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**Statement by Andrey Vasilyev,  
Officer in Charge of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe  
Ministerial Conference “Blue Diplomacy for Central Asia”  
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Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank the Federal Foreign Office for inviting the UNECE to contribute to this substantive high-level discussion on its Water Initiative for Central Asia.

The Berlin Process stands out among similar programs with its comprehensive approach to the problems of water resources management in Central Asia.

This approach is not only offering rich synergies among various directions of work and levels of interventions but is ideally suited to promote the integrated management of water resources.

The UNECE is a natural partner of GIZ in the implementation of the regional component of the Programme “Trans-boundary Water management in Central Asia”.

It is the custodian of several relevant international legal instruments, like the Water, Espoo and Industrial Accidents Conventions.

It is actively involved in Central Asia: among others it is supporting National Policy Dialogues on integrated water resources management in the framework of the EU Water Initiative and is the main driver of efforts to improve dam safety and to develop regional cooperation on water quality.

Let me share with you a few thoughts on how the UNECE sees possibilities for achieving sustainable progress in the continuation of the Berlin Process:

Piecemeal, short-term fixes are unlikely to bring sustainable solutions.

Only by taking into account economic, environmental and social aspects, that is the development of integrated management of water resources at the river basin, national and regional levels can this precious shared resource be managed in an efficient and rational manner.

Ministries and agencies responsible for different uses of water – agriculture, energy, environment, health and sanitation and so on – need to work closely together to develop coherent, optimal policies that take into account the needs of all sectors.

And countries need to work together to develop balanced and optimal regional solutions.

The UNECE is proposing to focus on the promotion of IWRM at all levels during the second phase of the Water Initiative.

International water law offers a solid basis for the resolution of disputes and the development of lasting cooperative solutions. But polemics in the press are not the best way for its application.

The UNECE Water Convention and other relevant legal instruments can be much more effectively implemented through dialogue and cooperation, which in turn requires bilateral and regional legal and institutional frameworks, as demonstrated by the successful joint management of the Chu and Talas Rivers by Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

For this reason the UNECE has offered and will continue to provide support to the modernization of the legal basis of IFAS, including all its organizations and institutions.

Water is a strategic issue for Central Asia.

It is so central to the economic development, social stability and security of the region as well as to the relations between the countries that any real change can be achieved only through the involvement of the highest level political decision makers.

This is well reflected by the fact that during the last two decades water and energy problems have regularly featured on the agenda of Central Asian summit meetings.

In view of this the UNECE combines expert level work with top level political consultations when promoting cooperation on water resources management.

The visit of Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to Central Asia or the numerous meetings of the Executive Secretary of the UNECE with the Presidents and Prime Ministers of these countries helped to generate much needed trust and political will.

Finally, Central Asian countries should be encouraged to see water resources management from the broad perspective of sustainable development, linking it to global efforts on climate change adaptation and mitigation, the development of a green economy, poverty reduction, food security and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

Increased efforts to achieve environmental sustainability in the Aral Sea Basin would be the first step in this direction.

This broad approach would help the region prepare itself for long-term challenges like irregular weather patterns and increasing water scarcity due to climate change and the effects of demographic and economic growth.

The UNECE, with other members of the UN family, works to facilitate the sustainable development of Central Asia.

The Program Component implemented by the UNECE during the first phase of the Water Initiative addressed perhaps the most complicated and politically sensitive issue of water resources management: regional cooperation.

Thanks to its top-level political mandate by the April 2009 Summit and the active involvement of several dozens of local experts and policy-makers it produced concrete, tangible results.

But what is even more important: it generated visible momentum exactly in those areas where further progress would empower the countries of the region to resolve their disputes and manage their shared water resources in an integrated, rational and efficient way.

The second phase of the Initiative, just introduced by Foreign Minister Westerwelle is much needed, since it could play a decisive role in securing further progress, building on the work already accomplished. UNECE stands ready to continue our cooperation so that to provide input to further work in this area.