

THE CENTRAL ASIAN SUBREGION PARTICIPATION IN THE EFE PROCESS PROGRESS AND OUTLOOK

SYNTHESIS REPORT

The Regional Environmental Centre
for Central Asia







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This Regional Synthesis Report is a contribution of the Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia to the process of preparation of sub-region to the Eight Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe" to be held in 8-10 of June 2016 in Batumi, Georgia.

This publication was prepared by Saltanat Zhakenova, CAREC, in cooperation with the UNECE Environmental Conventions Secretariats (Albena Karadjova, Alina Novikova, Francesca Bernardini, Nicholas Bonvoisin, Maryna Yanush, Sonja Koeppel, Tea Aulavuo) and teams of EU funded Project "Forest and Biodiversity Governance including Environmental Monitoring in Central Asia" (Talaibek Makeev, Simon Charre) and FOEN funded Project "Supporting Turkmenistan in establishing a State of Environment Report in line with the UNECE Indicators" (Alexander Shekhovtsov). The findings of the report are basing on the discussions at national and sub-regional consultations held in period of March-May 2016.

The Report will be further elaborated in accordance with the recommendations of discussion of the side-event "Greening the economy and sustainable development in Central Asia - current achievements and the way forward", to be organized by 9 June 2016 within the framework of the Eighth Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe"

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List of acronyms

CA	Central Asia
CAREC	Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia
EECA	Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia
EfE	Environment for Europe
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EU	European Union
FLERMONECA	Forest and Biodiversity Governance including Environmental Monitoring in Central Asia
GBPP	Green Bridge Partnership Programme
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
GMO's	Genetically Modified Organisms
ICSD	Inter-State Commission for Sustainable Development
IWRM	Integrated Water Resources Management
JTF EI	Joint Task Force on Environmental Indicators
MEA's	Multilateral Environmental Agreements
NEAPs	National Environmental Action Plans
NGO	Non-governmental Organizations
NSoER's	National State-of-Environment Reports
REAP	Regional Environmental Action Plan
RES	Renewable Energy Sources
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SEIS	Shared Environmental Information System
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
WG EMA	Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment



KAZAKHSTAN

UZBEKISTAN

KYRGYZSTAN

TURKMENISTAN

TAJIKISTAN

Introduction

The Central Asian subregion is characterized by unique natural ecosystems with a major role in ensuring environmental security and sustainability of the whole Eurasian continent.

Since 1991, together with other countries of the pan-European Region the nations of Central Asia (CA) have been actively engaged in the “Environment for Europe” (Efe) Process. The Ministerial Conferences held every 5 years serve as high-level stakeholder platforms for target discussion, decision-making and synergy of efforts to address priority ecological challenges faced by the countries of the UNECE Region, manifesting the basis for the sustainable development of the region.

Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan developed their National Environmental Action Plans (NEAP’s) under the Efe Process that started at the 1st “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference in 1991 in Dobris and the principles of the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development. The cooperation framework for the regions of Europe, North America, Central Asia and the Caucasus were coordinated and approved at subsequent Ministerial Conferences in Lucerne (1993) and Sofia (1995).

In 1998, at the 4th Efe Ministerial Conference in Aarhus the ministers of environment decided to place bigger emphasis on the Newly Independent States to foster rapprochement of environmental policies and conditions in the European region. Recognizing the importance of regional cooperation, the Ministerial Declaration endorsed the Joint Statement of the Ministers of Environmental of the Central Asian Region (Almaty, April 22, 1998) and obligations they assumed on cooperation and support of the decision to develop and implement the Regional Environmental Action Plan within the Efe framework. The Central Asian Regional Environmental Centre (CAREC) was established based on the resolution of the Ministerial Conference.

At the 5th “Environment for Europe” Ministerial conference in Kiev (2003), it was decided to continue the support of all Regional Environmental Centres (REC’s) due to their particular role as unaffiliated platforms of cooperation, partnership and information exchange as well as promotion of civil society involvement in decision-making. The ministers adopted the essentially novel Environment Strategy for Countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA), and welcomed the efforts of Central Asian states towards forging the “Invitation to Partnership” Central Asian Environment, Water and Security Initiative (CAI).

At the 6th “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference in Belgrade (2007), CAI was recognized as the multi-stakeholder dialogue platform fostering presentation of the interests of Central Asian countries within the framework of the EfE Process, as well as a tool aiding the implementation of EfE-specific programs and projects in Central Asia, where possible, through CAREC. CAI purpose is to mainstream additional sustainable development dimensions on limited natural resources, poverty and unbalanced economic development of the region in environmental agendas and efforts by way of collaboration with international organizations and donor community, as well as partnerships among governments, private sector and civil society agents.

The 7th EfE Ministerial Conference supported the Green Bridge Partnership Initiative and Programme proposed by Kazakhstan and appealed to stakeholder governments, international financial institutions, business and other stakeholders to join the initiative and to promote environmental sustainability as well as fair and prospering future in the pan-European and Asia-Pacific Regions.

Since 2009, the EfE Process has been undergoing reforms to ensure its further relevance and value as well as efficiency. Certain country-level challenges – for example, lack of understanding of the importance of regional cooperation, certain budget restrictions preventing assumption and fulfillment of target obligations, frequent institutional changes on the level of governments and decision-making, delays in designating persons responsible for the EfE Process – negatively affect engagement of CA countries in the EfE Process. Nonetheless, the EfE Process in Central Asia is viewed as a vital foundation for bi- and multilateral cooperation due to its close connection with other regional and subregional initiatives and processes, i.e. promoting integration of environmental and sector-specific policies. Despite considerable distinctions among EECCA countries, their shared interests of security and stability

– particularly with respect to environment and regional development – require close collaboration based on their geographic proximity, level of economic development, similarity of environmental issues, relatively mature environmental legislation, etc.

Preparing the subregion for the 8th “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference

The two themes of the upcoming 8th “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference – “greening the economy in the pan-European region” and “improving the air quality for a better environment and human health” – are the most significant and urgent for the countries of Central Asia (CA). Responding to pertinent thematic documents and the preliminary strategic framework, acting in accordance with its mandate and pursuing the aim of forging the regional EfE vision in the context of the recently adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDG’s), CAREC has launched a series of **national and regional consultations** and a **survey** on environmental policy.

The purpose of consultations, including in the form of a survey, was to provide a dialogue platform to share knowledge on EfE Process and the Ministerial Conference, collect information on the progress and prospects for the Central Asian Subregion to participate in the “Environment for Europe” Process, as well as to elaborate a joint approach on post-Batumi steps.

Consultations aims:

- raise awareness on the EfE Process and the 8th Ministerial Conference among stakeholders;
- enhance cross-sectoral interactions and engagement in the process of preparing for the Conference, including via thematic initiatives;
- coordinate actions in preparation for the Ministerial Conference to promote the interests of the Central Asian Subregion and individual CA countries.

Schedule of national consultations:

March 9, 2016 – Ashgabat City (Turkmenistan);

April 8, 2016 – Bishkek City (Kyrgyzstan);

April 12, 2016 – Astana City (Kazakhstan);

April 22, 2016 – Dushanbe City (Tajikistan);

April 27-28, 2016 – Tashkent City (Uzbekistan).

Schedule of subregional consultations:

March 11, 2016 – Almaty City (Kazakhstan) - Meeting of Regional Organizations;

May 23-26, 2016 – Ashgabat City (Turkmenistan) – Meeting of Inter-State Commission for Sustainable Development (ICSD)

Structure of national and subregional consultations

The consultations consisted of three main parts:

- familiarization with the EfE Process, scope of the 8th Ministerial Conference and official Conference documents;
- discussion of national mid- and long-term priorities;
- coordination of planned activities related to country reports and assumption of voluntary obligations as well as subsequent steps on participation in Conference side-event and exhibition.

Progress in executing the resolutions of the 7th “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference

In the context of countries’ goals on their participation in the EFe Process, based on the recommendations of national consultations a significant progress in implementing the decisions of the 7th EFe Ministerial Conference (2011, Astana) is evident.

As per the Conference resolutions, the countries were recommended to ratify and implement relevant multilateral environmental agreements (MEA’s), including the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Transboundary Water Convention) and it’s Protocol on Health and Water.

The ministers approved the Astana Water Actions and welcomed the initiatives proposed by stake-holder states and organizations in the course of the Conference targeting enhanced efficacy of water resources management and closer transboundary water collaboration.

During the 7th EFe Ministerial Conference in Astana (2011), the ministers endorsed the idea of continual monitoring of the state of environment in Europe by facilitating regular environmental assessment and introducing the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) in the subregion.

At the Astana Conference, the ministers of environment representing the countries of the pan-European region confirmed their desire to lead the process of transition to “green” economy. They highlighted the need to stimulate “green” investments and encourage sustainable production and consumption, power- and resource-efficiency as well as innovations. They also stressed the importance of building human, institutional and economic capacities, in particular by way of scientific research, educational and other academic interventions. Moreover, concerned governments, international financial agencies, private sector and other stakeholders were invited to join the Green Bridge Partnership Program to foster environmental sustainability as well as fair and prosperous future not only for the pan-European but also for Asia-Pacific Regions.

Implementation of UNECE Environmental Conventions

Regional and subregional agreements and conventions constitute the legal base for cooperation within Central Asia. The subregion is one of priority areas for UNECE Environmental Conventions implementation. The UNECE Secretariat collaborates with all five Central Asian countries parties and non-parties to UNECE regional conventions.

UNECE Environmental Conventions include the Convention on Air Pollution and its Protocols, the Water Convention and its Protocol on Water and Health, the Espoo Convention and its Protocol on SEA, the Industrial Accidents Convention, the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on PRTR.

The Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution was signed in 1979 and entered into force in 1983. Since then it was extended by eight specific protocols, out of which currently the most important ones are: the Gothenburg Protocol¹, the Protocol on Heavy Metals, the Protocol on POPs and the EMEP Protocol².

Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan acceded to the Convention in 2001 and 2000, respectively, however did not yet ratify any of its protocols. The first EMEP monitoring station in Central Asia was established in 2007 in Borovoe, Kazakhstan.

UNECE is currently implementing a capacity-building programme to encourage ratification and support implementation of the Convention and its protocols in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. It includes workshops on development of air pollutants emission inventories and analysis of national policy and legal framework related to air quality management held in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. As a result of these activities, Kazakhstan for the first time reported its emission data under the Convention in 2016, and Kyrgyzstan is planning to develop a national action plan for the ratification of the protocols to the Convention. Uzbekistan is currently reviewing its national law on atmospheric air protection. If adopted in 2016, the draft law will form prerequisites for ratification of the Convention and the EMEP Protocol.

¹ Protocol to Abate Acidification, Eutrophication and Ground-level Ozone

² Cooperative Programme for Monitoring and Evaluation of the Long-range Transmission of Air Pollutants in Europe

The Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) was adopted on March 17, 1992, in Helsinki, and entered into force on October 6, 1996. It has been acceded by Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, respectively in 2001, 2012 and 2007.

The Work Programme of the Water Convention includes several activities to facilitate transboundary water cooperation in Central Asia (www.unece.org/env/water/centralasia.html). This includes support to regional level cooperation including on water quality and dam safety, transboundary cooperation on the Pjanj as well as Chu and Talas rivers. Recently a report on the water-energy-environment nexus in the Syr Darya Basin was produced. Moreover, the National Policy Dialogues on Integrated Water Resources Management carried out in the framework of the EU Water Initiative strengthen national water governance in Central Asian countries.

The Protocol on Water and Health was adopted on June 17, 1999 and entered into force on August 4, 2005. None of the Central Asian countries are Parties to it but all are active in its framework. Kazakhstan is presently working on accession and Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are considering initiating the accession process. Moreover, an ongoing UNECE-FinWaterWei II project supports Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan in setting their national targets on water and health in the context of the Protocol.

The Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context was adopted on February 25, 1991 in Espoo (Finland) and came into force on September 10, 1997. It confers rights to Parties and their public to be consulted by other Parties on planned activities with potential adverse consequences that may affect their territory. The Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) was adopted in Kyiv on 21 May 2003 and entered into force on July 11, 2010.

As of today, from among the CA countries only Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are Parties to the Convention and none of them has yet joined the Protocol on SEA. All the CA countries, however, follow the activities and regularly attend meetings undertaken under the Convention and the Protocol. The Central Asian states, in particular the non-parties may perceive the implementation of the Espoo Convention provisions difficult due to the fact that environmental impact assessment in transboundary context suggests coordination of pertaining procedures with all stakeholders as well as consultation with authorities and the public of neighboring countries. In practice, however, the procedural frameworks and tools provided by the Espoo Convention have proved to improve the planning and to facilitate

the transboundary cooperation, e.g. regarding activities that may adversely impact shared natural resources. Systematic application of SEA to government development plans and programmes in turn can substantially contribute to sustainable development and greening economies.

Over the years, the secretariat to the Espoo Convention and the Protocol on SEA has facilitated several capacity building activities in Central Asia. More recently, in 2014-2015, it rendered technical advisory assistance and support to Kyrgyzstan for enhancing its legislation and institutional capacities to implement the Convention and the Protocol. With funding from Switzerland, and in cooperation with CAREC, the secretariat is also in the process of supporting the development and update of the existing EIA Guidelines in a Transboundary Context for Central Asian Countries, first developed in 2005 under the leadership of CAREC and then revised 2008. The update will take into account the introduced legal and institutional national developments concerning the application of the Espoo Convention, the subregional experience gathered, as well as the developed international practice of the Espoo Convention.

In 2015-2018, under an EU funded multi-stakeholder project “Supporting Kazakhstan’s Transition to a Green Economy Model”, the Secretariat also provides support for promoting strategic environmental assessment as a planning tool for greening the economy in Kazakhstan. The activities will include:

- Review of existing national legislative and administrative/institutional frameworks in the field of environmental assessment in order to prepare for the development of a strategic environmental assessment (SEA) system in line with the Protocol on SEA (legislative review);
- Development of new legislation on SEA based on the results of the legal review (legal drafting);
- Conduct trainings for the national and local officials to apply SEA in Kazakhstan.

The legislative review is expected to commence in 2016, and will be kicked off by a national round table event to inform the national authorities and stakeholders about the SEA and its benefits, other countries’ experience in transitioning to a green economy model and in using SEA procedure under the Protocol.

The review will be conducted by a qualified international legal expert who will closely work with the Ministry of Energy and will be supported by selected local experts on environmental assessment legislation. The Ministry of Energy will take active part in conducting the review, being responsible for collecting the required materials and participating in their analysis and facilitating interviews of national environmental assessment authorities by the international expert.

In early 2017, the review and its main findings will be presented for comments at a second national conference involving all relevant parties. Based on the recommendations for legislative and institutional changes required for development of the SEA system in line with the Protocol and the feedback received at the national consultation event, the international and national consultant in cooperation with the Ministry may initiate the preparation of a draft law on SEA or amendments to existing legislation.

The country specific activities were preceded by an initial training for the national and local officials to apply SEA in Kazakhstan, in the framework of a sub-regional conference and training event organized by UNECE that took place on 2-6 November 2015 in Khaheti (Georgia). Sponsored by the Green Economy Project five Kazakh governmental officials from the Ministry of Energy attended the events, composed of:

- (a) A one-day sub-regional conference on developing legislative frameworks for the strategic environmental assessment in conformity with the Protocol on SEA; and
- (b) A four-day "Training of Trainers" workshop on the design and delivery of training events on strategic environmental assessment.

The training was organized to enhance regional capacities in developing national SEA systems by facilitating the exchange of experience between countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia with a view to aligning legislation and practice with the UNECE treaties and the relevant European Union legislation on SEA and EIA. Kazakh officials had a possibility to exchange opinions with their colleagues from Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan that have already undergone similar activities. The purpose of the Training of Trainers workshop was to prepare national experts as trainers for carrying out further SEA capacity-building and awareness-raising events at national and local levels.

Industrial accidents can have severe consequences on human health and the environment, including in other affected countries. The UNECE Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents, adopted in 1992 and entered into force in 2000, helps its 41 Parties to prevent industrial accidents that can have transboundary effects and to prepare for, and respond to, accidents if they occur. Only Kazakhstan is a Party at present. However, the Convention's Assistance Programme has been developed to enhance the capacities of countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia and South-Eastern Europe in implementing the Convention. The Programme's 15 beneficiary countries include Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

In 2015, the Convention secretariat worked with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in the arrangement of a joint subregional workshop for Central Asia on industrial accident prevention: Chemicals management, identification and notification of industrial hazardous activities and accidental water pollution (Astana, 26-28 May 2015). A national workshop on the Convention was held in Ashgabat the previous year and a national workshop on accession to and implementation of the Convention was held in Bishkek in 2013. Many other such events have been organized earlier.

From the beginning of 2017, a Russian-funded project on strengthening implementation of and accession to the Convention Central Asia will be implemented, expected to include national seminars in all five countries, assistance with drafting self-assessments and action plan and a subregional workshop (Kyrgyzstan, 2018), with finalization in 2019. Building on past work in other parts of the UNECE region, activities to address risk management at tailings management facilities in a country in the Caucasus, Central Asia or Eastern Europe are now being considered.

The UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) and the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Register (PRTR) provide robust foundation for governments in ensuring effective and conscious participation of the public in Agenda 2030 implementation with the aim of sustainable national and local development.

Being the parties to the Aarhus Convention, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan demonstrated commitment to fulfill their corresponding obligations. To facilitate collaboration among state authorities, the public and the

private sector in responding to environmental challenges, national-and sometimes local-level Aarhus Centers were established in concerned countries with the OSCE support and guidance. In spite of the fact that Uzbekistan has not ratified the Convention, the country experts regularly participate in the Convention activities.

It should be noted that although a number of countries have achieved certain progress in fulfilling their obligations under the Aarhus Convention, a number of challenges related to access to information, public participation in decision-making and justice were revealed within national implementation reports and findings of the Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee. Lack of awareness among the public and state officials, insufficient institutional and financial capacities are among the general factors constraining further development and effective implementation of the Convention in some countries.

As to access to environmental information, it appears expedient to focus further country-specific steps to promote public access to such data on the following:

- collection of and ensuring public access to primary statistical data on emissions, environment-related product information and other environmental information;
- linking environment and health information;
- strengthening exchange of data produced or collected by public authorities;
- ensuring data functional compatibility and their public availability via electronic information tools;
- reviewing and analyzing data confidentiality policies; and
- encouraging initiatives on electronic government and open government data, public access and re-use of geospatial and Earth satellite data relating to the environment.

Corresponding efforts should be implemented based on Shared Environmental Information (SEIS) principles.

In order to strengthen public participation in decision-making, it is necessary to take further actions to address such issues as unclear and/or inadequate legislation and inefficient practices as to public participation (ex., EIA/state environmental assessment) in the development of projects, plans, programs, policies and legislation.

To ensure access to justice, proceeding efforts could focus on elimination of legal discrepancies and restrictions in relation to environmental NGO's and public representatives, reduction of sometimes rather significant court fees, provision of qualified legal aid, raising awareness and building capacities of judges and prosecutors on environmental cases initiated by public and environmental NGO's.

As to strengthening biosafety and facilitating public access to information and public participation in cases of deliberate release of genetically modified organisms (GMO's) into the environment, the Parties to the Convention urged Central Asian states to take robust steps towards ratifying GMO-related amendments to the Convention.

With respect to enhancing national mechanisms regulating chemical substances, particularly emissions and transfer of hazardous chemicals and pollutants, as well as to monitoring the progress in forging corresponding national priorities, the countries of Central Asia should be encouraged to develop necessary legal frameworks, strengthen their technical capacity on establishing national emissions and pollutant registers as per the provisions of the Protocol on PRTRs, and to join the Protocol.

Due to the procedural nature, the Aarhus Convention and the Protocol on PRTR can assist Central Asian states in achieving Sustainable Development Goals through the strengthening capacity of their public authorities with regard to effective public access to environmental information and engagement of NGO's, local communities and other stakeholders in the development and implementation of different plans, programs and projects affecting the environment and human health. In this regard, the Aarhus Convention and the Protocol are crucial for various areas, including transition to "green" economy, energy sustainability, disaster reduction and mitigation and adaptation to climate change.

SEIS introduction

The Declaration of the 7th “Environment for Europe” pan-European Ministerial Conference (Astana, September 21-23, 2011) includes a resolution on regular environmental monitoring and development of the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS). The MONECA (environmental monitoring) Component of the EU Project “Forest and Biodiversity Governance including Environmental Monitoring in Central Asia” (FLERMONECA) executed jointly by the Austrian Environment Agency and CAREC was aimed at assisting CA states in achieving specific outcomes as to application of SEIS principles in generating, using and presenting data on certain environmental indicators.

While it is recommended to develop SEIS based on the principles, it is worthy of note that it should be viewed as a general approach and not a technically unified system (**Insert 1**). With that, it is important to identify the object of applying the seven principles and the process accompanying SEIS development.

Insert 1 **Seven SEIS principles** Information should be:

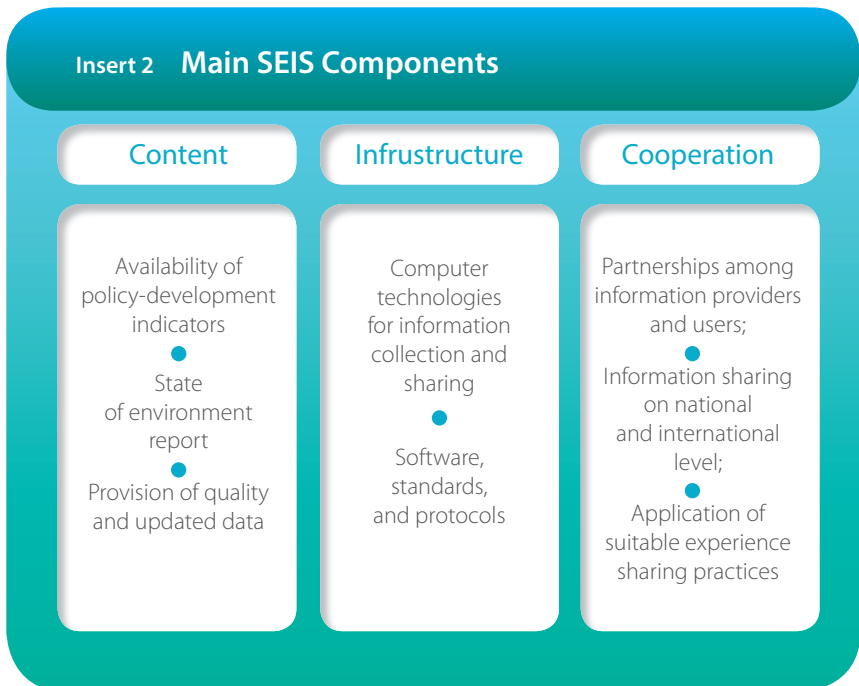
- 1 Managed as close as possible to its source;
- 2 Collected once, and shared with others for many purposes;
- 3 Readily available to easily fulfil reporting obligations;
- 4 Easily accessible to all users;
- 5 Accessible to enable comparisons at the appropriate geographical scale, and citizen participation;
- 6 Fully available to the general public, and at the national level in the relevant national language(s);
- 7 Supported through common, free open software standards

Source: <http://www.eea.europa.eu/about-us/what/shared-environmental-information-system-1>

In the scheme, the main components and the composition of sub-components is based on the EU cooperation experience in other regions as well as CA countries' needs on SEIS development (**Insert 2**). The requirements of pan-European cooperation within the framework of the "Environment for Europe" Process and the possibilities to assist Central Asian countries in achieving specific and tangible results in SEIS development before the 8th pan-European Efe Ministerial Conference in June 2016 in Batumi (Georgia) were considered as well.

In many countries of Central Asia emphasis has so far been placed on developing and strengthening environmental information systems that support environmental policy-making. This included producing and sharing sets of environmental indicators.

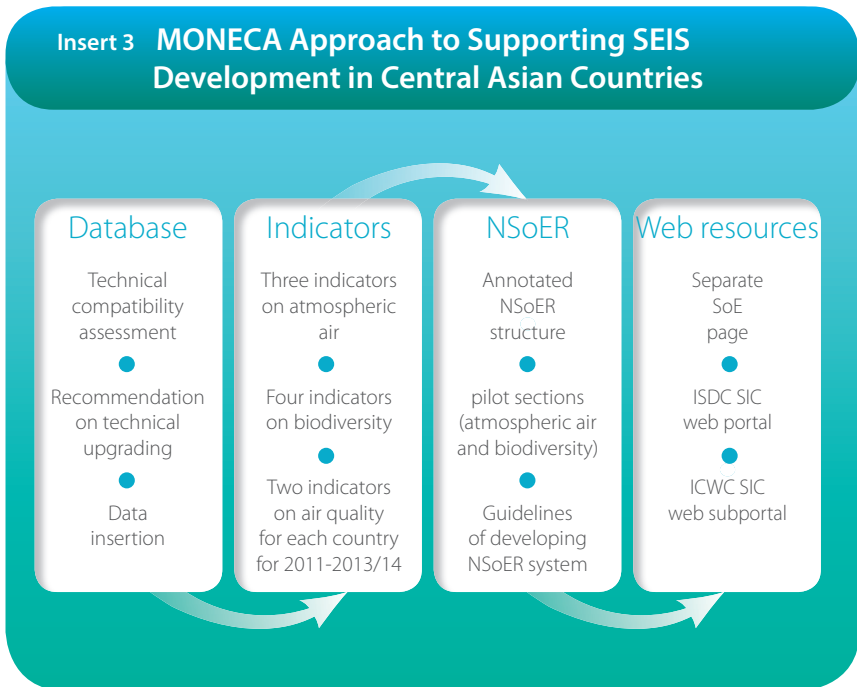
While selecting the themes for SEIS-based production and presentation of indicators, the MONECA component took into account the recommendation and efforts of the UNECE Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment (WG EMA) and Joint Task Force on Environmental Indicators (TJF EI) in which Central Asian countries are actively engaged.



The UNECE WG EMA efforts target the development of environmental monitoring systems, production of state-of-environment evaluation reports, and SEIS-based web infrastructure, whereas the UNECE JTF EI works on environmental indicators production and sharing.

In 2012, within the UNECE JTF EI framework the East European, Caucasus, and Central Asian (EECCA) countries agreed to produce and share data on 8 SEIS-based environmental indicators of the UNECE Guidelines on Environmental Indicators for EECCA Countries.

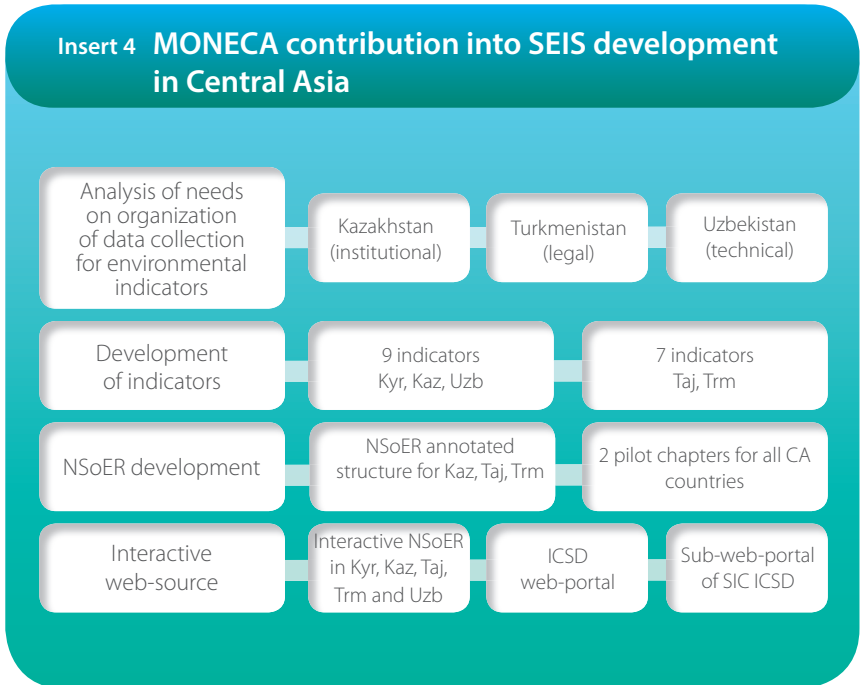
The SEIS-specific assistance framework for Central Asian countries was identified under the MONECA Component of the FLERMONECA Project. Thus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan selected air pollution and biodiversity as their pilot themes, whereas Tajikistan chose selected change and biodiversity.



Based on corresponding action plans, each target country underwent an assessment of its capacity to generate data, produce environmental indicators and reports, and ensure online access thereto (**Insert 3**).

In countries, which did not collect environmental data in accordance with the UNECE format, potential opportunities to gather it and produce indicators were assessed. Invited local experts completed datasets in accordance with the UNECE Guidelines, formulated the data collection procedure, drafted corresponding thematic reports as per the annotated structure of National State-of-Environment Reports (NSoER's) designed within the project framework.

All CA countries were assisted in creating their NSoER websites, their interactive versions based on target environmental indicators (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) or interactive webpages on websites of national statistics agencies (Tajikistan) (**Insert 4**).



Transition to “green” economy and supporting the Green Bridge Partnership Programme

Ministers at the Seventh Environment for Europe (EFE) Ministerial Conference (Astana, 2011) 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 (Rio+20).

The discussion of experiences and activities during national consultations shows that all countries of the subregion are successfully implementing multi-stakeholder legal and institutional policies in the sphere of greening the economy and sustainable development. In most of CA countries, except Kazakhstan, the green economy policy is part of broader midterm sustainable development strategies. CA countries have a clear understanding of sectors or themes that require a priority focus for the green economy transition. In particular, the national policies which has goals and targets for introduction and promotion of integrated water resources management (IWRM) practices, mitigation, energy efficiency, RES, and sustainable agriculture.

Market-based policy instruments are receiving increasing attention and countries are using a variety of them to support the transition to a green economy. In the area of environmental taxation, ongoing efforts are focusing on pollution and there are also examples of taxes on the use of natural resources. Regarding the reform of environmental subsidies, efforts are being made to promote resource efficient technologies, sustainable agriculture, feed - in tariffs for RES and other. Relevant multilateral environmental agreements and international standards and guidelines are used as a basis for setting national regulations and standards.

Nevertheless, countries expressed concerns about the costs of transitioning to a green economy and the implications for international trade. Issues of clean technology development and transfer, capacity-building, methodological support and additional financial resources play a key role to enable countries to transition to and benefit from a green economy. The transition to a green economy in CA requires a well-balanced policy mix and financing mechanisms.

National and local governments, the business sector, civil society, and international organizations, are implementing different initiatives which are need to be further strengthened and, in some cases, replicated and scaled up, in the forthcoming years.

Special activity should be focused on the impacts that transitioning to a greener economy would have on country's economies, including assistance to quantify some of the key benefits and costs in terms of income, productivity, job creation and poverty reduction. Building capacity for policymaking and the sharing of best policy practice is an important area for development. Information-gathering tools and processes could be strengthened for measuring progress toward greening the economy. Another important area is to help subregion fully leverage international financial mechanisms at their disposal to implement the green actions by informing and strengthen the capacity to make full use of them.

During the 7th EFe Conference, the Kazakhstan presented the multilateral, cross-sectoral and voluntary Partnership Programme "Green Bridge" (GBPP) which provides a stable and long-term basis for green investment, transfer of new technologies and innovations from the developed countries to the developing world, to update the sectors of the economy and create new and long-term green jobs. The ambition was -to provide the platform to enable countries, companies, and research institutions to work together and share best practice on how taxation and regulation can provide an attractive environment for green businesses to grow. In 2012 GBPP was endorsed by the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Brazil.

The key programme areas identified in the GBPP are: national and international governance strengthening; information infrastructure for partnership, awareness raising and education; promotion of green business and green technologies; financial and economic mechanisms; improving standards for a green economy; and intervention in specific sectors (water; mountain and other ecosystems); eco-efficient use of natural resources; sustainable energy; food security and sustainable agriculture; sustainable urban infrastructure and transport and green construction; adaptation to climate change and preparedness for natural disasters.

The Charter on the GBPP was firstly signed in Astana by 8 countries - Kazakhstan, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Belarus, Mongolia, Georgia, Germany and Montenegro on September 30, 2013 within the International conference on the GBPP and the International specialized exhibition "Astana EXPO-2017". Presently, the Charter was signed also by Finland, Latvia, Hungary and Albania. The Road-map for 2011-2020 was developed by the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan with the initial stage focused on experience studying, establishment of communications and development of mechanisms of management and financing of the programme. Late 2014, the Association of GBPP and the "Green Bridge" Institute were established.

Post-Batumi regional cooperation prospects within the “Environment for Europe” Process

In accordance with its mandate, CAREC held a series of national and regional consultations with representatives of state, research, academic and non-governmental organizations to exchange information on the “Environment for Europe” Process and the 8th Ministerial Conference, as well as to elaborate joint post-Batumi activities.

The participants of the national consultations noted the following.

I. General recommendations

- 1 Recognize the importance of the EfE Process for environmental protection and sustainable development as contributing to environmental safety of the whole subregion, at the same time highlight the right of countries to formulate environmental policy based on strategic national priorities regardless of the EfE Process scope;
- 2 Acknowledge high vulnerability of the subregion to anthropogenic and climatic factors and unsustainable use of natural resources noting the continuing deterioration of environment;
- 3 Recognize importance and express support of global SD processes, in particular on the promotion of SDG's, climate change actions, EfE Process, as well as on implementation of inter-national environmental agreements, at the same time noting the lack of systemic approach and certain mismatch in their execution;
- 4 Suggest to strengthen coordination of actions by the countries of the sub-region with the aim of promoting their interests and increasing the efficiency of the EfE Process in addressing subregion- and country-specific environmental challenges;
- 5 Support the ongoing work on dataflows for the establishment of national SEIS and suggest it's further implementation in close cooperation with other partners.

II Subregional cooperation

- 6 Highly appraise the role of subregional agreements and organizations in maintaining stability despite unresolved water and land resources issues;
- 7 Note the positive results of CAREC efforts and welcome the initiative on raising awareness and engaging stakeholders by way of national consultations to mainstream the EfE Process in the subregion;
- 8 Recognize the need to emphasize common subregional goals and priorities in relation to environment, ongoing processes and partner initiatives;
- 9 Render special attention to issues of water resources management, in particular, the Aral Sea situation. Water resources play an important role in socio-economic development and environmental protection of CA states, and despite the fact that IWRM principles are taking root in all of them, multiple pressure factors still exist;
- 10 Acknowledge the importance of multilateral and/or inter-regional cooperation aimed at exchange of experiences, best practices, expertise and technologies;
- 11 Recognize the importance and support the formation of the permanent dialogue platform to discuss the progress in EfE Process implementation in the subregion, reach consensus on joint agenda, freely exchange information, engage stakeholders in decision-making, including via online means;
- 12 Note the similarity of opinions of the majority of participants on the following priorities of regional environmental policy, including in the Aral Sea Basin:
 - integrated water resources management, including restoration of water infrastructure;
 - preservation of ecosystems and biodiversity of the subregion;
 - adaptation to climate change and decreasing climate change vulnerability;
 - rehabilitation of degraded lands;

- management of municipal solid waste;
 - promotion of renewable energy and increasing energy efficiency;
 - atmospheric air pollution;
 - mitigating risks to public health.
- 13 Agree that within the framework of long-term planning it is also necessary to consider issues of regional environmental policy in the context of:
- ensuring chemical safety;
 - elimination of historical pollution;
 - preservation of marine biodiversity and river ecosystems.

III National environmental policies

- 14 Note significant progress in developing and deploying environmental policies, including with respect to fulfilling obligations under UNECE Conventions, advancing “green” economy in the context of water and land management, SEIS, Astana Water Actions and other resolutions of the 7th “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference (Astana, 2011);
- 15 Specify the fact that on country level certain institutional capacities have been built, however to deem expedient to continue their strengthening as well as to attract international expertise on best practices and methodologies on effective environmental policy implementation;
- 16 Highly appraise the capacity of cross-sectoral interaction and the importance of integrating environmental and sector-specific policies to achieve “green” economy objectives;
- 17 Render significant attention to issues of innovations and transition to automated administration, including in relation to environmental monitoring;
- 18 Highlight the importance of promoting ecosystem-based and integrated approach to natural resources management;

- 19 Consider necessary to engage civil society organizations in the process of elaborating and implementing environmental policies;
- 20 Acknowledge the high potential of collaborating with business on reducing environmental pressure, at the same time note the insufficient level of its involvement and awareness;
- 21 Note the importance of the following for the implementation of target policies on "green" economy and improving air quality during post-Batumi period:
 - attraction of innovations and technological support;
 - ensuring availability of international expertise;
 - mobilization of funding;
 - capacity building, both on technical issues as well as educational techniques, analytical skills and openness to partnership;
 - informational and other support for effective fulfillment of obligations under conventions.

NOTES

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