



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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ENV	757
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COEST	344
UNECE	2

NOTE

from: General Secretariat
to: Delegations
Subject: Outcome of the Seventh "Environment for Europe" Ministerial Conference
(Astana, Kazakhstan, 21-23 September 2011)
- Information from the Presidency

Delegations will find attached an information note from the Presidency on the above topic, which will be dealt with under "other business" at the meeting of the Council (Environment) on 10 October 2011.

**7th "Environment for Europe" (EfE) Ministerial Conference
(Astana, 21- 23 September 2011)****- Information Note from the Presidency -**

The 7th "Environment for Europe" (EfE) Ministerial Conference was held in the capital of Kazakhstan, Astana, from 21 to 23 September 2011. More than 1,500 participants, from governments, the international community, civil society, business and the media discussed the two main themes: *sustainable management of water and water-related ecosystems*; and *greening the economy: mainstreaming the environment into economic development*.

The Conference was the first one to be organised in line with the Reform Plan adopted in 2009, according to which, *inter alia*, within the identified themes of the Conference, there should be a focus on specific needs of the subregions, in order to contribute to better cooperation and more substantive and action-oriented outcomes of the Conference. Interesting and fruitful discussions at the round tables proved that the Conference focused on the most burning issues for the region.

The Conference included plenary sessions with keynote interventions, round-table discussions, as well as several dozen side events. The Conference was opened by the First Deputy Prime Minister of Kazakhstan, and the Kazakh Prime Minister himself invited the participating ministers to a meeting on the third day of the Conference.

The Polish Minister of the Environment, Andrzej Kraszewski, in his capacity of EU rotating presidency, was invited to the joint press conference of the Kazakh Minister of Environment Protection, the Executive Secretary of the UNECE and the Head of the European Environment Agency.

The Presidency organised a meeting with the NGO representatives, which was an opportunity to have an open and intensive exchange between civil society and government representatives from the EU Member States on a range of issues related to the main topics of the Conference, but also the future of the EfE process, as well as sustainable development in a broader context (Rio+20).

The Astana Ministerial Declaration, negotiated in the preparatory process, was adopted at the end of the Conference by acclamation. Ministers of the Environment of the UNECE region confirmed their "commitment to improve environmental protection and to promote sustainable development in the UNECE region" and reaffirmed "the important value of the EfE process as a unique pan-European forum for tackling environmental challenges and promoting broad horizontal environmental cooperation among countries in Europe, North America, the Caucasus and Central Asia".

Among the other outcomes of the Conference, are to be recalled:

- a decision of the Ministers to "establish a regular process of environmental assessment and to develop the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) across the region" (in the Ministerial Declaration, p. 14). This will be developed by the EEA and its partners with a view to helping review and assess the state of the pan-European environment;
- the Astana Water Action, developed by the Chair of the UNECE Water Convention Bureau, with the assistance of the Water Convention Secretariat and a drafting group of representatives nominated by the CEP. The Astana Water Action is a collection of possible actions for improving the status of water and water-related ecosystems through their more sustainable management. In order to make the Astana Water Action more practical and concrete, as well as to increase its political relevance, countries and other actors were invited to voluntarily commit to some specific actions contained in it. A list of 75 specific actions for improving their waters was presented by 20 countries and 4 organizations at the Conference. These actions cover water and ecosystems, water and health, access to water and sanitation, adaptation to climate change and extreme events, transboundary water cooperation, water efficiency and water investments;
- the "Second Assessment of Transboundary Rivers, Lakes and Groundwaters" and "Europe's Environment – An Assessment of Assessments". These reports were elaborated in advance of the Conference in order to give the participants the possibility to discuss in length the findings of the two documents.

The outcomes of the Astana Conference will also serve as a contribution from the UNECE region for the UNCSD Rio+20. In their Declaration, Ministers i.a. agreed "to take the lead in the transition to a green economy and to make a substantive contribution to the discussions on green economy within the context of sustainable development and poverty alleviation at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development to take place in Rio de Janeiro from 4 to 6 June 2012 (Rio+20)". They invited "UNECE to contribute, together with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and relevant international organisations, to the development of the Rio+20 Green Economy outcomes".

The UNECE regional meeting for the preparations of the Rio+20 Conference will take place in Geneva on 1-2 December 2011.

Although no country volunteered yet to host the next EfE Ministerial Conference, the 7th EfE Conference proved that the process is still vital and its future will depend on the effective implementation of the decisions taken. The 2009 reform also allowed to have more focused discussions and outcomes. A review of the process is foreseen in 2013.

On the occasion of the Ministerial Conference, the Government of Kazakhstan presented its Green Bridge Partnership Programme and actively asked for its support. In the opening statement at the plenary of the Conference, the Polish Minister, on behalf of the EU and its Member States, welcomed "the initiative taken by Kazakhstan in presenting the Green Bridge Partnership Programme intended to contribute to the shift towards a green economy that leads to sustainable development by stimulating investments". At the same time, the EU and its Member States recognized "that further work needs to be done in developing this project" and while they appreciated "the bottom-up approach and the underlying objectives that inspire this initiative", they indicated that "there are still key features in this proposal that continue to raise questions , in particular the governance aspects".