



# European Union – Central Asia Working Group on Environment and Climate Change

## *Second Meeting of the Coordination Committee*

*10 February 2021, Zoom*

### Minutes

#### ***Opening of the meeting***

Meeting Co-Chairs:

- Mr Andrzej Januszewski, Directorate-General for Environment, European Commission (DG ENV),
- Mr Angiolo Martinelli, Head of the Division of International Environmental Cooperation of the Directorate for Sustainable Growth and Quality of Development, Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea, Italy (IMELS).

Mr Valts Vilnitis, WECOOP Team Leader, opened the meeting and invited all participants to introduce themselves.

Mr Andrzej Januszewski (DG ENV) greeted the participants and highlighted the importance of cooperation between the EU and CA countries. When presenting the challenges in environment and climate change, he also noted that despite the COVID-19 crisis, the WECOOP team managed to move forward with our cooperation. He stressed the importance of the EU Green Deal, which encompasses strategies for all sectors and requires the collaboration of all partners. The future agenda of WGECC should therefore include biodiversity, climate and zero pollution action. The COVID-19 conditions have given us the chance to show that we can move from unsustainable production and consumption towards a green economy and better manage our resources. Finally, he mentioned two important upcoming events, such as COPs of the UN Convention on Biodiversity and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. He invited representatives of the CA countries to participate actively in these global events.

Mr Angiolo Martinelli (IMELS) addressed participants by video, wishing them strengthened cooperation in these difficult times, also by defining the objectives and contents of the next WGECC meeting. He emphasised the importance of promoting multilateral cooperation in the framework of sustainable development and sustainable production and consumption patterns for a green recovery.

Mr Olzhas Agabekov from the Ministry of Environment, Geology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Kazakhstan advised to formulate the issues to be discussed at the forthcoming WGECC meeting and wished participants fruitful work.

Mr Johannes Stenbaek Madsen, Head of Cooperation, EU Delegation to Kazakhstan (EUD Kazakhstan), introduced the meeting agenda.

In his introductory speech, Mr Stenbaek Madsen reminded that the current WGECC Work Programme (adopted one year ago) sets the main objectives of promoting sustainable development and circular economy in the CA countries. Subsequently, two broad areas for cooperation in these fields were specified:

- improvement of the environment, climate and water policies at the national level to approximate them to the EU standards,
- promotion of sound green investments in the relevant sectors to reduce all forms of man-made pollution including carbon dioxide.

The adopted Work Programme is ambitious, covering several sectors and includes activities like capacity building, support in the approximation of national legislation to EU standards, organisation of regional clinic workshops, support of dialogue both among the CA countries and between the CA countries and the EU or particular Member States, through the support of the WECOOP project. Moreover, Mr Madsen recalled the 15 other programmes and projects being currently implemented in Central Asia with the EU support, mobilising a total amount of about EUR 100 million (CAWEP, SWITCH-Asia, Water-Energy-Food NEXUS Dialogue, Disaster Risk Reduction, as well as Environmental Remediation Account for Central Asia focused on the uranium legacy sites in the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan).

As most of the results planned were achieved despite COVID-19 pandemic, Mr Stenbaek Madsen has stressed the positive role of new information technologies which enable remote work at international level and move us towards the digital era.

### ***Review of the work done by WECOOP since the 9th meeting of the WGECC***

Mr Valts Vilnītis, WECOOP Team Leader, presented WECOOP project progress and plans until the end of 2021, informed about available working capacity for the second half of the project and invited the CA countries to formulate their needs to get efficient tailor-made support (the presentation is available at the WECOOP website in English and Russian languages).

### ***Open discussions and Q&A***, moderated by Ms Snejana Popova (EUD Kazakhstan)

Ms Popova (EUD Kazakhstan), as a responsible Project Officer, stressed the flexibility of the WECOOP project and invited countries to formulate their needs, either during the meeting or later, to fully utilise the available capacities of the WECOOP experts.

CA countries expressed their appreciation for the activities carried on so far by the project, conveying their expectations for the project's upcoming phases.

Kazakhstan (Mr Daulet Abilkairov, Ms Yelena Kuanbayeva, IGTIC) expressed appreciation of WECOOP support in the field of Best Available Techniques (BAT) and requested continuation of support in this area.

