



**Ministerial Conference**  
**on**  
**Enhancing Environmental co-operation**  
**between the EU and the Central Asian Countries**

5-6 April 2006, Almaty, Kazakhstan

***CONCLUSIONS***

***(Draft) CONCEPT PAPER***

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**of the  
Ministerial Conference  
on  
Enhancing Environmental co-operation  
between the EU and the Central Asian Countries**

5-6 April 2006, Almaty, Kazakhstan

Upon invitation from the European Commission to this Ministerial Conference kindly hosted by the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan in Almaty on 6 April 2005, representatives of the Governments of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan met with representatives of the European Commission in charge of Environment, External Relations and EuropeAid (EC Cooperation office) and in the presence of representatives of the EU Member States, International Financing Institutions and NGOs.

With a view to contributing to the improvement of the sustainable use and management of natural resources in Central Asia, including biodiversity conservation, nature protection, and measures against land degradation, to reduce effects of climate change, and to increase environmental cooperation and awareness, the representatives of the Central Asian States and the EU agreed that the areas for environmental cooperation with the EC in the period 2007-2013 would be:

- the regional aspects of the EU Water Initiative, transboundary waters and the Caspian Sea;
- the improved and sustainable management of forests and forestry resources, including mountainous and other natural areas, and indicative actions under the Forest Law Enforcement and Governance Ministerial process;
- the introduction and further implementation of the Kyoto Protocol mechanisms at regional level;
- the environmental awareness in the region through cooperation with civil society and private sector at regional and sub-regional level.

The representatives of the Central Asian States and the EU noted that the above priorities for Central Asia are in line with the policy orientations discussed for the Regional Strategy-East 2007-2013 and Indicative Programme (2007-2010) under the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI). In this way, Central Asian States will be anchored in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Common Spaces with Russia and so enable their participation in the ENPI regional programmes. Additionally the representatives of the Central Asian States and the EU agreed that these priorities should be reflected in the European Commission's Strategy for Central Asia 2007-2013, its indicative programme (2007-2010), as well as the relevant financial assistance instruments to contribute to its implementation.

The representatives of the Central Asian States and the EU agreed that the focus in the initial phase of this enhanced EU environmental cooperation with Central Asia will be on water issues, reflecting the importance of water in the Central Asia Initiative for Sustainable Development.

In this framework the representatives of the Central Asian States and the EU agreed on their mutual interest for:

- making progress towards the achievement of Millennium Development Goals for water in Central Asia, through sustainable management of water basins within an ecosystem approach, sound water use, improved access to drinking water and development of sanitation infrastructure, reinforced coordination mechanisms and increased resources of the civil sector and organisations in charge of water management and environmental protection;
- supporting the implementation of harmonised policies in the frame of the European Water Initiative (EUWI) towards a progressive convergence of their respective water related legislations with the EU regulatory framework on water;
- enhancing the mobilisation of the necessary resources and attraction of funding for new infrastructures;
- launching National Policy Dialogues as a major instrument with the EUWI and implementing specially designed activities;
- supporting improved monitoring capacities for water issues.

The representatives of the Central Asian States and the EU stressed the need for an integrated approach to water resources management, including transboundary river management and maintenance of mountainous ecosystems. Moreover, they agreed on the importance of political will and commitment in order to increase regional co-operation among the Central Asian States in the water sector for achieving sustainable economic and social development as well as its contribution to peace, stability and prosperity in the region. Attention was also drawn to issues of common concern such as harmonisation of environmental legislation, more specifically on water and climate change, and contribution of civil and private sector in water management and environmental protection.

In this perspective, it has been agreed to set up an EU-Central Asia Joint Expert Working Group, as the co-ordination and information mechanism with the EECCA component of the EUWI, to develop and strengthen co-operation on water issues along the lines outlined in the attached concept paper.

The Conference participants took note of the following issues:

- Aral Sea problems
- Mountainous areas and deterioration of glaciers

Finally, the representatives of the Central Asian States and the EU agreed that enhanced environmental cooperation would constitute an important component of the EU - Central Asia Regional political dialogue.

**Draft**  
**CONCEPT PAPER**

**Ministerial Conference**

**on**

**Environmental Co-operation between the EU,  
and countries of Central Asia**

Upon invitation from the European Commission to this Ministerial Conference kindly hosted by the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan in Almaty, 6 April 2006, representatives of the Governments of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan met with representatives of the European Commission in charge of Environment, External Relations and EuropeAid in the presence of representatives of EU Member States.

In the frame of the EU enlargement and of the new external policies for Russia and the neighbouring states, Central Asia countries with Russia have become the essential neighbours of the European “Neighbourhood Policy” and “Common Spaces” areas. The changes towards harmonisation and cooperation with the European Union in that part of the world are currently speeding up and are going to impact positively on the relations between Central Asia and the European Union.

With a view to contribute to the improvement of the sustainable use and management of natural resources in Central Asia, including biodiversity conservation, nature protection, and measures against land degradation, to reduced effects of climate change, and to increase environmental cooperation and awareness, the experts agreed that the areas for environmental cooperation with the EC in the period 2007-2013 would be:

- the regional aspects of the EU Water Initiative, and cooperation on regional seas
- the improved and sustainable management of forests and forestry resources, and other natural areas through assistance for regional aspects of the indicative actions under the Forest Law Enforcement and Governance Ministerial process,
- the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol at regional level,
- the environmental awareness in the region through cooperation with civil society and private sector at regional and sub-regional level.

The Conference participants noted that the above priorities for Central Asia are in line with the policy orientations discussed for the Regional Strategy-East 2007-2013 and Indicative Programme (2007-2010)

under the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI ). In this way, Central Asia States will be anchored in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Common Spaces with Russia and so enable their participation in the ENPI regional programmes. Additionally the Conference participants agreed that these priorities should be reflected in the European Commission's Strategy for Central Asia 2007-2013, its indicative programme (2007-2010), as well as the relevant financial assistance instruments to contribute to its implementation.

The initial focus agreed by the Conference participants of this enhanced EU environmental cooperation with Central Asia will be on water issues, reflecting the importance of water in the Central Asia Initiative for Sustainable Development.

The governments of Central Asia Republics have determined in the context of the Central Asia Initiative for Sustainable Development three goals to address the key issues of security, water and environment: to ensure sustainable operation of water basin ecosystems , sound water use and access to drinking water, and reinforce mechanisms for inter sectoral partnership and capacity building to coordinate and strengthen the resources of the civil sector and water management and environmental protection organisations. The EU also launched a Water Initiative at WSSD in Johannesburg in 2002 designed as a contribution to achievement of the millennium development goals (MDGs), for drinking water and sanitation within the context of an integrated approach to water resources management. A strategic partnership with Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) was initiated in the frame of this European Water Initiative (EUWI).

In this context, the experts discussed and confirmed the importance of enhancing environment co-operation between the EU and Central Asian countries, particularly in the frame of the EUWI for EECCA which is aiming at contributing to support policies and identification of projects on the domains of Water Supply and Sanitation and Integrated Water Resources Management; ways to enhance and complement the work done in the EUWI for the CA region were explored. Issues of common interest such as harmonisation of environmental legislation (more specifically on water), climate change, and contribution of civil sector and private sector in water management and environmental protection were also raised

The Conference participants agreed on the following considerations that should allow providing appropriate orientations for future work:

- 1) Enhanced co-operation on water issues between the EU and the Central Asia Countries in the frame of the European Water Initiative will contribute to achieve, by 2015, the Millennium Development

Goals on clean drinking water and good sanitation facilities. Moreover this co-operation is of mutual interest with a view to achieving sustainable economic and social development, thus contributing to peace, stability and prosperity in the Euro-Asian region. This improved co-operation on water and better coordination water policies between the EU, the Central Asian countries are also bound to have a positive effect for an increased mobilisation of investments by national authorities, international donors, including IFIs and private investors.

- 2) National Policy Dialogues constitute a major instrument within the EUWI, including the EUWI-EECCA Component. It is, to a large extent, through the successful implementation of specially designed joint activities facilitating National Policy Dialogues that the vision of the EUWI will come through.
- 3) The donors and international organisations, such as the OECD EAP Task Force, EC, GWP, OECD, OSCE, PPC, UNECE, UNEP, UNDP and WHO, as well as International financial Institutions such as EBRD, World Bank; ADB, KfW in different ways have already facilitated and been actively involved in policy dialogues in the region for many years. Furthermore, the level of bilateral assistance from EU Member States to the region is, generally speaking, fairly limited and water is not a priority for the bilateral assistance offered with only a few exceptions.
- 4) The specific objective of these dialogues should be to initiate specially designed joint activities regarding WSS, Financing and IWRM to improve the regulatory and administrative framework, priority setting and project identification and development capacity in the region through a dialogue that, among others, involve public authorities and representatives of the civic society, thereby contributing to the development of road maps to the water-related MDGs and IWRM targets in the EECCA region.
- 5) In the years ahead, relations between the European Union and the CA countries are likely to steadily increase. This will require to strengthen cooperation both at bilateral and at regional level.
- 6) In this context, and recognising the concrete achievements in regional co-operation and integration with the help of the EU assistance since the early 1990s, in particular through the Tacis regional programmes, the Conference participants acknowledged the importance of further developing the co-operation in the domain of environment, and water in particular, through National Policy Dialogues.

- 7) With the aim of achieving the above objectives, the experts recommend:
- to create a EU Central Asia Joint Expert Working Group in charge of:
    - A. facilitating the establishment of National Policy Dialogues and elaborating a feasible work programme on enhanced cooperation on water supply and sanitation with the region, including support to Water Supply and Sanitation policy reforms;
    - B. enhancing cooperation in the domain of integrated water resources management, notably transboundary river basin management, identifying priorities for joint action
    - C. ensure the setting up of appropriate and realistic frameworks for facilitating the financing of water related infrastructure projects, including for public-private partnership, addressing soft measures (legal, administrative, technical) which can significantly improve implementation of National programmes,
    - D. to ensure the monitoring and implementation of the above-mentioned dialogues and their achievements in the frame of the EUWI
    - E. to consider the establishment of a technical Secretariat, with appropriate funding, who could support the above group in coordination with the EUWI Technical Secretariat
  - to keep the EUWI-EECCA Working Group regularly informed about the progress
- 8) The experts reviewed the EU cooperation and financial assistance for past, ongoing and proposed projects under the EU Regional and Central Asia Co-operation Action Programmes 2002-2006 (Takis) as well as of the priority orientations and prospects for future assistance under the proposed new cooperation instruments for the period 2007-2013: the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) and the Development Cooperation and Economic Cooperation Instrument (DCECI).
- 9) The experts underline the need to review and align, where possible and appropriate, the existing Tacis funded projects under the regional cooperation programmes in line with the objectives of this concept paper.

Finally, the following was agreed:

- to nominate a representative to the joint working group before 31 June 2006;
- to hold a High Level Conference in 2008 to review the progress of the working group and to define further priorities for actions.