

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

10th Meeting | 4-5 October 2021 | Online

Summary by the Co-Chairs

More than ninety participants from five Central Asian (CA) States, European Union Institutions and Member States, international and regional organisations, international financial institutions and civil society, attended the 10th Meeting of the EU-CA Working Group on Environment and Climate Change (WGECC), co-chaired by the European Commission, Italian Ministry of Ecological Transition, and the Ministry of Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The Meeting, dedicated to discussing opportunities for a green recovery, focused on the priority areas of biological diversity, climate change, decoupling of economic growth from the increase of pollution and sustainable recovery.

During the 2 day meeting, Delegates could discuss progress and achievements in EU-CA regional cooperation and EU and CA policies in environment and climate change since the 9th Meeting of the WGECC. The recent developments under the new European Green Deal umbrella were presented, and special attention was paid to the upcoming international events (UN FCCC COP 26 and UN CBD COP 15).

H.E. Ambassador Terhi Hakala (EU Special Representative for Central Asia), Mr Akhmetzhan Primkulov (Vice Minister, Ministry of Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Kazakhstan), Ms Astrid Schomaker (Director, Global Sustainable Development, Directorate-General for Environment, European Commission) and Mr Oliviero Montanaro (Director General, Italian Ministry of Ecological Transition) delivered their welcome addresses and opened the Meeting.

All four speakers appreciated the increasing importance and successful activities of the EU-CA WGECC, stressed the need for continuing cooperation between the EU and Central Asia countries and highlighted that the regional approach brings the best results.

Ambassador Terhi Hakala welcomed participants, presented a summary of the EU climate ambitions and the EU Green Deal, stressed the importance of international cooperation in mitigation and adaptation, and expressed the EU's willingness to share its experience with the CA countries.

Vice Minister **Akhmetzhan Primkulov** informed on recent developments of environmental and climate policies of the Republic of Kazakhstan and told about the country's ambition to achieve carbon neutrality by 2060. Kazakhstan understands decarbonisation as a complex socio-economic issue, and relevant instruments have been introduced (new Environmental Code) or are under preparation (Doctrine to achieve carbon neutrality by 2060). He remarked the need to pay special attention to green financing and green technologies.

Ms Astrid Schomaker (European Commission) mentioned the recent developments in implementing the new European Green Deal. This is a "paradigm shift", as business as usual is not sufficient to achieve climate and environmental ambitions. Green transition is crucial globally, and extended experience sharing is therefore necessary. Upcoming UNFCCC COP 26 and UN CBD COP 15 are

important milestones that should speed up and intensify international efforts to stop climate change and halt biodiversity loss.

Mr Oliviero Montanaro (Italian Ministry of Ecological Transition) reminded the role of Italy since the establishment of the EU-CA WGECC, stressing the importance of sharing knowledge and experience. He also referred how Italy has put the ecological transition at the centre of its efforts to enhance prosperity and sustainability in the interest of future generations. He then recalled the importance of international dialogue on a green and ecological transition that Italy is promoting this year by chairing the G20 and the UK-Italy Presidency Partnership for COP26.

Ms Astrid Schomaker (DG for Environment, European Commission) delivered her **Keynote speech on Opportunities and challenges for a green recovery**. She stressed that the Green Deal is on top of other EU policies, and its implementation should turn challenges into opportunities. Covid-19 pandemic exposed the world's vulnerability but at the same time strengthened our determination to work towards green transition. The comprehensive recovery package means EUR 240 billion of additional investments, which should lead to new job creation, increased resilience of Europe and its reduced dependence on external supplies of energy, fuels and raw materials.

Under the umbrella of the Green Deal, several specialised policies were developed like the Zero Emission Action Plan, the New European Bauhaus, the Farm-to-Fork Strategy, and so on. The EU is willing and able to share its experience in green transition with all countries, especially with the CA countries that have strategic geographical positions and are vulnerable to adverse climate and environmental changes.

The point of view of Central Asia: possible strategies for a green recovery in CA and opportunities for cooperation

Mr Ruslan Muratov (Senior Manager, Green Technologies Department, International Centre for Green Technologies and Investment Projects, Republic of Kazakhstan) stressed the importance of green technologies (primarily digital technologies) in the process of green transition of Kazakhstan and informed about recent activities like the Green Bridge Initiative, support to start-ups implementing green technologies or planned establishment of the Central Asian BAT Bureau. Mr Muratov emphasised the significance of international cooperation and the upcoming UN FCCC COP 26.

