

EU – Central Asia Strategy for a New Partnership Platform for Environment and Water Cooperation



The EU-Central Asia Platform for Environment and Water Cooperation The Sixth EU–Central Asia High-Level Conference 24-25 January 2019, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

CONCLUSIONS

Ministers and Heads of Delegations of the Central Asian countries, of the European Union (EU) and of EU Member States responsible for the environment, climate change and water policies met on 24 and 25 January 2019 in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, for the Sixth EU Central Asia High-Level Conference organised under the EU-Central Asia Platform for Environment and Water Cooperation.

Participants:

- welcomed the progress achieved since 2015 by Central Asian countries in the areas of environmental protection, climate change and water management, following the joint conclusions reached at the Fifth EU-Central Asia High Level Conference in Milan and the recommendations developed within the framework of the EU-Central Asia Working Group on Environment and Climate Change;
- welcomed the progress in the process of ratification of the Paris Agreement by Central Asian countries, the publication by UN Water of the Synthesis report towards achieving SDG6 on Water and Sanitation and of the report of the Global High Level Panel on Water and Peace, the conclusions of the High-level International Conference on the International Decade for Action “Water for Sustainable Development” 2018-2028, the outcome of the Summit of the Heads of the States-founders of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea, held on 24 August 2018 in Awaza, Turkmenbashi and the outcome of the London Conference on Environmental Remediation in Central Asia;
- recalled the necessity to continue joined effort to achieve the NDCs agreed on in the framework of the Paris Agreement in order to achieve its the long-term goals;

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- expressed their resolve to continue cooperating closely in the context of the EU Strategy for Central Asia;
- reaffirmed the need to continue high-level dialogue and cooperation between the EU and Central Asian countries to tackle the growing threats to the environment and the serious challenges posed by climate change;
- welcomed the recent EU Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions on Water Diplomacy, which consider water as a tool for peace, and the ongoing constructive dialogue on water and energy issues in Central Asia;
- welcomed the participation of the Central Asian countries in the UNECE Environmental Performance Review Programme and encouraged those countries which have not been reviewed yet in the third cycle of the environmental performance reviews to benefit from this instrument, particularly considering the important role it plays in supporting the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals;
- welcomed the launch of the UN Decade "Water for sustainable development" 2018-2028 and the coordinating role of UNDESA;
- welcomed beginning of the consultation process of the IFAS Executive Committee with the states of region, the UN member states, the UN and its agencies on coordination of the development of a UN Special Programme for Aral Sea Basin;
- reaffirmed that transboundary water cooperation is essential to share water resources and thereby ensure peace and stability, as confirmed at the Eighth Meeting of the Parties to the UNECE Water Convention on 10-12 October 2018 in Astana;
- noted the importance to develop a constructive regional cooperation based on international law, that takes into account interests of all countries in the region and with the broad participation of international organisations;
- welcomed the outcome of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Parties Conference held in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt on 17-30 November 2018, and in particular the "*Sharm el-Sheikh Declaration on Investing in Biodiversity for People and Planet*" adopted at its High-Level segment and agreed to cooperate closely towards the development of an ambitious post-2020 global biodiversity framework;
- look forward to cooperating closely also in the context of the upcoming 4th session of the UN Environmental Assembly of the UN Environment programme which will be held in

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Nairobi, Kenya on 11 - 15 March 2019 and which will focus on Innovative solutions for environmental challenges and sustainable consumption and production.

- in accordance with the General Assembly Resolution of April 12, 2018 «Cooperation between the United Nations and International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea», expressed willingness to cooperate with the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea;
- expressed concern over the aggravating consequences of the desiccation of the Aral Sea, supported the creation of a multi-partner Human Security Trust Fund for the Aral Sea region and called upon donor countries and international organizations to consider opportunities to provide practical contributions to its development;
- reconfirmed their countries' commitment to the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals.

