

## FLASH REPORT

### SWITCH-ASIA LAUNCH EVENT IN CENTRAL ASIA

On 5 July 2019 SCP Officials from policy and technical level, representatives from national governments, and European Commission Directorate Generals for Development and Cooperation (DG DEVCO) and EU Delegations, United Nations agencies, regional organisations as well as Business, Academia, NGOs, and MSMEs, came together for the SWITCH-Asia Launch Event in Central Asia, in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. The one-day event was supported through the SWITCH ASIA SCP Facility Programme.

Launched in 2007, the SWITCH-Asia programme has achieved more than a decade of progress on Sustainable Consumption and Production in 24 countries in the region. The programme has been extended to Central Asia in 2019.

The event was attended by over sixty EU and Central Asia participants and focused upon the exchange of experience, network development and further cooperation on challenges and opportunities related to SCP in Central Asia. Technical discussions were held on institutional and regulatory gaps and capacities, highlighting the importance and necessity for promoting SCP patterns in Central Asia, in order to support the five targeted countries' transition towards a low-carbon, resource-efficient and circular economy.

#### Key Observations

In his opening remarks, **Micha Ramakers**, Deputy Head of Unit for Middle East, Central Asia and South Asia, European Commission, clearly acknowledged that, *“sustainability in our societies is no longer simply about increasing efficiencies or complying with regulations—it is about making fundamental changes in the way business is done and the way the world consumes.”* **Eduard Auer**, head of the European Union Delegation to Kyrgyzstan, emphasized that *“Central Asia has a centuries-old tradition of bringing Europe and Asia together. Cooperation between the European Union and the region can bring real, tangible benefits, from stronger and diversified economies, to more job opportunities, and a more peaceful, secure region for all. The alignment of the new EU Strategy on Central Asia and SWITCH-Asia’s overall objectives was also recognised.”* In particular, the importance of supporting the private sector and small and medium-sized enterprises; turning environmental challenges into opportunities; sharing know-how on renewable energy and energy efficiency; cooperating on energy, water, environment and the use of natural resources; and stimulating regional exchanges on competitiveness and the business environment. **Alybaev Avtandil**, Deputy Minister of Economy, Kyrgyzstan, highlighted *“the benefits of shifting to green economy and the need for more responsible approaches. Countries in Central Asia are well-aware of the urgent need to switch to more sustainable production and consumption patterns and green economy. Being in a transition period towards green economy, the launching of the SCP SWITCH Asia in Central Asia is timely and very opportune”.*

The SWITCH-Asia programme was introduced by Alessandra Lepore, EU Switch-Asia Coordinator and Arab Hoballah, Team Leader SCP Facility. The SCP regional context in Central Asia was presented by the SCPF key expert for Central Asia, Zulfira Zirkina. Key themes such as policy and institutional issues; tools to support SCP (energy efficiency, sustainable procurement, eco-labelling); needs and challenges in communicating SCP related issues; lessons learnt from other countries in Asia, were addressed during the panel discussions.

Active discussions were led by the panel chairs with representatives and external speakers who deliberated and compared the respective jurisdictions and legal and policy approaches to tackling issues while at the same time important steps were taken by various countries in terms of adequate policies as well as by the private sector with regards to voluntary rating and labelling systems. Almost all countries are actively involved in the SDGs review process while developing green economy strategies, both providing a relevant foundations and opportunity for SCP to build on relevant knowledge and actions, looking for scaling up opportunities to further mainstream and deliver SCP and Green Economy.

The event concluded with a clear understanding of the relative strengths, weaknesses and ambitions of the five targeted Central Asian countries, as well as a common determination to further mainstream and deliver SCP and Green Economy.

International organisations such as UNEP, UNWTO, GGGI and CAREC, not only expressed satisfaction being associated with this launch but that are seriously looking for opportunities to work together in providing needed support to the countries.

## **Recommendations and Next Steps**

Among other outcomes, the following could be highlighted:

Further integration of SCP into overarching policy frameworks, commitment from governments to lead by example, stronger multistakeholders partnerships, and effective awareness raising efforts, particularly through well-trained media professionals, will be prerequisites for the promotion of inclusive sustainable development in Central Asia, and switching people's mindsets towards responsible consumption and production.

Necessity for the next SCP policy and actions related work in the region to consider ways in connecting with the environment and development strategy for Central Asia to be launched soon. If the expected green procurement and eco-labelling needs were frequently raised, while seriously considering effective promotion of resource and energy efficiency, through buildings and construction, nutrition and food safety, tourism development and integrated waste management, in particular food, plastics and chemicals.

Induce and support eco-innovation, policy dialogues on demand side management, inter-sector and inter-ministerial consultations and collaborations, with an active involvement of the business sectors, the MSMEs and young entrepreneurs.

## Follow-up Activities

Follow-up activities might include, but are not limited to:

Consultations between the EU, the EU Delegations, the NFP and the SCP Facility will consider next steps for national SCP multistakeholders consultations in the countries to have more in-depth discussions about challenges, opportunities and needs, better define the priorities for action, before elaborating related action plan. Such consultations are expected to lead to national dialogues in October-November for most probably Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, while these dialogues will be planned for early next year for Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.

DEVCO supported by the SCP Facility will circulate a more substantive report from the event, including conclusions from different sessions, discussions and recommendations for follow-up activities on how to enhance the collaboration and build an equal and strategic partnership.

Please find a few [photos](#); the [press statement](#) issued at the event; [online links](#) to the EU and EUD websites and social media platforms and initial press coverage. Separately enclosed is the t programme, including some background information and an overview of speakers.