

**The Award Ceremony
to recognize the winners and participants of the EU Contest
“Switching to renewable energy sources – our contribution to carbon neutrality”**

6 June 2022

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

Dear Contestants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- I am very 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 **“Switching to renewable energy sources – our contribution to carbon neutrality”**.
- It is notable that this occasion also coincides with **the World Environment Day**, which all of us celebrated just yesterday.
- This contest is already the third organized by our EU-funded WECOOP Project. I am pleased that this tradition continues. The first contest on climate change was organized in 2020. Due to the COVID pandemic, the study tour for the winners of that year had to be postponed, but it will hopefully take place this year.
- Last year, our contest was on biodiversity and ecosystems restoration. The winners were invited and took part in the study tour to the Kyrgyz Republic.
- **I am thankful to the winners of past two years who continue writing and reporting on environmental issues and, I believe, some of them are among us today.**
- This year, we chose another very important topic – renewable energy. And I was happy to learn that **the number of participating journalists was the highest**. The organizers reported 52 journalists had submitted applications.
- As you know, the Central Asian region has abundant potential to develop the renewable energy sector. **It possesses an estimated 5 % of the world’s natural capacity for wind and solar energy capture. This is a very high number.** Yet, with the exception of hydropower, especially in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, the share of renewables in national energy mixes is negligible in all CA countries.
- Considering negative environmental impacts of using fossil fuels, water shortages and other severe challenges caused by the climate change, it is absolutely obvious **the countries of the region urgently need to diversify and switch to sustainable energy sources.**
- In the European Union, renewable energy is considered priority. The share of renewable energy more than doubled between 2004 and 2020 in the EU countries. **Under the European Green Deal, all 27 EU Member States committed to turning the EU into the first climate neutral continent by 2050.** To get there, they pledged to reduce emissions by at least 55 % by 2030, compared to 1990 levels, which requires higher shares of renewable energy and greater energy efficiency.
- The ongoing war in Ukraine presents a serious threat to energy security of the European continent. To address this threat, in May 2022, the **European Commission presented the REPowerEU Plan in response to the hardships and global energy disruption caused by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.** A massive scaling-up and speeding-up of renewable energy in power generation, industry, buildings and transport will accelerate our independence, give a

boost to the green transition, and reduce prices over time. **The Commission proposes to increase the headline 2030 target for renewables from 40% to 45% under the 'Fit for 55' package.**

- In line with the Green Deal and the EU Strategy on Central Asia, the EU is committed to support CA countries in their current energy transition efforts by building upon the region's potential in solar, wind and hydroelectric energy in order to contribute to strengthening the region's energy resilience, helping to meet its climate objectives, and creating jobs and business opportunities.
- Generally, 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 climate change and energy crises 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, sustainable energy, circular economy 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.
- Before I conclude my speech, I want to thank the organizers, the WECOOP project team, for the initiative to hold this third media contest. Our colleagues and experts who have participated in the evaluation of the submitted entries have already given a very positive feedback about the awareness that the contest raised and the quality of submissions.