Environmental remediation of Uranium Mining Legacy Sites in Central Asia. Urgent appeal made for financial support

Resolving the legacy of uranium mining in Central Asia is becoming urgent. Further action is needed to prevent the release of radioactive and toxic waste not only locally but also to protect transboundary rivers from pollution. By doing so the Fergana Valley will be protected. This valley in Central Asia is of high significance for the economic development of the region.

With this in mind, the EU strongly supports the urgent appeal made to the international community to make more financial means available to solve the health and environmental problems. This is crucial for progress in Central Asia. In total, 70 million euro is needed and to be pledged at a Donors' conference to be held on 8 November 2018.

The appeal for financial support was made during the international conference held on 17 May in Bishkek (the Kyrgyz Republic). The event was hosted by the Kyrgyz Government with the support of the European Commission (EC). The meeting concluded that all the preparatory work has been finalised to allow immediate start of the remediation work in seven identified priority sites pending financial support which is currently insufficient. The seven priority sites were selected with the consent of the three most directly involved countries: the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Days before the conference, the European Union delegation led by Mrs Michele Rivasi (Member of the European Parliament) visited the uranium legacy sites at Mailuu-Suu (the Kyrgyz Republic). First-hand information was received on the seriousness of the current situation. The urgency to bring permanent solutions to the affected populations became clear. There is a high risk of pollution of the rivers leading to contamination of significant parts of Uzbekistan’s downstream. Therefore, work has to commence immediately to prevent this from happening.

During the conference Mrs Rivasi (MEP) stated: “The situation in Mailuu – Suu is a clear illustration of the urgency of the health and environmental problems in Central Asia. This is the result of the uranium mining legacy. The current situation is unacceptable and needs to be solved. All the plans that bring a solution are ready and should be financed by the international community. This will allow the immediate start of the work. The population has been waiting too long for our response. They rightly ask for international support to improve their day - to - day lives.”
The EU already has already relegate 16.5 million Euro and Norway 600.000 Euro to a special fund for the financing of the works as managed by the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). However, this is far from being sufficient. An additional amount of 70 million Euro is needed to finance remediation activities in the seven identified priority sites in Central Asia. The aim of the EBRD fund is to merge and manage financial resources based on well-established financial rules.

Overall, the EU-led regional environmental remediation program serves various purposes to the benefit of the population of Central Asia. The aims of the programme are:

- To improve human health;
- To improve the quality of the environment;
- To promote economic development in particular to promote local employment;
- To promote regional cooperation;
- To maintain peace and stability in the region.

The work will contribute to the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In 2013, the UN already recommended financial support from the international community in order to bring solutions to the region. A new UN resolution is under preparation.

The detailed remediation plans are based on best practices used for similar sites in the EU and elsewhere. The plans were independently reviewed and approved. The techniques to be used are well known and tested.

**Background**

The EU efforts are part of an international programme towards environmental remediation in Central Asia. These efforts aim to rehabilitate radioactive and contaminated former uranium production sites. The plans aim to mitigate the environmental and public health risks faced by the people living near these sites but also to reduce the transboundary impact of the pollution.

The EU efforts on environmental remediation in Central Asia are part of the overall EU - Central Asia strategy. A new strategy is under preparation.

In addition to the 16 million Euro transferred to the EBRD Environmental Remediation Fund, the EU has already provided €15 million for detailed environmental impact assessments and feasibility studies at the seven priority sites:

- Min-Kush, Shekaftar and Mailuu-Suu in the Kyrgyz Republic;
- Degmay and Istoklol in Tajikistan;
- Charkesar and Yangiabad in Uzbekistan.

These sites are included in a Strategic Master Plan for uranium legacy sites as prepared under the leadership of the International atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The plan defines the priority uranium legacy sites and the estimated cost of the remediation work.

The EU also has funded a programme with United Nations Development Program (UNDP) to raise awareness among both the donor community and the local population on the remediation plans and
to increase awareness among stakeholders.

The countries concerned have signed agreements with the EBRD that will lay the foundation for the procurement of the projects based on EBRD rules and procedures. At first instance a Project Management Unit (PMU) is being set up in the Kyrgyz Republic.

The EBRD manages seven donor funds providing support to increase nuclear safety and reduce radiological risk in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. To date, 45 donor countries and institutions have pledged over €4.0 billion to EBRD-managed nuclear safety projects. The largest project is the transformation of Chernobyl into an environmentally safe and secure site.

For more information, please contact

- Carl Frosio: Carl.Frosio@ec.europa.eu EU Delegation Bishkek,
- MEP Michele Rivasi: michele.rivasi@europarl.europa.eu European Parliament,
- Martin Andersen, Senior Program Manager, European Commission, Brussels: martin.andersen@ec.europa.eu

**Detailed information and multimedia material can be found under following links:**

Brochure on Environmental Remediation in Central Asia (English):


Brochure on Environmental Remediation in Central Asia (Russian):


Strategic Master Plan for Environmental Remediation of Nuclear Legacy Sites in Central Asia:

www.eeas.europa.eu

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