Ms Veronika Isaeva (Head of Administration of Industrial Ecology, State Committee on Environment and Climate of the Kyrgyz Republic) informed on the Kyrgyz NDCs, and the ambition of achieving carbon neutrality by 2050 through the development of a carbon-free economy (80% electricity from hydro). Under the conditional target, GHG emission reduction could be between 15 and 43%. Besides other environmental problems (air, water, waste), adaptation to the impacts of climate change is a national priority.

Mr Sangin Samiev (Head of the Environmental Monitoring Department of the Agency for Hydrometeorology of the Republic of Tajikistan) informed that climate change and adaptation measures are national priorities. The country plans further development of hydro-energy potential and extended planting of trees.

Mr Magtymguly Akmyradov (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan) informed about Turkmenistan's recent measures, such as the new national climate strategy or new environmental policy until 2040, updated legislation and concrete actions (planting 30 million trees). The lack of water resources and desertification are considered national priorities. He remarked the Aral Sea emergency, and the need for further support to remediation measures is needed. Mr Akmyradov called for the

elaboration of a joint regional strategy for strengthened regional cooperation, taking into account desertification. Finally, he expressed appreciation for the collaboration with the EU and the support by WECOOP in the field of drafting new legislation.

Mr Abdurashid Sadikov (Head of Main Department on Biodiversity and Protected Areas, State Committee for Ecology and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Uzbekistan) also considers the Aral Sea a hot issue, which requires further support to remediation measures. He supported the proposal that extended regional cooperation should lead to a joint regional strategy. Cooperation with the EU is appreciated.

SESSION 1 (Taking stock – Update on progress since the 9th Meeting of the WGECC and prospects for future developments), moderated by **Mr Johannes Stenbaek Madsen** (Head of Cooperation, EU Delegation to Kazakhstan) and **Ms Snejana Popova** (Project Officer, EU Delegation to Kazakhstan) hosted an overview of the recent EU policy developments on environment, climate action and international priorities, including the EU-CA regional cooperation. The speakers in the session presented the recent results in the CA region, referred to the implementation of the Work Programme of the WGECC, and informed on current and future developments in environmental governance, climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Mr Andrzej Januszewski (Desk Officer, Unit ENV F2 - Bilateral & Regional Environmental Cooperation, DG Environment, European Commission) presented the developments of strategies, policies and plans under the umbrella of the Green Deal, focusing on the Circular Economy Action Plan, Forest Strategy for 2030 and Chemicals Strategy.

Ms Stine Rasmussen (Policy Officer of Unit CLIMA A1, DG Climate Action, European Commission) presented the increased EU's ambition to full carbon neutrality until 2050 and to reduce GHG emissions by 55% by 2030. A recent "Fit for 55" package was introduced, which includes 14 draft legal acts. She also referred on the European Climate Law.

Mr Valts Vilnītis (WECOOP Team Leader) presented the progress of the WECOOP project since the 9th WGECC meeting. He reported that, regardless of the problems with Covid-19 pandemic, most of the tasks have been fulfilled (except those for which physical international travel is essential). He informed how the project continued to provide logistical support to the WGECC and technical assistance to the CA countries, including capacity building and tailor-made support. He referred that WECOOP provided support to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan while possible support for Tajikistan is still to be defined. A quarter of the human resources capacity of the project is still available.

Mr Alexander Belokurov (UNECE) presented the recent developments of the EUWI National Policy Dialogues on Integrated Water Resources Management and Water Supply and Sanitation. He stressed the importance of regional cooperation both with and outside the CA region and informed on CA country-specific priorities.

Mr Sulton Rahimzoda (Chairman of EC IFAS) presented to the audience Possible Strategies and Opportunities for Green Recovery in Central Asia, highlighting the crucial role of water in the CA region. He remarked how the regional cooperation supports the building of mutual trust and called for strengthened regional cooperation to include issues like an efficient use of water, modernisation of water-related infrastructure and extended use of renewables.

