

**Seventh meeting of the Interagency Coordination Council for
the National Dialogue on Integrated Water Resources Management in Kazakhstan**

14 December 2022, Astana, Sheraton-Astana Hotel

Welcome speech by

Dr Johannes Baur, Head of Cooperation, the EU Delegation to Kazakhstan

**Dear Mr Mukataev,
Dear development partners,
ladies and gentlemen,**

- I am pleased to welcome you on behalf of the EU Delegation to Kazakhstan.
- As you know, the EU has been supporting the National Water Policy Dialogue in Kazakhstan since 2013. A lot of activities have been carried out by our strategic partners UNECE and OECD.
- Since 2019 the NPD process in Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries has been supported through **a regional NPD project as part of the WECOOP programme** which supports the EU-Central Asia Working Group on Environment and Climate Change (WGECC).
- The **EU Strategy on Central Asia** defines **water management and a coordinated approach to environment-related issues as key priorities**. Implementation of this strategy allows our continued partnership to build resilience in the region, taking into account the challenges posed by COVID-19 pandemic and geopolitical realities.
- We continue to implement the **European Green Deal – our new growth strategy** to build back better by investing into environmentally friendly technologies, further promoting circular economy, improving environmental standards and pursuing our aim of becoming climate-neutral by 2050. In October 2022, the European Commission proposed **stronger rules on surface and groundwater pollutants, and treatment of urban wastewater**. We are open to share with you all the experience gained in the EU member states on these issues.
- **Considering that all EU member States and the European Union** are Parties to the Water Convention and the Protocol on Water and Health, and that **the 2021 EU Council conclusions** stressed the importance of these instruments for EU's external action, I would like to support further implementation of these instruments in Kazakhstan and **urge Kazakhstan to accede to the Protocol on Water and Health** as soon as possible.
- Strict adherence to the guiding principle of Integrated Water Resource Management is key in achieving the ambitions of Sustainable Development Goals (including interrelated water and health goals). The EU Member States continue to follow coordinated frameworks for securing good ecological status of their water resources

through the **EU Water Framework Directive** - one of the most important and advanced instruments in the world on the integrated water resources management.

How can we further extend our cooperation in this area?

- **The EU is Kazakhstan's first trade and investment partner** and Kazakhstan is our closest economic and political partner in the region of Central Asia. The **Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EPCA)** brought relations between the EU and Kazakhstan to a new level. It sets a legal framework for possible cooperation in 29 areas, from international and regional security to trade, investment, development of infrastructure as well as **environment, climate change**, human rights, democracy, civil society development and local self-governance.
- We should discuss how develop our cooperation under this agreement. There is potential to enlarge also our **investment cooperation** in the water area for selected infrastructure projects using European expertise.
- *Access to safe water and hygiene is crucial to ensure good public health. It is important to prioritise and scale-up investments in the water sector. The European Union will continue supporting Kazakhstan in water policy development and implementation and mobilising investments to the sector to build back better in the post-pandemic recovery.*
- And of course, **regional cooperation remains** key. At the recent **EU-CA Connectivity Conference in Samarkand** (18 November) we presented the two **Team Europe Initiatives (TEI)**: 1) **Water, Energy and Climate Change** and 2) Digital Connectivity. These new initiatives will be the basis for our future cooperation with Central Asia to achieve the following objectives: (i) to balance needs of competing water uses through strengthened cross-border and regional water management; (ii) to improve safety and operation of critical energy and water infrastructure through strengthened legal and institutional frameworks; (iii) to contribute to climate change adaptation and mitigation by supporting sound management of water resources and critical energy and water infrastructure; (iv) to stop environmental degradation and biodiversity loss through enhanced regional cooperation and EU-CA policy dialogues.
- In addition to our ongoing regional projects such as WECOOP and NEXUS to assist the countries in Central Asia in adopting best approaches to manage their natural resources, including in the water sector, we will have a **new bilateral cooperation facility for Kazakhstan** which – among other topics – can focus on this work. We hope very much to hear today your suggestions for our future cooperation.
- The EU in general can for example offer its expertise in river basin management and in the improvement of water quality which has been a success in the EU through the implementation of the water quality Directive.
- Today's agenda is very rich. We will discuss the water and health issues in the country as well as transboundary issues. We will hear about the developments in the Chu-Talas basin, Pretashkent aquifer (shared by Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan), pollution of the Syrdarya basin. Proposals for the NPD work plan for the year ahead will be also discussed.

In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm the European Union's commitment to continue supporting Kazakhstan in water policy development and implementation and mobilising much needed investments to the sector.

I wish us all a very successful and fruitful meeting.