

**4<sup>TH</sup> ASEM ENVIRONMENT MINISTERS' MEETING  
ON SUSTAINABLE WATER AND FOREST MANAGEMENT  
ULAANBAATAR, MONGOLIA, 22 MAY 2012**

**Chairman's Summary**

1. As highlighted by the President of Mongolia, climate change is already affecting Mongolia together with other factors. The former nomadic lifestyle is being left behind and a **new concept for a green economy is being developed**. This situation is representative for many countries. Although the context in each country is different, experience sharing will benefit all. Continued discussions and agreements at the global level are needed. The meeting was an important opportunity to discuss ideas and proposals for the upcoming Rio+20 meeting. In Rio, the idea should be discussed to **establish an Inter-Governmental Panel on Drought and Desertification**.
2. **The European Union stressed that ambitious, action-oriented outcomes are needed at Rio +20**. These outcomes should include concrete goals for which proposals have already been prepared. They include making progress in REDD Plus and other initiatives and setting up policy frameworks and market instruments that effectively slow, halt and reverse deforestation and forest degradation and promote sustainable use of forests, as well as conservation and restoration. There is also a need to further develop and improve monitoring systems with a particular focus on reporting obligations. The EU and its member states have suggested a **global goal on water to be adopted in Rio with underlying targets to ensure universal access to water and sanitation** and sustainable water use through integrated water resource management and increased resource efficiency. Water is a key factor of economic development, there is therefore a clear link between water resources and social and human development. The major challenge we are facing today requires from our economies more rational and efficient use of our water supplies.
3. **Socio-economic and demographic factors pose the main challenges to sustainable water management** in the world. Water scarcity already affects many, and climate change has a growing impact. Water supply needs to keep up with population growth, as urbanisation puts increasing pressure on water resources. Water related disasters are also on the rise. In Europe, the number of extreme weather events and their costs rose significantly in the past decade. Many countries in Asia are among those at highest risk for extreme

weather events and floods, and many such events occurred in recent years. Better prevention measures can save costs of post-disaster assistance later. **Risk based approaches are needed** rather than event-based responses, including the development of early warning systems.

4. Each region has its own specific challenges, and **an international, integrated approach to water resource management is required**. Despite obvious differences between the countries, there are many common grounds for cooperation and experience sharing and there is a need to further develop multi-sectoral approaches.
5. Important issues facing the ASEM member states include the link between climate change and water management, challenges of waste water, the importance of water as a resource and transboundary water management. Important examples of transboundary cooperation and results of recent international conferences, where highlighted, which all should contribute to the Rio +20 discussions. In international and national discussions it is important to **take a holistic approach to water**. Government entities have to work together in a holistic way. More attention is needed for capacity building and financing mechanisms to make interventions sustainable.
6. The state of the European and Asian **forests** is of critical importance for both the economy and the environment. A lot of progress was made towards sustainable forest management, while challenges remain.
7. **In Europe, forest areas cover almost half of the land surface** and continue to grow. Around 1 percent of the forest is affected by forest damage, frequently caused by insects and diseases. Protected areas are gradually increased, while there is growing awareness of the importance of forest management for the protection of soil, water and infrastructure. It is expected that Europe will remain a net exporter of wood and forest products, driven by global demands.
8. The **Asian Forests**, estimated at 740 Million hectares, **have increased by 1.4 Million hectares per annum in the past decade**. At the same time deforestation continues in many countries. Population pressure continues to affect forests, and solutions must be in line with the principles of the green economy, which will promote further economic growth while safeguarding forests for future generations. The trans-boundary importance and the multiple functions of forests require strong cooperation between countries. The continued dialogue and cooperation are instrumental for enhanced implementation of global commitments and the achievement of internationally agreed objectives including the biological diversity of forests.

9. **Forests should be seen as a pillar for development.** The linkages between forestry, biodiversity and climate change need to be integrated into policies and programmes. Some countries already made progress with REDD+ and their experiences can be shared with others. Other approaches to using sustainable forest management as a tool to mitigate climate change also need to be explored further.
  
10. ASEM members were informed about the new initiative on **key Short-Lived Climate Pollutants (SLCPs)**, which are responsible for a substantial fraction of climate change, but which did not receive much attention in the past. Controlling these SLCPs will have immediate, multiple benefits for human well-being. Possible solutions have already been identified to reduce SLCPs. A **Climate and Clean Air Coalition to Reduce Short Lived Climate Pollutants** was launched in February 2012. Many countries already joined this coalition and it is open to the private sector and NGOs. All ASEM countries are encouraged to join.
  
11. The meeting was an opportunity to **highlight some of the unique challenges and opportunities countries like Mongolia face**, which include being a landlocked country, with challenges to reach the seas, while having low precipitation levels. At the same time, Mongolia is located at the junction of three major Asian water basins and is therefore a very important water source. This illustrates once again that countries need to collaborate on all levels to develop true green economies. Green loans can be one of the most important tools to support developing countries to pursue a sustainable development track. Countries need to take mutual responsibilities to protect and rehabilitate trans-boundary rivers and forests. A new mechanism can be developed by ASEM countries to designate high value forest regions. These forests should have a high capacity to arrest and mitigate carbon dioxide and follow a common management policy.

In the evening the participants attended the Ecoton, a new Mongolian environment and youth festival. On the second day participants visited Hustai National Park, to witness the successful re-introduction of the Przewalsky Horse into the wild and plant trees.