In particular, they referred to their interest in exchanging experiences with international organisations and experts and organising training and seminars in specific areas like energy, cement, concrete and lime production, non-organic chemistry, and nonferrous materials. They wish to receive assistance to develop technical standards and rules of operation of installations and the development and issuing of environmental permits, trying to avoid the mistakes that EU Countries might have done in the past in the same fields. Moreover, Kazakhstan expressed interest in capacity building (training), digitalisation of environmental agenda, procedures of integrated environmental permitting in the EU countries. Finally, more information on the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism was requested.

Kyrgyzstan (Ms Aizada Kiiazova, SAEPF) informed on the ongoing state administration reform and recommended to discuss directions of cooperation with WECOOP bilaterally after the completion of the said reform. Kyrgyzstan is interested in WECOOP's support to the National Water Agency (drafting legislation, training) and the WECOOP plan to develop Regional Biodiversity Review. Ms Kiiazova informed

about the ongoing definition of the cooperation with the EU, referring that activities related to the environment should be included. Ms Kiiazova suggested to organise a separate meeting to discuss and agree on the further cooperation upon completion of the restructuring of the governmental structure.

Tajikistan (Mr Dilovarsho Dustzoda, Hydromet Agency, Committee on Environmental Protection under the Government of Tajikistan) stated that Tajikistan is interested in WECOOP support for the development of the environmental policy with particular regards to EU standards, including Environmental Code, environmental regulations, monitoring of glaciers and snow coverage, capacity building in adaptation to climate change, sewage treatment, solid waste management, digitalisation. Tajikistan is also interested in receiving support for the cooperation with relevant IFIs.

Mr Dustzoda reminded the importance of addressing climate change adaptation and raising awareness from the regional to the local level. He also stressed the importance of preparing and implementing sound local adaptation plans to promote the social well-being on a local level, and regional stability at the regional level.

Tajikistan then asked for a separate meeting to discuss WECOOP's support in detail.

Turkmenistan (Mr Magtymguly Akmyradov, MFA) expressed appreciation of current WECOOP support and informed that the main issues on which they would require support from WECOOP in the framework of the WGECC are enhancing the legislation on environmental management, improving environmental regulations, air quality monitoring with special attention on the suspended particulate matter – dust concentration in the atmosphere. He also mentioned the importance of addressing the Aral Sea disaster's negative impacts through afforestation and sustainable wetland management.

Uzbekistan was not present due to technical reasons (poor internet connection).

***The 10<sup>th</sup> meeting of the WGECC (2021, Almaty): possible focus. Open discussions***, moderated by Ms Alessandra Fidanza, Senior Expert – Sogesid spa Technical Assistance Unit, Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea, Italy

Ms Alessandra Fidanza presented the Background paper, shared with the meeting participants before the event to facilitate the discussion on the topics for the 10<sup>th</sup> meeting of the WGECC.

Based on the decision taken during the first meeting of the Coordination Committee (WGCC) on 15 June 2020, the 10<sup>th</sup> meeting of the WGECC should focus on “Addressing a green recovery”. Having considered the situation both in the European Union and in Central Asia, she suggested to build the discussion of the 10<sup>th</sup> meeting of the WGECC around “**The Green Recovery: new opportunities for cooperation**” around the following **four items**:

1. **Biological diversity**: EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030; the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on biodiversity; biodiversity for green recovery; an expert overview on the current state of biodiversity in Central Asia; common position for COP15 CBD;
2. **Climate change**: EU 2030 Climate target plan and European Climate Law; social aspects of climate change; ICAT toolbox; common position for COP26 UNFCCC;
3. **Zero Pollution ambition for air, water and soil**: decoupling economic growth from the increase of pollution;
4. **Toolbox for sustainable recovery**: investments in cleaner air and renewable energy.

CA countries' representatives were then invited to express their opinions and preferences about the proposed topics and to highlight the points they would like to focus on more, in the framework of the structure proposed.

