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Environment for Europe Bulletin

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**HIGHLIGHTS FOR
WEDNESDAY, 21 SEPTEMBER 2011**

OPENING PLENARY

The Seventh Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe" opened Wednesday 21 September 2011, at the Independence Palace in Astana, Kazakhstan.

Umirzak Shukeyev, First Deputy Prime Minister, Kazakhstan, welcomed participants and introduced the Green Bridge Partnership Programme, a proposed partnership to enhance cooperation among Asia, Europe, and the Pacific and to encourage transfer of clean technology, joint investments, exchange of experiences, and the preservation of common ecosystems. Conference Chair Nurgali Ashim, Minister of Environmental Protection, Kazakhstan, highlighted the main themes of the Conference: sustainable management of water and water-related ecosystems; and greening the economy. Jan Kubiš, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), read a statement by Ban Ki-Moon, United Nations Secretary-General, noting the contributions of the UNECE process as a platform for pan-European cooperation on environment and sustainable development and highlighting the UNECE's work on environmental assessments, institutional mechanisms for cooperation, multilateral environmental agreements, and multi-stakeholder partnerships. Kubiš noted that while significant progress had been achieved in the water sector, progress remains uneven across the UNECE region and water resources are still under great stress. Challenges include poor management practices, overexploitation, unsustainable consumption, inadequate infrastructure investment, and low efficiency in water use. He underscored the importance of information in choosing effective and efficient actions to promote sustainable water management and the green economy and urged participants to establish a regular process of environmental assessments and a shared information system. Kubiš recommended that the Conference consider developing a regional roadmap for greening the economy and a toolbox of best practices to be shared within the region and with other regions.

Sylvie Lemmet, Director, United Nations Environment Programme Division of Technology, Industry and Economics (UNEP/DTIE), introduced a video message by Achim Steiner, Executive Director, UNEP. In his message, Steiner underlined the importance of water resources management for agriculture and food security. He said present levels of freshwater consumption by agriculture would lead to unsustainable demand by 2050. He emphasized that in the transition towards a green economy there is no trade-off between environmental sustainability and economic progress. He further stated that the green economy offers opportunities in the pan-European region for better use of energy resources, for reducing primary energy

demand, and for job creation for young people. He expressed hope that this Conference will contribute shared objectives and perspectives to the Rio+20 conference in 2012.

Delegates adopted the agenda (ECE/ASTANA.CONF/2011/1) without changes. Chair Ashim drew attention to the organization of work of the Conference (ECE/ASTANA.CONF/2011/7).

THE "ENVIRONMENT FOR EUROPE" PROCESS: 20 YEARS OF PAN-EUROPEAN COOPERATION

Beldrich Moldan, former Minister of Environment and Senator, Czech Republic, delivered a keynote address "From Dobříš to Astana: 20 years of pan-European cooperation", highlighting some achievements of the EfE process in his country and in the pan-European region as a whole. He emphasized, *inter alia*: the participatory nature of the process and the involvement of civil society; the increased cooperation in the UNECE region to mainstream environmental protection; and the adoption in 1998 of the UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (the Aarhus Convention); the important institutional role played by the UNECE in shaping the EfE process; and the reform process of the EfE, started in 2009, to strengthen EfE's effectiveness ensure it remained appropriate to the changing political and economic contexts, and to the environmental priorities of the region.

Chair Ashim presented the "Green Bridge" Partnership Programme (ECE/ASTANA.CONF/2011/6), stating that despite the many international environmental programs, the measures taken by government lag behind as a result of market failures and environmental constraints. He proposed the adoption of the Green Bridge Partnership Programme to stimulate opportunities for the green economy. He underscored the unique contributions of the Green Bridge, including, *inter alia*: to promote new cooperation: to fill gaps in existing short-term or piecemeal actions; to focus on green business; and to initiate a practical, long-term systemic effort to transfer existing best management practices and ensure more synergistic efforts. He stressed the importance of initial launching support for this initiative and referred to Kazakhstan's commitment to contributing to this initial support.

Jacqueline McGlade, Executive Director, European Environment Agency (EEA), presented the key findings of "Europe's Environment Assessment of Assessments" (EEAoA) report (ECE/ASTANA.CONF/2011/8). Lamenting the fact that the report is not yet suitable for policy-making, due to inadequacies in the water-related reports and a lack of green economic assessments, she emphasized the need for improved data collection and coordinated monitoring practices as well as a consistent definition of "green economy". She identified the main challenges as: gaps in the number of assessments; failure to address policy demands; and lack of coordination

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which leads to competition for scarce resources. McGlade introduced the Shared Environmental Information Site (SEIS), an integrated web-enabled, environmental information system, as a network of public information and highlighted the Eye on Earth web service for use across technological platforms.

