**Speech of Executive Director of CAREC at Milan Ministerial conference, 12-13 October 2015**

**Your Excellences, Distinguished Ministries, Delegates**

*First of all I would like to thank European Commission, Italian Chairmanship for inviting to this high level meeting and giving a chance to speak to all of you on behalf of regional organizations of Central Asia.*

The extension of the European Union’s Central Asia strategy underlines of the importance of EU- Central Asian partnership.

***Regional Environmental Center for Central Asia (CAREC) started operating in 2001 as a platform for cooperation on environmental issues and sustainable development for Central Asia. CAREC enables a dialogue on environmental issues between public- and private sector as well as civil society***.

Since its establishment, CAREC has implemented more than 250 projects on a wide variety of subjects, worth more than 30 million Euro. Setting up Regional Center is a unique experiment in Central Asia in which an organization successfully transformed itself from a core-funded entity into a sustainable project based organization. CAREC became a model for social entrepreneurship in the Central Asian context.

CAREC as a regional platform have been successfully promoting European initiatives on environment in the region through regular project implementation and facilitating continuous regional process of cooperation. CAREC have either successfully implemented EU’s flagship projects in the region such as the AWARE and WMBOCA project, or acted as the Central Asian node for projects such the COMO East Initiative or participated in related consortia as in the case of CASEP and FLERMONECA.

CAREC is actively taking part in the European and international processes and initiatives such as the Environment for Europe process and became an active promoter of these initiatives in the region. CAREC is the Central Asian focal point for many initiatives such as programmes on environmental indicators (SEIS), ecosystem services and water management (EU Water Directive).

CAREC became a bridge between the region and international environmental processes, bringing Central Asian partners closer to the global environmental and development agenda. We provide opportunities for joint positioning of the Central Asian countries on climate change at the forthcoming COP21 UNFCCC in Paris; we are part of the regional institutions to advocate for joint actions to fulfill 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and SDGs; we support the sub-regional reporting on UNCCD; and we are ready to extend our hand for other UN Conventions.

With projects at the local, mezzo, national and regional levels CAREC has access to the “real-life” situations in Central Asian region, thus making CAREC a strong and reliable partner for both the local, national and international partners.

CAREC has generated political support for its initiatives, activities in Central Asian countries and has established a professional profile. Country offices in all five countries have been established. Presence and up to date information and contacts with national and local partners is a key strength of CAREC.

During the past years, CAREC implemented a wide range of projects on environmental governance and management, on climate change and energy efficiency, education for sustainable development and water cooperation. The projects are planned and implemented in such a way to address the real-needs of communities, countries and the region. CAREC has gained image of trustful, knowledgeable partner with appropriate expertise and strong implementation skills.

CAREC has very strong credentials among the civil society in the region. Within the Central Asia Initiative of the EU, CAREC supported many civil society initiatives on environment and sustainable development. In 2013 CAREC has launched a new concept for partnership with civil society and NGOs. CAREC remains a voice in Central Asia on the role of communities, civil society and the NGO sector in environmental management and governance.

In summary, CAREC has gained both expertise, knowledge and support from its partners for its role as a regional cooperation platform. In 2016, CAREC will celebrate its 15th anniversary and the EU will start a new phase of its Central Asia programme. CAREC is ready and able to further enhance the partnership between Central Asia and European Union on environmental issues.