Kazakhstan (Mr Daulet Abilkairov, IGTIC) has reconfirmed its willingness and ability to organise the 10<sup>th</sup> meeting of the WGECC in Almaty, preferably off-line / face-to-face. Kazakhstan also proposed to upgrade the level of country representatives in WGECC to Ministers of environment. Finally, supporting all the 4

items for discussion, Kazakhstan proposed to add to the WGECC agenda several new issues, especially Carbon Border Adjustment mechanism, digitalisation in environmental sector, environmental taxation and transboundary environmental risks.

Kyrgyzstan (Ms Aizada Kiiazova, SAEPF) expressed support to the four items for the next WGECC discussion and mentioned as priorities: biodiversity, the 10YFP initiative, and climate (with a focus on NAPs and the assessment of the cost of inaction).

Tajikistan (Mr Dilovarsho Dustzoda, Hydromet Agency) expressed support to the four items for the 10<sup>th</sup> WGECC agenda. He informed that there are already round tables on CBD, of which he is Member, but there is not a significant engagement of Central Asian countries in them. Therefore, he stressed the importance of participating in the construction of a position for the CBD's COP and strengthening the regional cooperation for common regional positions at COPs and other high-level international events. Mr Turakul Murodov (Committee for Environmental Protection) proposed to conduct separate meetings between countries and WECOOP to discuss country positions and suggestions before the 10<sup>th</sup> meeting of WGECC more in detail.

Turkmenistan (Mr Magtymguly Akmyradov, MFA) expressed support to the four items for the 10<sup>th</sup> WGECC and recalled the importance of regional cooperation and the formulation of common regional positions at COPs and other high-level international conferences. In this respect, he proposed that WECOOP would assist countries in the development of common positions. Mr Akmyradov also mentioned that it would be important to keep WGECC at a working level and formulate common positions before organising high-level events.

Uzbekistan (Mr Bobur Makhmudov, Department of International Cooperation and Projects, State Committee for Ecology and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Uzbekistan) confirmed (in writing) their support to the four items for the 10<sup>th</sup> WGECC discussion and supported the proposal of strengthening the regional cooperation and formulating common regional positions at COPs and other high-level international conferences.

Ms Fidanza then requested the audience to vote in favour of holding the 10<sup>th</sup> WGECC as a face-to-face meeting, even if this would mean organising it only when the worldwide travel restrictions are lifted. The Committee unanimously agreed with this proposal.

### ***Summary of the outcomes and closing remarks***

#### DG ENV (Mr Andrzej Januszewski)

The results achieved by WECOOP project are highly appreciated. The thematic items proposed for the 10<sup>th</sup> meeting of WGECC are entirely in line with the relevant EU policies on environment, climate and water, and refer to the overarching concept of Green Deal. DG ENV will continue its support to joint activities on the bilateral level with the CA countries and support regional cooperation.

#### DG CLIMA (Ms Stine Rasmussen)

Ms Rasmussen expressed satisfaction that climate is at the top of the agenda in all CA countries and stressed the importance of supporting renewable energy and energy efficiency and investing in future-proof technologies in order to avoid stranded assets.

#### Mr Valts Vilnītis, WECOOP Team Leader

Mr Vilnītis remarked that the current contribution of WECOOP is appreciated and all CA countries are interested in continuing cooperation with WECOOP. He also recalled that all four areas proposed for the 10<sup>th</sup> WGECC meeting are accepted by all CA countries (of which biodiversity and climate are priorities), that parallel roundtables on particular topics might be organised during the WGECC meeting. He added that the 10<sup>th</sup> WGECC should be scheduled in Almaty, Kazakhstan, preferably as a face-to-face meeting,

even if the date should have to be postponed. He recalled that WECOOP team is open to any idea raised by the CA countries.

Ms Alessandra Fidanza

Ms Fidanza summarised the meeting outcomes, recalling the main relevant topics cited by each Central Asian country, and thanking participants for having enriched the discussion on the structure of the 10<sup>th</sup> WGECC with concrete connections to the real needs of Central Asia.

She recalled that all participants accepted the proposal to hold the 10<sup>th</sup> WGECC as a face-to-face meeting, with a full half-day dedicated to each of the four main focus areas agreed upon. She then informed participants that the meeting minutes and draft agenda for the 10<sup>th</sup> WGECC meeting will soon be circulated for comments by participants.

Mr Johannes Stenbaek Madsen then expressed thanks to all for active participation and closed the meeting.