Ms Zinaida Fadeeva (Team Leader of the SWITCH-Asia SCP Facility) introduced the SWITCH-Asia policy advice and grant projects in Central Asia. She voiced more support to sustainable production and

consumption as a priority (e.g., drafting national action plans) and informed that grant projects are mainly focused on SMEs.

Mr Ralf Ernst (Deputy Co-Ordinator/Head, Environmental Activities OSCE) illustrated OSCE's work on environment and security in Central Asia and informed on responses to security risks from climate change: within the CA region, 11 climate security hot spots were identified for which adaptation strategies and implementation plans should be prepared. The promotion of sustainable connectivity or energy security is another priority of OSCE.

Delegations of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan informed the audience on recent developments in environmental governance, including solid waste management and climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Mr Olzhas Agabekov (Director, Climate Policy and Green Technologies Department, Ministry of Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Kazakhstan) pointed out that the transition to a green economy in Kazakhstan is in progress, and the majority of policy, normative and economic instruments are in place. The new Environmental Code came into force in July 2021. Steps are now being undertaken to introduce Best Available Techniques (BATs) in key industries. The achievement of carbon neutrality by 2060 was announced, and a gradual phaseout of coal-fired power plants is planned.

Ms Veronika Isaeva (Head of Administration of Industrial Ecology, State Committee on Environment and Climate of the Kyrgyz Republic) informed that the President's new Decree on environmental safety and climate was issued in 2021. She also added that Kyrgyzstan is developing their updated NDC and preparing for the 4th national communication. In the field of biodiversity, the protection of mountain forests and snow leopards is considered a priority.

Mr Sangin Samiev (Head of the Environmental Monitoring Department of the Agency for Hydrometeorology of the Republic of Tajikistan) informed that the country is highly vulnerable to climate change (damage estimated at 4.8% of GDP) adaptation is the top priority. Specific measures are being implemented (afforestation, introduction of renewables or new transport strategy).

Mr Serdar Eyeberenov (Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection of Turkmenistan) stated that his country is considered highly vulnerable and informed about current measures to tackle climate change (2019 Climate Strategy, Afforestation Plan, new legal acts on renewables or energy efficiency). Support by WECOOP in drafting legislation is appreciated and requested to be continued.

Mr Abdurashid Sadykov (International Cooperation and Projects, State Committee for Ecology and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Uzbekistan) informed on new developments, including the start of green recovery activities and newly established protected areas, support to renewable energy, eco-tourism and awareness-raising. Nature-based measures are considered a priority.

Mr Ysmayil Dairov (Executive Director, Regional Mountain Centre of Central Asia) informed about the progress of elaborating a draft regional Central Asia statement for COP26.

Question on Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) has been raised.

SESSION 2 (Biological Diversity), moderated by **Mr Andrzej Januszewski** (Desk Officer, Unit ENV F2 - Bilateral & Regional Environmental Cooperation, DG Environment, European Commission), stressed the need to foster the efforts on protecting biodiversity, in particular with a view to CBD COP 15 in China, which is expected to result in ambitious commitments and action.

Mr Januszewski then presented the new EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, an essential part of the Green Deal concept. Considering the global biodiversity crisis (especially extinction of species), the Strategy includes 4 elements: Protection, Restoration, Transformative Change, Global Action.

Mr Thierry Lucas (Programme Management Officer on Ecosystems and Biodiversity, UN Environment Programme (UNEP)) informed on severe impacts of the Covid 19 pandemic on biodiversity in certain parts of the world. He called for a substantial increase of nature positive financing, especially during the UN Decade for Ecosystem Restoration 2021 – 2030.

Mr Sorosh Poya Faryabi (Conservation and Science Manager of Wildlife Conservation Society, Afghanistan) informed on mission and activities of the World Conservation Society and presented findings on biodiversity degradation in the CA region, drivers of that degradation and recommended strategic approaches.

Ms Natalia Golovko (UNECE EPR team) introduced the concept of Environmental Performance Reviews (EPRs), informed in detail on the structure of EPR chapter on biodiversity and presented findings and recommendations from EPRs of CA countries.

Ms Anna Kirilenko (WECOOP team) presented an analytical overview on the priorities for preserving biodiversity and key ecosystems in Central Asia. Common priorities include strategies, legislation, capacity building, governance, migratory species, genetic resources, biodiversity and health issues.

