



SAVE WATER, GROW GREEN!
ENVIRONMENT FOR EUROPE
7th MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE
ASTANA, KAZAKHSTAN 21-23 SEPTEMBER 2011

eNewsletter

Astana 2011- The Final Countdown

In just one week from now the 7th Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe” will open in the capital of Kazakhstan, Astana. More than 800 participants will gather in the halls of the Palace of Independence to discuss two main themes: **Sustainable management of water and water-related ecosystems; and Greening the economy: mainstreaming the environment into economic development.**

Astana-2011 will become the place to share experiences, discuss the challenges and work on cooperative solutions. From governments and international organizations to businesses and NGOs, the “Environment for Europe” partners and stakeholders will work together under a common motto - “Save Water, Grow Green!”. The Declaration to be approved by the ministers of environment will become a pledge for action to bring the conference discussions and outcomes to reality.

Whilst the Astana Ministerial Conference is expected to address environmental issues of common concern in the UNECE region, it provides an important opportunity to address priority environmental issues in the Central Asian sub-region. The sub-region has witnessed one of the greatest man-made disasters – the Aral Sea tragedy and therefore has a number of lessons learned to share with the rest of the region.

The two reports produced for the Astana Conference – **Europe's Environment – An Assessment of Assessments** prepared under the leadership of the European Environment Agency and the **Second Assessment of Transboundary Rivers, Lakes and Groundwaters** developed under the auspices of the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes

(Water Convention) – provide decision and policy-makers with food for thought, as well as stimulate further action by Governments, the international community, including donors, NGOs and other partners.

The Assessment of Assessments report shows that we need to further strengthen the link between policy and information. Based on the findings of the report, it is expected that Ministers in Astana will decide to establish a regular process of environmental assessment and to develop the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) - a collaborative initiative of the European Commission, EEA and EEA member and cooperating countries - across the region.

More information about the Assessment of Assessments is available at:

<http://aoa.ew.eea.europa.eu/>

The Green Bridge – an initiative of host country Kazakhstan – aims to establish a wide international and cross-sectoral framework for regional and inter-regional cooperation and collaboration among countries of Asia, the Pacific and Europe, international organizations, NGO and business on the way to a green economy. Developed into the “Green Bridge” Partnership Programme, it covers such key areas as strengthening national and international governance, awareness raising and education, promotion of green business and green technologies, financial and economic mechanisms, improving standards for a green economy and developments in the relevant sectors.

The Partnership Programme can be read at: <http://www.unece.org/env/efe/Astana/documents.html>

The Astana Conference is the first one prepared in accordance with the provisions of the Reform Plan of the "Environment for Europe" process adopted in 2009. Marking the 20 year anniversary of the "Environment for Europe" process, Astana-2011 is expected to pave the way for strengthened Pan-European cooperation on environment and sustainable development.

See you soon in Astana!

On 21 September 2011 the Independence Palace in Astana will welcome the participants of the 7th Ministerial "Environment for Europe"(EfE) Conference. For the first time in the 20 years of the EfE process the Ministerial Conference is organized in Central Asia. This will be an important event not only for the EfE process. The conference will also draw attention to the environmental challenges that are most relevant in Kazakhstan and other countries from this sub-region. With only one week left before the start of the Conference, we have interviewed Mr. Ruslan Bultrikov, Deputy Minister for Environmental Protection of Kazakhstan and Co-Chair of the UNECE Steering Group on the Environmental Assessments, to learn more about the host country's vision for the upcoming event.

Q: Why is the Conference important for Kazakhstan?

Growing environmental problems caused by the depletion of natural resources and the destruction of ecosystems, require a new paradigm for the economy – the green economy. For many countries in Europe, Asia and the Pacific, transition to a green economy is an opportunity for economic development and to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. The Conference provides an opportunity to Kazakhstan to exchange experience in addressing environmental problems, which may have implications not only for Kazakhstan but also for other member states of the UNECE. The Conference can also become a platform for Euro-Asian dialogue, especially as some of the UNECE countries of the subregion are also members of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). We expect that the conference will help all participants to find new and more effective approaches to solve environmental problems in the region, especially on issues of preservation of shared ecosystems, water resources, energy and food security, as these issues are beyond the authority of individual sectors, countries and geographical boundaries. Kazakhstan has the honor to be the host country of the conference, and we took an active part in the preparatory process, including the formation of the priority themes for the conference and its outcome documents.

