



SAVE WATER, GROW GREEN!

ENVIRONMENT FOR EUROPE

7TH MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE
ASTANA, KAZAKHSTAN 21-23 SEPTEMBER 2011

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eNewsletter

“Environment for Europe”: Twenty Years of Partnership

From Dobris to Astana

The “Environment for Europe” (EfE) ministerial process was started back in 1991 by Josef Vavrousek, Minister of the Environment of Czechoslovakia, with a first conference at Dobris Castle near Prague. That conference was followed by five others and developed into the process that provided a platform for a unique partnership of the member States within the UNECE region, organizations of the United Nations system represented in the region, other intergovernmental organizations, regional environment centres, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders.

The main goals of the process, namely to harmonize environmental policies and enhance the quality of our common environment and to contribute to peace, stability and sustainable development, remain of major importance throughout the UNECE region. There is an urgent need for further integration of environmental considerations into all sectoral policies to ensure that economic growth takes place in accordance with principles of sustainable development.

Each previous Conference has helped to intensify cooperation, identify the most challenging areas and start new initiatives. As new environmental problems emerged, Ministers of the Environment did their best to develop strategies and programmes, aimed at better addressing new challenges, as well as already existing issues.

The process has been an important driving force for the development and adoption of regional multilateral environmental agreements, like the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus, 1998) and three Protocols to UNECE environmental Conventions (Kyiv, 2003).

The publication of four pan-European assessment reports on the state of the environment is another

achievement of the EfE process. The reports that were produced by the European Environment Agency (EEA) in cooperation with partners in 1995, 1998, 2003 and 2007 helped to identify major threats and challenges for the development of regional environmental policies.

Other achievements of the process include the introduction of the Environmental Performance Reviews Programme and the adoption of several regional strategies aimed, inter alia, at promoting biological and landscape diversity, education for sustainable development and improving mechanisms for collecting and processing environmental data and publishing indicator-based assessment reports.

The process has brought a strengthened partnership and closer cooperation among all stakeholders in the UNECE region, including international organizations, non-governmental organizations, the business community, local authorities and youth.

Reform of the “EfE” Process: Keeping the Momentum

The reform of the EfE process was initiated at the Sixth “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference in Belgrade in 2007, and was further developed by the Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) in consultation with EfE partners and endorsed by the Economic Commission for Europe in spring 2009.

The main objectives of the reform were to strengthen the effectiveness of the process and to reflect current environmental priorities and needs in the evolving political and economic landscape.

Pursuant to the Reform Plan, the EfE process will continue to serve as a mechanism for improving the environment in the UNECE region. The process will focus on the implementation of national environmental policies and support the convergence of environmental

policies and approaches with the prioritization of environmental objectives. The EfE process will further encourage cooperation with civil society organizations, in particular from the private sector, and promote broader environmental cooperation.

Astana 2011: Save Water, Grow Green

The Seventh “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference will take place at the Independence Palace in Astana (Kazakhstan) from 21 to 23 September 2011. It will be a major political event bringing together all important environmental players of the UNECE region. The conference will discuss environmental issues of common concern in the UNECE region and provide an opportunity to focus on the most challenging environmental issues for the countries of Central Asia.

The two main themes for the Conference are (1) sustainable management of water and water-related ecosystems and (2) greening the economy: mainstreaming the environment into economic development.

The UNECE secretariat in cooperation with its partners in the EfE process will present two substantive background papers for the consideration of the CEP meeting in May 2011. These two papers, addressing the main themes of the upcoming Conference, namely water and water-related ecosystems and a green economy, will identify key issues and challenges and propose possible follow-up measures in the respective areas. Following the approval of the CEP, these papers will serve as a basis for discussion during the Conference in Astana.

The Conference in Astana will take place 20 years after the start of the EfE process and participants will be guided through the living history of the EfE during the short anniversary presentation at the opening session.



The Green Bridge Initiative for green growth will be presented by Kazakhstan and will be followed by the presentation of the Second Assessment of Transboundary Waters. One of the key topics of the opening session will be the presentation by the EEA of an “Assessment of Assessments” (AoA) report and the discussion on its findings and conclusions.

The Conference will provide an opportunity for a high-level multi-stakeholder dialogue during three key sessions. Each of the thematic sessions will be opened by a short plenary and followed by ministerial round-table discussions.

Green Bridge Initiative — Europe-Asia-Pacific Partnership for Green Growth

The Green Bridge Initiative was developed by Kazakhstan and supported by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in 2010 in Astana. The Initiative aims to stimulate trans-regional cooperation, especially in the area of green economy, ensuring access to green technologies and developing framework mechanisms to stimulate their implementation. The key areas of the Initiative include, among others, eco-efficient use of natural resources, investment in ecosystem services and promotion of green business and technology. A wide range of approaches are proposed to achieve the main goals of the Initiative, including policy dialogues, capacity-building for policymakers and developing and strengthening mechanisms for technology transfer across the European, Asian and Pacific region to preserve ecosystems and attract green investments. The Initiative was officially submitted to the Committee on Environmental Policy and is under consideration as one of the possible outcomes of the Conference.