Mr Gatis Eriņš (WECOOP team) presented CA's Biodiversity map demo tool, which is available at the WECOOP website. As the tool is open, participants were invited to send newly emerging information to the WECOOP team.

Ms Alessandra Fidanza (Senior Expert, International Cooperation, Sogesid Spa–Italian Ministry of Ecological Transition) chaired the **SESSION 3 (Climate change: policies and implementation)**, that reverted around the current EU policies as well as factual information on relevant international or regional activities.

Mr Niels Schuster (Coordinator for inter-institutional Relations – Climate law and Green Deal legislation, Unit CLIMA DG 01, Directorate-General for Climate Action, European Commission) introduced the EU 2030 Climate target plan and European Climate Law and informed on the EU climate targets as laid down in the European Climate Law and the 2030 Climate Target Plan. Moreover, information on the Fit for 55 package, the Climate Pact, the newly established EEA Scientific Advisory Board and the Indicative GHG Budget was presented. He remarked that the role of carbon sinks and of adaptation should be strengthened. The 2040 target will be announced in 2024.

Ms Natalia Golovko (UNECE EPR team) introduced the concept of Environmental Performance Reviews, informed in detail on the structure of EPR chapter on climate change and presented findings and recommendations from EPRs of CA countries, highlighting some common issues among CA reviewed Countries.

Mr Henning Wuester (Director, ICAT) presented the Initiative for Climate Action Transparency (ICAT), financed by Germany, Italy and others. He reported on the mission and activities of ICAT. He presented ICAT's primary tools, including policy assessment guides for developing evidence-based policies or tools for NDC tracking, calling for CA to take advantage of this set of instruments now available through the upcoming regional hub for Central Asia.

Mr Zafar Makhmudov (Executive Director, CAREC) introduced the Regional Climate Action Transparency Hub (ReCATH) in Central Asia, which will start operations in November 2021. He recalled

some outcomes of the Central Asia Climate Change Conference in July 2021 in Dushanbe, where ICAT referred to its activities and perspectives.

Mr Marco Beroš (European Investment Bank) presented concrete case studies in Eastern Europe and Asia on climate adaptation and disaster prevention financing. The projects presented focused on flood protection infrastructure and technical assistance (flood management plans).

Mr Malte Maass (Asian Development Bank) presented the Water Pillar as a part of Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) activities. The Water Pillar is based on resilient systems, sustainable water services and a holistic approach. ADB expects to spend EUR 80 billion in this field up to 2030.

Mr Pasquale De Micco (Economic and legal analysis of indirect taxation, Sector TAXUD C2.001, DG for Taxation and Customs Union, European Commission) explained the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), which is compliant with the WTO rules. Its purpose is to create a level-playing field for EU producers subject to EU carbon pricing. The CBAM foresees an import levy on EU imports of electricity, cement, aluminium, fertilizer and iron and steel products, depending on the emission content of production and the difference between the EU ETS price and any carbon price paid in the production country. The transition period is foreseen to be 2023 – 2025.

Questions from the audience included the EU Climate package, the opportunities for regional approaches to EPR recommendations, interest of IFIs in water-related projects, especially in the Aral Sea area, and energy security.

SESSION 4 (Zero Pollution ambition for air, water and soil), moderated by **Ms Snejana Popova** (Project Officer, EU Delegation to Kazakhstan), was focused on decoupling economic growth from the increase of pollution.

Mr Michael Klinkenberg (DG Environment, European Commission) presented the recent EU Zero Pollution Action Plan, prepared under the Green Deal umbrella, which covers air, water and soil pollution, includes 9 flagship initiatives, and sets quantified targets together with compliance deadlines. It also sets a hierarchy of action on pollution (prevention – minimisation and control – elimination and remediation). Specific attention is paid to the impacts of pollution on human health. An increased role is given to innovations, and digital solutions are emphasised.

Ms Anastasiya Atyaksheva (Senior expert, International Green Technologies and Investment Projects Centre, Kazakhstan) presented evolutionary development of best available techniques (BAT) in Kazakhstan from the first steps to the proposed establishment of the Central Asian BAT Bureau.

