

Executive Secretary



UNECE Executive Secretary Sven Alkalaj and Prime Minister of Georgia Bidzina Ivanishvili

Executive Secretary visits Georgia

The Executive Secretary visited Georgia from 15 to 17 May. During his visit, he held a series of bilateral meetings with government officials, including Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili, Deputy Foreign Minister Tamar Beruchashvili, Economy Minister Irakli Kvirikashvili, Energy Minister Kakha Kaladze and Environment Minister Khatuna Gogaladze.

In these meetings, he discussed further cooperation between Georgia and UNECE, in particular in the areas of sustainable economic development, environment, energy, transport and statistics.

Georgia is a party to two UNECE environmental conventions (the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution and the Aarhus Convention) and is actively involved in the work on the other conventions. Under a joint UNECE-OSCE project under the Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC), UNECE has been supporting Georgia and Azerbaijan in the discussion of a bilateral agreement on the shared water resources of the Kura River Basin. In 2013-2016, UNECE is planning to organize a series of capacity building activities in Georgia to promote the implementation of the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) to the Espoo Convention.

The Executive Secretary also held a meeting with the National Statistics Service of Georgia to discuss the follow-up to the Global Assessment of the National Statistical System jointly conducted in 2012 by UNECE, Eurostat (Statistical Office of the European Union) and EFTA (European Free Trade Association).

The two sides also discussed forthcoming meetings, including the regional conference on trade facilitation, the Single Window, and corridor development to be held in Batumi on 24-25 June 2013 and the fourth International Forum "Energy for Sustainable Development" to be held in Tbilisi on 17-19 September 2013, as well as various projects to further regional and inter-regional cooperation. □

Biodiversity



22 MAY 2013
**INTERNATIONAL DAY
FOR BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY**
WATER & BIODIVERSITY

UNECE Water Convention puts ecosystems at the heart of water management

This year "Water and Biodiversity" is the topic of the International Day for Biological Diversity, which is celebrated annually on 22 May. In 2013 — the International Year of Water Cooperation — the International Day for Biological Diversity aims to raise awareness of the intricate linkages between sound ecosystem management and water management, as well as the role of ecosystems in the sustainable use and protection of water resources.

Poor water management has obvious negative impacts on biodiversity and water-related ecosystems. A good management of ecosystems further provides many opportunities to help address water-related challenges and achieve water security. For example, wetlands can reduce risks from flooding. Restoring soils and forests can reduce erosion and pollution and increase water available for crops. Identifying and strengthening such "bridges" between water management and ecosystems conservation and restoration are therefore vital for cooperation across sectors and borders.

The UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) helps countries to address these challenges. A new thematic assessment is currently being developed under the Convention to better understand the interactions between water, food, energy and ecosystems (the so-called "water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus") in river basins, in order to strengthen policy coherence between the water, agriculture, energy and land management sectors and support decision-making processes.

The Water Convention also supports an integrated approach to water management, the

improvement of water quality and the protection of ecosystems and biodiversity in several transboundary basins. Vulnerable ecosystems are a key area of Afghan-Tajik cooperation under the Water Convention, where the first steps are being taken to establish data exchange and assess the status of ecosystems in the upper Amu Darya Basin. In the Chu and Talas River Basins, the new project supported by the Global Environmental Facility and UNECE will expand the cooperation of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan to water quality and biodiversity. In another example, deterioration of water quality and degradation of ecosystems is bringing Georgia and Azerbaijan together to develop a bilateral agreement on the shared water resources of the Kura River Basin as part of a joint UNECE-Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe project under the Environment and Security Initiative. □

For further information please visit: <http://www.unece.org/env/water/>
or contact: water.convention@unece.org.

Air Pollution



Innovative ways to reduce pollution from residential wood burning

Under “woodstove changeout” campaigns in the United States of America, owners of old, inefficient wood stoves are encouraged — through education and cash rebates — to “changeout” or replace their stoves with cleaner burning appliances like modern gas, wood or corn stoves, gas furnaces and heat pumps. Currently, 50 communities have implemented woodstove changeouts, with over 24,000 old stoves and fireplaces being replaced or retrofitted. Each changeout helps to reduce emissions of harmful air pollutants up to as much as 70% both indoor and outdoor. So far, the campaign has led to the reduction of fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) emissions by 370 tons a year, and of toxic air pollutants by 63 tons a year. Each old wood stove replaced is equal to eliminating the PM_{2.5} emissions from five old diesel buses.

To date, woodstove changeouts in the United States provide approximately US\$ 135–US\$ 329 million per year in estimated health benefits. An extensive body of scientific evidence shows that exposure to fine particulate pollution can cause premature death and adverse cardiovascular effects, leading to increased hospital admissions and emergency room visits for heart attacks and strokes, as well as respiratory effects, including asthma attacks.

In Germany, climate policy has favoured the increasing use of renewable energy. Increased burning of woody biomass has, however, also resulted in an increase in fine particulate matter emissions, associated with adverse health effects. To combat this, the Ordinance on small combustion installations was amended in 2010 to introduce stricter limits on emissions from new room heaters and boilers and to implement a transition period of 5–15 years for existing ones. The new limit values for the release of carbon monoxide and particulate matter or “dust” are expected to significantly reduce air pollution from the some 14 million German stoves and 0.7 million boilers using solid fuels. Small combustion is an area that is not easy to regulate as most operators are individual households. The new amendments accomplish this by obliging households and other operators to comply with a list of admissible fuels for heating and standardized quality requirements for wood pellets and briquettes, which need to be manufactured from untreated wood and have humidity of less than 25%. Chimney-sweepers consult new operators and review the application of these requirements.

In addition to combating the negative impacts of the increasing use of wood energy, the changeout campaign in the United States and the revised Ordinance in Germany are important steps in complying with the requirements of the Protocol to Abate Acidification, Eutrophication and Ground-level Ozone (Gothenburg Protocol) to the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution (CLRTAP), amended in 2012 to introduce emission limits and emission reduction commitments for fine particulate matter for its present and future Parties across the ECE region.

The effective air pollutant abatement measures described above, as well as several other examples of measures applied in sectors like power generation, agriculture and transport, were presented by Parties to CLRTAP at a recent session of the Working Group on Strategies and Review (Geneva, 30 April–3 May 2013). The presentations were followed by lively discussions during which Parties exchanged views on related driving forces behind the measures, their costs and effectiveness, and possibilities for their broader applicability. □

For further information please visit: <http://www.unece.org/env/lrtap/welcome.html>.

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