Q: Which specific examples and best practices will Kazakhstan highlight during the conference ?

We have something to show and tell at the conference, for example, the solutions for the conservation of

ecosystems and improvement of the socio-economic situation in the North (Kazakhstani) part of the Aral Sea, a significant expansion of natural protected areas, improved environmental legislation, implementation of the Tehran Convention (on the Caspian Sea) and signing the new Protocol on Regional Preparedness, Response and Cooperation in Combating Oil Pollution Incidents. We are actively implementing the basin approach to water resources management, environmental agreements with China and Russia, the Chu-Talas water and energy and environmental cooperation and others.

Q: What are Kazakhstan's suggestions on "greening the economy" - the second main theme of the conference?

Transition to a green economy: "fair and reliable, providing a better quality of life for all, within the ecological limits of the planet", is now the main focus of the world community. Following the decisions of the 6 Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development (MCED-6) and the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy, the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan in cooperation with its partners has developed a Programme of the Inter-regional Partnership under the name "Green Bridge". The overall objective of the "Green Bridge" Partnership Programme is the support and integration of inter-sectoral and multilateral cooperation for the transition to a green economy and creating favorable conditions for green technologies and investment.

To achieve this goal the Programme provides for the consistent implementation of logically interrelated policy measures: regional, national and in key economic sectors, as well as preparation and implementation of a set of practical regional and national projects to support the green economy

Q: What do you see as the main conference outcomes?

The conference in our region is a testament to the commitment of Kazakhstan to seek common solutions for regional environmental issues. The preservation of ecosystems and water resources is of strategic importance not only for Kazakhstan and Central Asia, but also for the whole region, taking into account the contribution of ecosystems to global eco-sustainability, as well as possible implications for regional migration and security. We hope that the discussions at the conference and the best practices that countries and organizations will share during side-events and exhibitions will help everyone to preserve the environment and improve the quality of life. We should focus on new green technologies that should become part of our everyday life. That is why we hope that the "Green Bridge" initiative can help us to achieve that goal.

Q: What is Astana preparing for the Conference participants?

We plan to organize a number of cultural events such as sightseeing tours, including visits to the new and unique objects in Astana: the Palace of Independence, the historical and national museums and exhibition galleries, the museum of the First President of Kazakhstan, "Baiterek" cultural center, Palace of Peace and Harmony. On September 23rd after the closing of the Conference you will be able to enjoy the original performance and amazing Kazakh music. We plan to organize trips to the spa zone Borovoy, to the famous national park of international importance Kurgaldzhino and other historical and cultural monuments of Kazakhstan.

New commitments to the “Astana Water Action”

In the past weeks, the commitments under the “Astana Water Action” have multiplied. As of 11 September, nine countries, one international organization and one non-governmental organization have registered several commitments, and more have been announced.

The “Astana Water Action” is an initiative proposed by the Bureau of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) as one of the outcome of the Astana Ministerial Conference. It is a collection of actions for improving the status of water and water-related ecosystems through their sustainable management.

The commitments that have been announced under the “Astana Water Action” differ greatly, reflecting the various countries’ priorities and needs.

Commitments include measures to improve water supply and sanitation; to improve the ecological conditions of water resources, including through the restoration of river continuity and habitat connectivity; to improve water quality by reducing micropollutants from point and diffuse sources; the mitigation of the negative impacts of extreme weather events and adaptation to climate change, improvement of the regulatory and administrative frameworks for the application of integrated water resources management (IWRM), including through the National Policy Dialogues under the EU Water Initiative; the improvement of transboundary water cooperation, in particular via bilateral agreements; the enhancement of renewable energy production through small hydro power plants; the remediation of contaminated sites, etc.

