, i.e. in IWRM. It also provided for closer cooperation between different water authorities in Tajikistan. Sulton Rahimov also commented on transboundary water cooperation between Tajikistan and neighbouring countries, mentioning a draft agreement between the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan prepared on the use of transboundary rivers. In 2010 an agreement between Afghanistan and Tajikistan on the monitoring of water resources and flood management was signed.

Kurbangeldy Ballyev, Representative of Turkmenistan, and Member of the Executive Committee of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea, spoke about the progress of

the national Expert Working Group, which aims to analyse national water legislation and prepare a proposal to the Government of Turkmenistan for accession to the UNECE Convention on Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes. □

The video interviews (in Russian) are available on UNECE's YouTube channel at:
Kyrgyz Republic - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bNGFYXFeXes>
Tajikistan - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GoJQpGtp2Q&feature=related>
Turkmenistan - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H88djqjEbvE>.

PARTNERING WITH SWISS RESEARCH INSTITUTE TO INCREASE FOOD SECURITY IN THE COMMONWEALTH OF INDEPENDENT STATES

Swiss-based experts in UNECE's Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes are providing technical assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States to help countries modernize their seed-potato production systems.

Most recently, Dr. Lê Công-Linh and Mr. Daniel Thomas, experts in plant biotechnology at the Agroscope Changins-Wädenswil Research Station ACW, Nyon, gave a five-day training course in Moscow on new biotechnologies in agricultural practice to improve seed-potato quality in the Russian Federation.

The training course, developed by Dr. Lê Công Linh, took place from 5 to 9 December at the A. G. Lorkh All-Russia Research Institute for Potato Cultivation, Moscow. Twenty participants from the Lorkh Institute and various regions of the Russian Federation were trained in the latest hi-tech procedures for extracting meristematic tissue, preparing culture media, using bioencapsulation and working with containers for clonal micropropagation of healthy seed. Sessions were given on in vitro culture techniques, including the elimination of viral diseases, the conservation of genotypes, and container-based production of microtubers of high sanitary quality.

Meristematic tissue

A meristem is a group of actively dividing and undifferentiated plant cells that can divide and form all types of tissues (shoots and roots). This tissue does not possess vascular system and, therefore, is prevented from virus invasion. If bits of meristematic tissue are isolated from the apical growth part of the plant and cultivated in a sterile, nutritious medium, the resulting plantlets are often free of



Dr. Lê Công-Linh introducing participants to the technology of meristem extraction for eliminating viral diseases

Mr. Daniel Thomas demonstrating the basic operations of the new production system

virus infections and parasites. It is the only known means to eliminate viruses from vegetatively propagated crops. Meristem culture is used to obtain pathogen-free material in order to produce healthy propagation stock for potatoes.

Training was also given on working with sterile environments. Through a theoretical session each morning, followed by practical work in the afternoon, participants learned about the mechanisms of regeneration and tuberization to control the reproduction process of the in vitro microplant cultures.

This was just one of the many training courses being offered by Agroscope ACW experts as part of a four-year technical-cooperation agreement with UNECE. The long-term goal is to establish at the Lorkh Institute a platform for spreading biotechnological production methods throughout the CIS's seed-potato-producing regions. The healthy seed obtained through these methods ensures high yields of consumption potatoes. This, in turn, is expected to contribute significantly to food security in that part of the world. □

For more information, please visit:

<http://www.unece.org/trade/agr/welcome.html>.

FACTS AND FIGURES

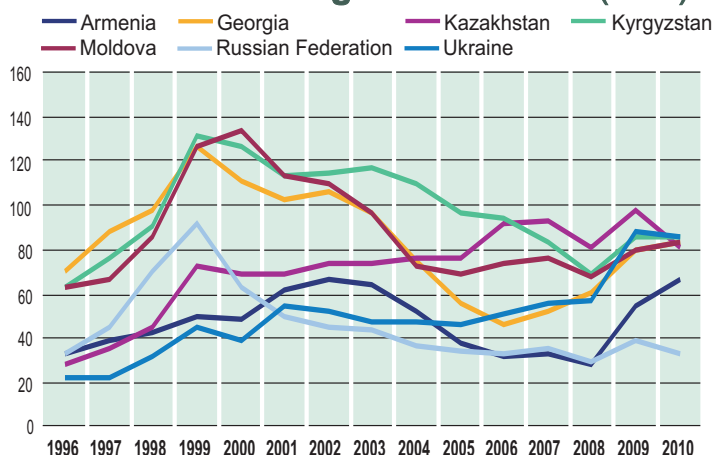
GROSS FOREIGN DEBT TO GDP IS RISING AGAIN IN THE EASTERN PART OF THE UNECE REGION

After the continuous fall in gross foreign debt (private and public) in relation to GDP registered since 1999 in most countries from Eastern European, the Caucasus and Central Asia, this ratio is on the rise again.

With levels varying from 48% to 134%, the foreign debt to GDP ratio peaked in the region in 1999. For some time, it exceeded 100% of GDP in Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and the Republic of Moldova.

The ratio then diminished in most countries in following years to a low point in 2008. The trend has reversed since 2008, and in 2010 the ratio ranged from 33% to 87%, a higher level than in 1996. □

Gross foreign debt to GDP (in %)*



Source: UNECE Statistical Database (<http://www.unece.org/stats/data>).

* Gross foreign debt is the outstanding amount of current liabilities that are owned to nonresidents by residents of an economy.

Information Service
 United Nations
 Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)
 CH-1211 Geneva 10 - Switzerland

Tel.: +41 (0) 22 917 44 44
 Fax: +41 (0) 22 917 05 05
 E-mail: info.ece@unece.org
<http://www.unece.org>

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