

Award Ceremony to recognize the winners and participants of the EU Contest “Restoring biodiversity – our shared responsibility”

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Welcome Speech by

Mr Johannes Stenbaek Madsen, Head of Cooperation of the EU Delegation to Kazakhstan

Dear Contestants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- I am very pleased and honored to welcome you on behalf of the EU Delegation to Kazakhstan to this Award Ceremony. Today, we will pay tribute to the winners and participants of the media contest “Restoring biodiversity – our shared responsibility”.
- Healthy, stable and biodiverse ecosystems are the foundation of our health and well-being. They help to regulate climate, control extreme events and diseases, as well as provide us with water, food, raw materials and spaces for recreation. Yet, we continue to use our planet’s resources unsustainably. The results are alarming. The COVID-19 pandemic that for over a year now has been disrupting our lives has shown the importance of maintaining the balance between human activities and nature.
- To tackle biodiversity loss, in May 2020, the EU adopted an ambitious plan – **the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030**. Being one of the core parts of the **European Green Deal**, the Biodiversity Strategy addresses the main drivers of biodiversity loss and is a central element of the EU’s economic recovery plan from the coronavirus pandemic, providing business and investment opportunities.
- It sets ambitious EU targets and commitments for 2030 to achieve healthy and resilient ecosystems, for example:
 - Turn at least **30%** of EU’s land and seas into protected areas
 - Restore **degraded ecosystems** and stop any further damage to nature
 - Restore at least **25 000 km** of the EU’s rivers to be free-flowing
 - Reverse the decline of **pollinators**
 - Plant over **3 billion** diverse, biodiversity rich trees, and so on.
- At the United Nations Biodiversity Summit in September last year, representatives of 88 states from all regions and the EU adopted the **Leaders’ Pledge for Nature** and set the goal – **“to reverse biodiversity loss by 2030 for sustainable development”**. This year, the UN has also launched the Decade on Ecosystem Restoration that aims to prevent, halt and reverse the degradation of ecosystems on every continent and in every ocean.
- As you know, in Central Asia, there is one of the 36 global **Biodiversity Hotspots**. It is formed by the two large mountain ranges – Pamir and Tien Shan. At least 20 types of ecosystems are found in these mountains. They are home to the region’s rare and endemic species.
- However, water stress, climate change and the resulting droughts and natural disasters have placed much of the region’s unique biodiversity under a serious threat. We have to understand, that **without ecosystem restoration and biodiversity conservation efforts, ensuring the well-being of 72 million people living in the region and a fair transition to a climate-secure future is impossible**.
- The **European Green Deal** sets the principles for the EU’s commitment to its partner countries in this regard and puts a strong emphasis on supporting the **transition to a circular economy and sustainable consumption and production**.

- Within the framework of its development cooperation, which since 2014 has amounted to **more than EUR 1 billion for Central Asia**, the EU promotes **sustainable economic development and a more rational use of natural resources**. The EU has **15 ongoing regional programmes** covering the sustainable use of water, energy, environment and the water-food-energy nexus for the total amount of **about €100 million**.
- Through projects like WECOOP the EU works together with its Central Asian partner countries to enhance national environmental, climate change and water policies to approximate them to EU standards. Through the cooperation it also promotes informed green investments in the relevant sectors with the ultimate goal of contributing to measurable reductions in man-made pollution.
- Responding to the crisis of biodiversity loss, ecosystem degradation, resource depletion and climate change requires concerted actions of society as a whole. In this regard, **mass media plays an important role in raising awareness, shaping attitudes and bringing change**.

Dear journalists,

- I encourage you to continue researching and reporting on climate, biodiversity and other pressing environmental issues. Do continue to encourage people to make small changes to their daily behavior and inspire them to live more sustainably. We are the Generation Restoration. It's time for us to deliver on existing commitments to restore our nature.
- Before I conclude my speech, I want to thank the organizers, the WECOOP project team, for the initiative to hold this second media contest. Last year, the similar contest on climate change took place. I hope this good tradition will continue. Our colleagues from other EU Delegations in the region who have participated in the evaluation of your materials have already given a very positive feedback about the awareness that these contests raised and the quality of submissions.