While many commitments are based on existing legal obligations and international commitments, several countries took advantage of the flexibility and openness

of the process to take new original commitments, also linked to their international cooperation.

Countries, relevant IGOs and NGOs are still encouraged to register their commitments to water actions until the Conference and at the Conference itself.

For more information, please visit:

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

The Second Assessment is now online!

The **Second Assessment of Transboundary Rivers, Lakes and Groundwaters** as well as its Executive Summary are now available in English and Russian on the website of the Astana Conference.

The Second Assessment is the most comprehensive, up-to-date overview of the status of transboundary waters in the European and Asian parts of the UNECE region. It covers more than 140 transboundary rivers, 25 transboundary lakes and about 200 transboundary groundwaters.

Utilizing data and information provided by national Governments and river commissions, maps, graphs and statistical data, the Second Assessment presents a broad analysis of transboundary water resources, pressure factors, quantity and quality status, and transboundary impacts, as well as responses and future trends. It also documents national and transboundary legal and institutional frameworks for water management and cooperation. Recognizing the threats from climate change, the Second Assessment seeks to provide a picture of the expected impacts on transboundary water resources, including the measures planned or in place to adapt to climate change. Finally, a major innovation of the Second Assessment is the specific attention devoted to ecological and biodiversity issues, through the assessment of 25 Ramsar Sites and other wetlands of transboundary importance.

The Second Assessment highlights regional differences, specificities and vulnerabilities. It shows that progress in water management and transboundary cooperation has been achieved by many countries, but also that problems still persist. It aims to inform, guide and spur further action by Governments, river basin organizations and international and non-governmental organizations to improve the status of transboundary waters and related ecosystems.

The Second Assessment has been prepared upon request by the Sixth “Environment for Europe”

Ministerial Conference as an input for the Seventh Ministerial Conference. It is the product of a collective effort by Parties and non-Parties to the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, including countries outside the UNECE region, and more than 250 experts were involved in its preparation and contributed data and information.

The Second Assessment, its findings and recommendations will be presented and discussed in a side event on Thursday 22 September from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. in room A7.

More information at:

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

Useful tips for Conference participants

Prepare in advance: Visit the conference website www.efe.kz for up-to-date information on the conference logistics. Relevant information can also be found in the [Information Note](#) on Conference Logistics, prepared by UNECE in cooperation with Kazakhstan Conference secretariat. Note the contact information for the host secretariat and UNECE focal points: feel free to contact them if you have any questions. Keep the key phone numbers (visa, transport, medical services) at hand for any urgent issue.

Feel welcome in Astana: Conference participants arriving to Astana airport from 19 to 21 September will be met at the airport. Please look around for staff with special Conference signs and welcome desk. More info [here](#)

If you are supposed to obtain visa on arrival, print and fill out visa [application](#) to save time on arrival, do not forget to take 2 passport-size photos with you.

Do not lose your immigration form, filled on arrival – you will be asked to provide it at departure. If you plan to stay in Kazakhstan for more than 5 days, get this form [stamped](#) by the police at the Conference venue.

Do not miss your conference bus: check schedule of conference buses on the website and upon arrival to your hotel, be on time for the departure of your bus.

Make the registration quick and smooth: bring your passport to receive a conference badge, arrive well in advance before the first opening session. The registration desk will be open in the Palace of Independence from 8:00 every day on 19 – 23 September. All conference participants and visitors to side-events and exhibition can pick up their badges even before the official opening of the Conference.

Keep the Conference green: bring your laptop and use it for reading conference [documents](#). Print only those materials that are really necessary for you.

Leave a green memory of the Conference in Astana: take part in the [tree-planting action](#) on 21 September.

Get the most out of the Conference agenda and beyond: check the [schedule](#) of side-events, visit the exhibition and [business fair](#). Take a look at the [map](#) of the Palace of Independence.

Enjoy your stay in Astana:

Take part in cultural events and sightseeing tours, offered by the host country. Ask for more information at the special counter at the Conference venue.

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

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

For enquiries, please contact:

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THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN