

## **Joint Communiqué of the European Commission Directorate General for Environment and the Ministry of Environmental Protection of Kazakhstan**

On 13 March 2009 a conference on environmental integration and sustainable development, co-organised by the European Commission (Directorate General for Environment) and the Ministry of Environmental Protection of Kazakhstan, was held in Astana. It gathered participants from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyz Republic, several EU Member States, the European Commission, the World Bank, the EAP Task Force, and representatives of various international organisations, as well as NGOs and business representatives.

The opening of the Conference was made by Mr Nurgali Ashimov, Minister of Environmental Protection of Kazakhstan and Mr Norbert Jousten, Head of the European Commission Delegation to the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and the Republic of Tajikistan. As an integral part of the Conference a panel on effective tools to promote environmental integration was held, chaired by Mr Jiří Hlavaček, representative of the Czech Republic EU Presidency.

The participants in the conference affirmed that sustainable development is the way to secure a safe and prosperous future and recognised the importance of environmental integration ("a key to good governance" as explained by the Institute for European Environmental Policy) in tackling environmental and resource challenges. Discussion during the meeting clearly showed the need for further collaboration between the European Commission and the countries of Central Asia in taking steps to put environmental integration into practice.

It was stressed that the regional approach is highly relevant to promoting environmental integration. The examples given by the participants, related to water, agriculture and energy issues, illustrated that many challenges in Central Asia can be most comprehensively and efficiently resolved at the regional level, even though useful initiatives can also be implemented at national or local levels. Regional action should be immediate and concrete, and based on existing processes, including the EU-Central Asia Strategy, the Berlin process, Central Asian Initiative for Sustainable Development and the Environment for Europe initiative.

It is indispensable to involve donors and International Financial Institutions (including the World Bank whose representative spoke of "a tremendous willingness to help"), to increase environmental investments, and ensure the sustainability of development projects implemented in Central Asia. Environmental education and enhanced public awareness rising should continue to be used to develop a broad support and understanding for environmental integration and capacity building. The existing NGOs structures and especially the activities of the Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia are a good base to achieve these goals.

At the same time, it was recognised that the positive impact of environmental integration and sustainable development must be made visible. The European Environmental Agency should play a role in this regard, bearing in mind the need to improve data availability and ensure systematic data collection.

To foster environmental integration, the existing legally binding instruments, including relevant multilateral environmental agreements (such as the Espoo Convention and its SEA Protocol) should be fully ratified and implemented. National legislation should fully reflect the commitments deriving from these agreements. The Astana Conference of 2011 in the Environment for Europe context could be taken as an opportunity to ensure full compliance in the region with UNECE Conventions. An exchange of experience and good practices in this regard should be an important component of the EU – Central Asia cooperation, as illustrated by initiatives taken by Germany in areas such as twinning between administrations.

The successful implementation of environmental integration policies depends on the political will of the governments and decision-makers, and appropriate involvement of the civil society, including the private sector. More work should be done to identify incentives for a greater commitment of stakeholders to support sustainable development, as pointed out by the EAP Task Force representative.

The participants of the Astana conference recognised that substantial efforts are needed to implement environmental integration and sustainable development and ensure that the results of this conference are put into practice.