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Executive Secretary attends ESCAP annual session in Bangkok



Ján Kubiš, UNECE Executive Secretary attended the 65th session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) that took place in Bangkok, 23-29 April.

At a high-level panel on the economic crisis on 28 April, Ján Kubiš said: "No region in the world is immune to the crisis and that concerns also the UNECE region, that comprises most developed economies of the world but also 18 ODA-eligible states. In this region extreme poverty had almost been eliminated by the end of 2007, but with higher food prices, falling employment opportunities, reduced remittances and strained safety nets, it is estimated by UNDP that some 10 million people have been pushed back into poverty."

He also underlined that developed economies too are suffering from raising unemployment and economic and social uncertainties and that notably rapid implementation of measures to re-establish a sound financial and banking system in developed countries, able to provide domestic and international credit, was a key to rapidly finding a way out of the crisis.

Noeleen Heyzer, Executive Secretary of ESCAP, who chaired the panel said that "the Asia-Pacific region has shown remarkable resilience to this crisis. This is due, in large part, to the wide-ranging regulatory reforms taken by countries in our region since the 1997 economic crisis."

However, she stressed that "one is to guard against trade protectionism. An early conclusion of the Doha round and more intraregional integration would provide a new impetus to economic recovery." She also called for more stable currency exchange rates in the region to prevent competitive devaluation in the face of declining exports and for intensified regional coordination and policy coherence.

In Bangkok, the Executive Secretary held a series of bilateral meetings with senior representatives from among ECE and ESCAP member States as well as with other participating high UN and international officials. ■

Water Convention asked to help improve flood management through pilot projects

From 2000 to 2008, at least 4.1 million people in the UNECE region were affected by serious flooding events. Floods do not respect borders – but transboundary cooperation can seriously mitigate their effects and floods can even have beneficial effects if appropriately managed through Integrated Flood Management.

To discuss these issues, a workshop on transboundary flood risk management was organized on 22-23 April in the framework of the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention), by the Governments of Germany and the Netherlands, the World Meteorological Organization and UNECE. It took place back-to-back with the second meeting of the Task Force on Water and Climate on 24 April.

The workshop aimed to provide a platform for an exchange of positive and negative experiences and lessons learned regarding transboundary flood risk management, especially between EU- and non-EU countries. It included presentations and discussion of 10 case studies from Central and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA). The case studies focused on joint flood forecasting and warning/ exchange of data, joint flood risk management planning and institutional and legal arrangements for cooperation.

All presenters highlighted the importance and challenges of cooperation in flooding events. For example, to address these challenges in the Sava river basin, the framework agreement on the Sava was complemented by a specific Protocol on flood



management. The common flood forecasting system recently created between the Czech Republic and Austria on the Morava river was considered so important by the downstream country Austria that one of its Czech founders was even awarded a prize in Austria for her engagement.

Finland and the Russian Federation have agreed on a discharge rule for Lake Saimaa and River Vuoksi where, in the case of a flood situation, discharge can be increased after consultations. If the Commission comes to the conclusion that changes in discharge have caused damage on the Russian side, the Finnish government will compensate for these.

However, numerous challenges for transboundary flood risk management still exist, especially in EECCA countries. These include the lack of a legal framework for cooperation in many cases (although cooperation



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Flood management (continued)

on a technical level often exists), lack of capacity and resources, lack of public participation and awareness, expected climate change impacts, etc.

The workshop concluded with a call for regional workshops, trainings and especially for pilot projects to improve transboundary flood risk management in transboundary basins in the UNECE region. These will be implemented within the programme of pilot projects on water and climate adaptation, discussed by the Task Force on Water and Climate on 24 April. The Water Convention is thus moving towards supporting climate change adaptation and disaster management “on the ground”. ■

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OFF THE PRESS



Sustainable development is a popular and important concept, but one that is open to a variety of interpretations. What all people agree on is that sustainable development is about improving human well-being. A more formal definition is given by the Brundtland Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development — “*Humanity has the ability to make development sustainable – to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.*”

How can we measure sustainable development? Many researchers in universities, environmental organizations, think-tanks, national governments and international agencies offered proposals for measuring sustainable development. This led to a proliferation of approaches and a wide spectrum of indicators, which testified to the difficulty of the challenge and at the same time called for a greater harmonization and comparability between countries.

To respond to this challenge, the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians created in 2005 a Joint UNECE/Eurostat/OECD Working Group on Statistics for Sustainable Development to develop a sound conceptual

framework towards measuring sustainable development based on capital.

This publication is the result of the Group's efforts. It thoroughly explores the capital approach to measuring sustainable development and compares the indicators that result from this approach with those in already existing national indicators sets. In this way, it draws the best from the conceptual work of researchers and the practical work of policymakers and statisticians.

It identifies good concepts and practices to assist national governments and international organizations in the design of sustainable development indicator sets and provides recommendations for further work. Sustainable development is a global issue, but after all the responsibility for achieving it rests mainly with nation states.

A new task force has been created to further pursue the conceptual development of the capital approach in identifying indicators to present the long-term dimension of sustainable development. ■

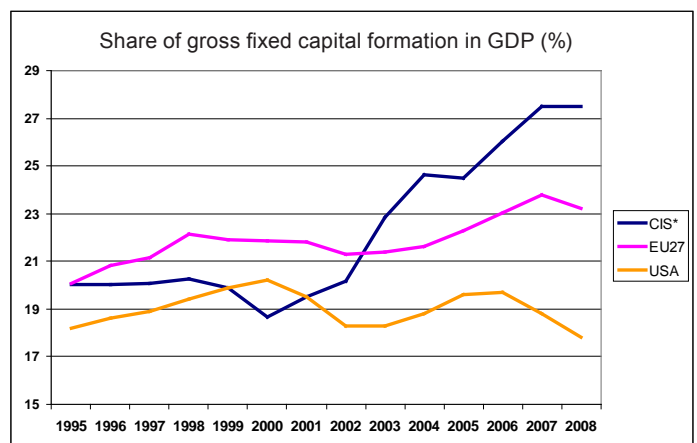
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FACTS AND FIGURES

Gross fixed capital formation consists of fixed assets acquired for longer term use in the production of goods and services. Fluctuations in the share of gross fixed capital formation in GDP are considered to anticipate future business activity. The investment rate started to decrease in the United States already in 2007, whilst in the EU the downturn did not happen until 2008. Among the CIS countries, the average investment rate stayed at the level of the previous year in 2008. The economic crisis unfolded in the same order: first in the United States, then in the EU countries, followed by the CIS countries by end-2008.

Since 2003 the average gross investment rate in the CIS countries has been significantly higher than in the EU and the United States. The highest investment rates, even more than 50% of GDP, were seen in Azerbaijan as a result of building up capacity for oil and gas production. Regardless of the need for investment to replace old capital in the CIS countries, their investment rates are expected to decline due to the credit and funding difficulties of enterprises. The impact of the current economic crisis on investment is likely to be even more evident in the EU and the United States. ■

Share of gross fixed capital formation in GDP highest in CIS countries



Source: UNECE Statistical Database (<http://www.unece.org/stats/data>), Eurostat and national statistics.