Ville Niinistö, Minister of Environment, Finland, presented the Second Assessment of Transboundary Lakes, Rivers, and Groundwaters in the UNECE region (ECE/ASTANA.CONF/2011/9), which emphasized variable institutional frameworks and increased transboundary agreements. He cautioned that new national legislation can absorb human and financial resources and limit attention to transboundary agreements. The assessment includes case studies of 25 Ramsar sites, aimed at linking water catchment planning with site management and promoting an ecosystem based approach. He noted that more comprehensive research on the impacts of climate change is needed at the sub-regional and basin level.

Andrzej Kraszewski, Minister of Environment, Poland, on behalf of the European Union and its Member States, noted that the EfE process serves as a model for the implementation of Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration by encouraging strong participation and broad stakeholder engagement in protecting the environment and sharing lessons learned. He emphasized that ensuring safe access to drinking water is high on the agenda of the EU and welcomed the Astana Water Action initiative. He recommended the adoption of regular environmental assessments. He expressed appreciation for the proposed Green Bridge Partnership Programme, but asked for clarification on its governance structure.

George Khachidze, Minister of Environmental Protection, Georgia, said the EfE is an efficient cooperation framework for UNECE member countries and welcomed initiatives on environmental cooperation and capacity building in the pan-European region. He highlighted his country's initiatives to promote a greener economy in the water, energy, and transport sectors, among others.

Keit Pentus, Minister of Environment, Estonia, welcomed the Second Assessment of Transboundary Lakes, Rivers, and Groundwaters and urged its recommendations be implemented as soon as possible. She said regular assessments are needed in the future.

László Borbély, Minister of Environment and Forests, Romania, described the EU Water Initiative, which covers 12 countries and focuses on the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals related to water and sanitation and integrated water resources management.

Lawrence Gumbiner, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Environment and Sustainable Development, United States, underscored the importance of water and sanitation as development and security issues. He recommended ongoing environmental monitoring and assessment efforts. He welcomed the establishment of the Green Bridge Partnership.

Guido Herz, Ambassador of Germany to Kazakhstan, Germany, welcomed the Green Bridge Partnership as contributing to increasing integration across the European-Asian region and boosting green growth. He recommended this initiative include supra-regional projects and an exchange across borders.

Alberto Pieri, Ambassador, Embassy of Italy in Kazakhstan, Italy, noted that the most important success of the EfE was to set up a regular reporting activity on the state of the environment in the region. He described a joint Italy-Kazakhstan initiative as an example of public-private sector cooperation in the Caspian Sea.

Mykola Romanov, First Deputy Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources, Ukraine, presented his country's priorities in environmental management until 2020, *inter alia*: integration

of environmental policies; reducing biodiversity loss through eco-networks; and new water legislation and river basin management to reduce pollution from pesticides and chemicals. He emphasized the importance of partnership with the business community to ensure transition to a greener economy.

Bayanbek Kadyrov, Director, State Agency on Environment Protection and Forestry, Kyrgyzstan, underscored the importance of mountain ecosystems and lamented that these ecosystems did not receive adequate attention in the Second Assessment of Transboundary Lakes, Rivers, and Groundwaters. He urged participants to provide financial support to the Green Bridge Partnership.

Olga Ponizova, Executive Director, Eco-Accord, recalled success stories of environmental cooperation in the UNECE region, such as the EU Biodiversity Strategy and the Aarhus Convention, and welcomed the Second Assessment of Transboundary Lakes, Rivers, and Groundwaters as a tool for accountability in environmental matters. She lamented the declining support for the participation of civil society organizations in the EfE process and called for greater transparency in the third assessment report.

Ms. Gulsara Yedilbayeva, Executive Director of the Kazakhstan Association of Enterprises for Sustainable Development, World Business Council for Sustainable Development Branch in Kazakhstan, highlighted initiatives by the business community to modernize industrial production such as waste recycling and ISO certification, and underscored the need for effective economic incentives, infrastructure development, and environmental monitoring to promote the green economy.

Nikolay Pomoshchnikov, Head of the Subregional office for North and Central Asia, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, welcomed the Green Bridge Partnership as promoting cross-regional cooperation to promote green growth and said the Asia-Pacific region is prepared to partner with Europe under the initiative.

Jens Wandel, Deputy Regional Director and Director of the Bratislava Regional Centre, United Nations Development Programme, called attention to key starting points in ensuring green growth: reversing dysfunctional policies; including fossil fuel subsidies; targeting support to vulnerable groups and financing direct green growth investment; and green public procurements.

Talaibek Makeev, Executive Director, Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia (Carec), applauded the progress that has been made over twenty years of environmental dialogue and suggested the world revisit its sustainability goals to prioritize greening the economy. He pledged Carec's support towards raising awareness and disseminating messages which will properly communicate a green economy.

Goran Svilanović, Co-ordinator of Economic and Environmental Activities, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, stressed the importance of the environment as a key component of peace and security. He linked greening the economy to improved governance and resilience to climate change and called for the incorporation of the Green Bridge Partnership Programme into the Rio+20 process.