Participants agreed that the EU-CA Platform for Environment and Water Cooperation should continue to cover the following priority areas: environmental governance, circular economy, sustainable consumption and production, climate change (adaptation and mitigation), integrated and water resources management, and reaffirmed their commitment to:

As regards Environmental Governance, Circular Economy and Sustainable Consumption and Production

- reinforce – as part of the existing Working Group - the regional EU-Central Asia policy dialogue on environmental regulation and standards, including also input from experts and civil society;
- consider the possibility, for interested parties, to join and further implement, the relevant global and regional Multilateral Environmental Agreements, including the UNECE conventions and protocols, by aligning their national legislations;
- strengthen policy planning by gradually adopting and carrying out regular strategic environmental assessment of policies, plans and programmes, and environmental impact assessment of projects;
- improve national capacities for environmental monitoring, according to the principles of the Shared Environmental Information System;

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- work together in the areas of circular economy, sustainable waste management and in addressing the issue of plastic waste, as well as on wider issues related to resource efficiency and sustainable consumption and production.

As regards Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation

- work together to implement the Paris Agreement through the realisation of their respective Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to hold the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels;
- promote a better knowledge and joined research of the shared climate change challenges across the region, in order to address regional, national and local issues;
- implement regional and national priority actions on adaptation and mitigation, taking into consideration the transfer of available approaches and technologies and financial and technical assistance from donor countries;
- facilitate organisation of systematic for afforestation and nursery forests in order to reduce the negative impact of the Aral Sea disaster;
- facilitate the development and implementation of projects and initiatives aimed at low-carbon and climate-resilient development;
- provide support in increasing capacity for prevention, reduction and possible management of nature disaster risks in the region;
- support the submission of sound project proposals to the relevant donors and International Financial Institutions to mobilize financing for their implementation.

As regards water resources management

- strengthen the national dialogues on water policy with the support of the EU;
- encourage and support regional, transboundary and international cooperation on IWRM;
- enhance integrated water resources management to address interests of all regional countries and ensure development of water infrastructures resilient to climate change, including water-saving technologies, water supply, sanitation, , and nature-based solutions;

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- facilitate achievement of goals of International Decade for Action “Water for Sustainable Development” 2018-2028;
- prevent emergency water pollution and possible transboundary effects by reducing disaster risks from mining operations, notably tailings facilities;
- promote the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus approach ensuring cooperation among stakeholders;
- strengthen water quality regulation and monitoring, to harmonise water quality classification systems at basin scale, considering all possibilities to align them with good international practices;
- promote further development of water accounting and improved reporting in these field;
- facilitate equitable access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation, especially in rural areas;
- support measures for protection and sustainable use of wetlands, lakes and riparian ecosystems.

As regards *Cross-Cutting Issues*

- consider the opportunities for cooperation in implementation of programme, aimed at improvement of socio-economic and ecological situation in the Basin of the Aral Sea;
- promote measures and policies required to address environment, water and climate challenges by integrating them into the national development strategies and plans, with corresponding adequate resources;
- promote and prioritise the development of environmentally-sustainable, low carbon and resilient infrastructures;
- identify and possibly mobilise sustainable financing from all relevant sources, including through blending mechanisms such as the EU Investment Facility for Central Asia;
- support the initiative of the Republic of Uzbekistan to declare Aral Region a zone for environmental innovations and technologies and establish International Innovation Centre for Aral Sea and a scientific research laboratory as a part of it;

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- improve the general public's environmental awareness and access to information, public participation and access to justice in decision-making in line with national legislation, principle 10 of the Rio Declaration and the Aarhus Convention for the countries concerned;
- empower women in tackling environmental, water-related and climate-change challenges.

Participants also

- welcomed the new programme for Sustainable Environment, Water and Energy Development, which consists of supporting the next phases of the European Union–Central Asia Water, Environment and Climate Change Cooperation (WECOOP), and the Central Asia Energy and Water Development Programme (CAEWDP). The continuation of the "Central Asia Nexus Dialogue Project: Fostering Water, Energy and Food Security Nexus Dialogue and Multi-Sector Investment", as well as the new programme SWITCH – Asia and Central Asia II for Promoting Sustainable Consumption and Production were also welcomed;
- agreed that the new Terms of Reference for the Working Group on Environment and Climate Change (WGECC) will be adopted at its next meeting;
- tasked the WGECC supporting the Platform to prepare the 2019-2021 Action Plan and to monitor its implementation.

Participants expressed gratitude to the Republic of Uzbekistan for its warm hospitality and dedicated support in organising this High-level Conference and decided to meet again in Brussels in 2022 to assess progress in reforming environmental policies and making them operational, and to establish priorities and practical steps for the next period of cooperation.