The first session will concentrate on effective policies to protect water-related ecosystems, the linkages between human health and water, challenges in adapting management of water to extreme weather events and climate change. A special focus will be placed on cooperation in transboundary basins.

At the second session, that will be bridging the main themes of water and a green economy, participants will be invited to share the effective policies and tools to improve water efficiency undertaken by different users, and ways to encourage investors to take into account the impacts on water, energy and resource efficiency, and vulnerable populations.

Focus on Water

The Belgrade Ministerial Conference commissioned the Second Assessment of Transboundary Rivers, Lakes and Groundwaters in the UNECE. This benchmark report will be presented at the Astana Conference and is expected to provide a strong background for discussion on water and related ecosystems during the Conference.

Another initiative — the Toolbox for Action on water and water related ecosystems — proposed by the Bureau of the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, will suggest concrete measures and activities to be taken as a follow up of the Astana Conference in the area of water and water-related ecosystems in order to strengthen implementation of water policies in the region.

The main focus of the third session will be a green, inclusive, and competitive economy, including resource efficiency, innovation and green investments. Effective green economy policies in such sectors as transport, housing, energy, agriculture and education will be at the centre of the discussion. One of the key topics for this session will be the potential contributions and linkages of the “Environment for Europe” process and the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development 2012 (Rio+20) in the area of green economy.

Outcomes of the round-table debates will be presented at the closing session and reflected in the Chair's Summary of the Conference. At its closing session, Ministers are expected to adopt a short declaration focusing on the challenges and most pressing issues, as well as relevant recommendations on follow-up and further actions to be taken linked with the two main themes of the Conference.

The “Assessment of Assessments”: Towards Informed Decision-Making

As a part of the preparatory activities for the Astana Ministerial Conference, the CEP established a Steering Group on Environmental Assessments to guide the preparation by EEA of an “Assessment of Assessments” (AoA) report for the Conference. The main purpose of the AoA will be to provide a critical review and analysis of existing national and international environmental assessments that are of relevance to the region and the two topics of the Astana Conference. It should identify gaps that need to be covered and priorities that should be addressed for conducting assessments to keep the pan-European environment under continuous review. Concrete proposals to this effect will be submitted to the ministers in Astana, including recommendations on how to develop a shared environmental information system (SEIS) in the region. By November 2010, more than 200 reports were submitted to the virtual database for the assessment.

Side Events and Exhibitions

Several side events and an exhibition related to the main themes of the Conference will be organized during the Conference. Interested participants would have to contact the host country secretariat directly regarding

the relevant practical arrangements. The request form for the reservation of rooms for side events and exhibition space will be available soon at the dedicated website of the Conference developed by the host country secretariat.

Preliminary Agenda for the Seventh EFe Ministerial Conference

Wednesday, 21 September	Thursday, 22 September	Friday, 23 September
Registration (9 a.m.-2 p.m.)	3. Sustainable management of water and water-related ecosystems (10a.m.-1 p.m.)	5. Greening the economy: mainstreaming the environment into economic development (10 a.m.-1 p.m.)
Lunch break / side events: noon-2 p.m.	Lunch break / side events: 1-3 p.m.	Lunch break / side events: 1-3 p.m.
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Opening of the Conference (plenary, 2-4 p.m.)2. The EFe process: 20 years of pan-European cooperation (plenary, 4-6 p.m.)<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ History of the EFe process■ Astana Green Bridge Initiative■ Presentation of AoA■ Presentation of the Second Assessment of Transboundary Waters■ Statements by Ministers and high-level representatives of private sector and civil society, with an emphasis on the findings of AoA	<ol style="list-style-type: none">4. Sustainable management of water and greening the economy (3 p.m.-6 p.m.)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">6. Reporting on the outcomes of the discussions under the thematic sessions7. Adoption of Conference outcomes8. Closing of the Conference (3 p.m.-6 p.m.)
Official events/side events: 6-9 p.m.	Official event/side events: 6-9 p.m.	

DEADLINES FOR REGISTRATION

29 April 2011	Submission of the request forms for side events and exhibitions to the host country secretariat
13 June 2011	Submission of the registration forms for conference to the UNECE secretariat
26 August 2011	Submission of the registration of media representatives to the host country secretariat

UPCOMING MEETINGS

Name of the meeting	Dates	Venue
Steering Group on Environmental Assessments, 3rd meeting	23 May 2011	Geneva
Committee on Environmental Policy, Special Session	24-27 May 2011	Geneva
Meeting of the CEP Bureau	24 May 2011	Geneva
Committee on Environmental Policy (to be confirmed)	20 September 2011	Astana



Conference venue:

The Palace of Independence was opened in Astana in 2008. The Palace has already hosted several high-level international meetings and conferences, including the 2010 Astana Summit of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. In addition to the main conference hall and several meeting rooms, the complex also includes a museum of traditional applied arts and a modern art gallery. □

More information on the "Environment for Europe" process and preparations for Astana Conference is available at:

<http://www.unece.org/env/efe/welcome.html>.

For enquiries, please contact:

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UNITED NATIONS

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE



**GOVERNMENT OF
THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN**