



and Central Asia



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EU action on **water resources** in Central Asia as a key element of environmental protection

Central Asia faces major ecological challenges and is directly affected by climate change. Water availability is a key strategic issue. Stored in the mountain glaciers of the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan, water is one of the most precious resources in the region and can be a significant source of tension.

As part of its Central Asia Strategy, the *EU-Central Asia Environmental Dialogue* has been established to foster environmental protection and better manage water resources. Italy, in close cooperation with the European Commission, leads the coordination of EU activities.

EU action on water resources in Central Asia plays a major role in its overall programme to protect the environment in the region.

The EU has also stepped up work with the five Central Asian countries to improve the management of land and forestry resources, support the stabilisation of the Aral Sea, mitigate effects of climate change and to reduce the impact of natural disasters. Recent activities include:

- promotion and Capacity building for renewable energy sources; improving energy efficiency and setting up frameworks for appropriate investment conditions. This is done by, inter alia, conducting trainings and seminars for governmental officials and financing feasibility studies regarding the installation of small sized hydro-power stations and the use of renewable energy sources in the region;
- helping the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan set up the Pamir-Alai conservation area on the border between the two countries, helping to enhance biodiversity;
- support to government authorities to adapt to climate change and the better implementation of the Kyoto Protocol;

- support to government authorities with the implementation of the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters;
- support to government authorities for the implementation of the Caspian Environmental Protection Convention, in order to improve water quality protection and sustainable fisheries;
- support to government authorities for an integrated approach of water resources management, water supply and sanitation;
- enhancement of environmental protection in the gas and oil industries.

The EU is the main supporter of the activities of the Central Asia Regional Environmental Centre (CAREC). Based in Kazakhstan, this centre brings together all five central Asian states to promote awareness and multi-stakeholder cooperation in addressing environment and sustainable development at local, national and regional level.

Water use and hydropower

Water consumption in Central Asia is extremely high compared to other countries, mainly due to highly inefficient agricultural irrigation practices. According to World Bank estimates, some 79% of Central Asia's irrigated water is simply lost en route.

There are conflicting needs for water access and use between the upstream and downstream countries. The plans of the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan to expand upstream reservoir capacity and hydroelectric power generation are a source of concern for the downstream countries, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, given their economic dependence on irrigated agriculture, especially cotton.



To help alleviate the problem, the EU is actively promoting efficient and economical usage of resources such as water and energy.

Several initiatives and projects have been launched to tackle these issues focusing, for example, on better use of resources, better management and rehabilitation of irrigation systems, the rehabilitation of energy transmission lines and energy saving measures.

EU Water Initiative

Reducing demand for these resources is a fundamental component of a possible solution.

The work undertaken under the *EU Water Initiative*, through its main operational instrument – *National Water Policy Dialogues* – is the centrepiece of EU efforts to achieve the water-related Millennium Development Goals and targets of the Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) network.

The overall objectives of National Policy Dialogues are to initiate country-specific activities regarding water supply and sanitation, financing strategies and IWRM to improve regulatory and administrative frameworks, help setting country priorities, identify projects and develop capacity in the region through a dialogue that, amongst others, involves public authorities and representatives of the civil society.

National Water Policy Dialogues have been launched in Central Asia, beginning with the Kyrgyz Republic in 2008 and Tajikistan and Turkmenistan in 2009.

The National Policy Dialogues develop “Policy packages” with activities that pay particular attention to policy reforms towards sustainable water management and financing of water supply and sanitation infrastructure developments, including conservation of the environment, water as a polluted natural resource, strengthening regulatory services, and institutional frameworks.

For example, projects are ongoing to improve and harmonise water quality standard systems in Central Asia, to encourage an integrated approach to water resources management (surface and groundwater), and to promote trans-boundary dialogue on water management. These projects focus on water issues that build on consensus among the five Central Asia states.