Mr Vladislav Bizek (WECOOP team) presented essential information on Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS), tackling a brief description of leading technologies, practical applications and related EU legislation.

SESSION 5 (Next steps and future developments) was chaired by Mr Andrzej Januszewski (DG Environment, European Commission).

Mr Januszewski presented **proposed activities of the EU-CA WGECC in 2022** to continue the implementation of the outcomes of the 6th EU-CA High Level Conference on Environment and Water Cooperation (Tashkent 2019) in environmental governance, circular economy, sustainable consumption and production, climate change adaptation and mitigation, water resources management and cross-cutting issues, including biodiversity. Within the EU Green Deal framework, the EU-CA WGECC will also consider recently launched EU flagship initiatives, which might interest

Central Asian Countries, namely the Zero Pollution Action Plan, Blue Economy, EU Forest Strategy for 2030 or the New European Bauhaus. WGECC will also consider the upcoming 8th Environment Action Programme, guiding European environmental policy until 2030. In addition, there are also emerging issues with particular importance for Central Asia like cleaning the energy sector (including mining of coal, oil and gas) and transport systems, reducing methane emissions from the gas and oil sectors or working with nature to become more resilient to climate change.

The WGECC will be open to supporting the liaising with other ongoing existing initiatives and multilateral processes (EU, particular Member States, UN Agencies, IFIs, etc.) involving Central Asia, such as the UNECE EPR, UNECE Environment for Europe process, Regional TEIs for Central Asia, GCF and other IFIs Regional Programmes in Central Asia or regional initiatives of single EU Member States. The WGECC supports the further discussion of the recommendations of the UNECE Environmental Performance Reviews carried out in CA Countries, which represent a source of concrete elements to which future projects or activities could refer.

Mr Valts Vilnītis (WECOOP Team Leader) presented the draft WECOOP Work Plan for 2021 – 2022, which includes but is not limited to the organisation of the EU-CA High-Level Conference (between May and September 2022, Brussels or elsewhere in the EU) and of the 11th Meeting of the WGECC (EU), 3 regional clinic workshops (sustainable urban mobility plans, green hydrogen, waste to energy – biogas), participation in Green Business School), study tour to the Czech Republic focused on industrial pollution and BAT, contest among Central Asian journalists, and regular production of the WECOOP Bulletin. Tailor-made support to particular CA countries will continue following specific requests based on their actual needs.

As a result of discussions at this WGECC meeting, two new themes may be considered by the WECOOP project: water quality assessment at the regional level and nature-based solutions to environmental problems. Countries were invited to come up with additional ideas.

Comments and/or questions from the audience included water quality monitoring, the strategy of transition to a green economy, problems of the Aral Sea, waste management or biodiversity. All participants called for the extension of the regional approach.

In general, the activities of the WECOOP project were appreciated by representatives of both CA countries and organisations/projects without any criticism. In particular, participants expressed satisfaction with how this WGECC was organised.

Summary of the outcomes and closing remarks were presented by **Mr Andrzej Januszewski** (DG, European Commission), **Ms Alessandra Fidanza** (Senior Expert, International Cooperation, Sogesid Spa–Italian Ministry of Ecological Transition) and **Ms Ainur Kopbaeva** (Ministry of Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Kazakhstan).

Mr Andrzej Januszewski appreciated the high quality of presentations and interventions. He expressed his opinion that WECOOP will continue to be a "point-of-reference" between the EU and the CA countries in the fields of environment and climate.

Ms Ainur Kopbaeva expressed thanks to the EU Delegation to Kazakhstan and the WECOOP project for organisation of the WGECC meeting and stated that the shared experience from the EU may help Kazakhstan to achieve its ambitious goals in the fields of climate and the environment.

Ms Alessandra Fidanza also appreciated the high quality of presentations and the spirit of open sharing of views between the EU and the CA countries. She recalled the importance of the WGECC to strengthen the trust between EU and CA, remembered the suggestions from CA Countries for new

regional activities and welcomed the launch of the Regional Climate Action Transparency Hub. She also recalled the opening remarks of the Director-General of the Italian Ministry of Ecological Transition, who confirmed the Italian support to the fruitful work of WGECC.

After the final salutations, Ms Alessandra Fianza declared the Meeting closed.