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“GREEN BRIDGE” PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM AS A TOOL OF TRANSITION TO “GREEN ECONOMY”

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Ideas of consolidating the efforts of Asia and the Pacific countries on solving the actual issues of environmental protection and sustainable development are reflected in the topics of Ministerial Conferences for Environment and Development, Earth Summit on sustainable development Rio+20 (picture 1):



Picture 1 – Dynamics of promoting green growth ideas

At each of these conferences were delivered, discussed and made decisions on the implementation of the following priority areas.

- “Asian Action Plan on Human Environment” (1985, Bangkok, Thailand);
- “Regional Strategy on Sustainable Development. Contribution to the Earth Summit” (1990, Bangkok, Thailand);
- First Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe" (1991, Dobris, Czechoslovakia);
- Second Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe" (1993, Lucerne,

Switzerland);

- “To the model of sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific” (1995, Bangkok, Thailand);
- Third Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe" (1995, Sofia, Bulgaria);
- Fourth Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe" (1998, Aarhus, Denmark);
- “From the capacity to concrete actions” (2000, Kita-Kyushu, Japan);
- Fifth Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe" (2003, Kiev, Ukraine);
- “Environmentally safe development –“Green Growth” (2005, Seoul, South Korea);
- “Building Bridges to the Future” - The Pan-European Programme for Environmental Protection (2006, Belgrade);
- “Extension of Green Growth. Astana initiative” (2010, Astana, Kazakhstan);
- "Save water, grow green". Partnership Program "Green Bridge" (2011, Astana, Kazakhstan);
- “The future we want”. Partnership Program "Green Bridge" (2012, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil).

On the whole the process of environmental protection in Europe, Asia and the Pacific is aimed on solving environmental problems at national and regional levels. Transboundary environmental impacts, regional environmental and economic mechanisms for their implementation require further development. In this regard, Japan's initiative "For a healthy environment of cities" made it possible to involve 62 cities from 18 countries in Asia-Pacific region in efforts to control air and water pollution, technologies to minimize all forms of waste, wastewater treatment, promotion of local initiatives (2000, Kita-Kyushu, Japan).

Seoul Initiative "Green Growth" has set the wide range objectives on strengthening the capacity for the policy of “green” growth (2005, Seoul, South Korea). As a result, five political consultative forums have been conducted and 8 pilot projects have been implemented [1].

Further promotion of the concept of "green" growth is aimed at harmonizing the processes of sustainable economic growth in Europe, Asia and the Pacific, and was reflected in the documents of the Sixth Ministerial Conference for Environment and Development, Asia and the Pacific, 2010, Astana, Kazakhstan: Ministerial Declaration [2], Regional Action Plan up to 2015 [3], Astana initiative "Green Bridge") [4].

As noted in the reform plan of the "Environment for Europe” process (UNECE, January 29, 2009), the main priority of the reform is to develop interaction with other regional and subregional initiatives and processes on integration environmental and sectoral policies. In accordance with the reform plan of the process "Environment for Europe" (EfE), the results of EfE conferences may include statements, initiatives, agreements and commitments of ministers or interested parties on existing and emerging issues and / or for the specified subregions. Policy instruments, including strategies, action plans, guidelines, recommendations, best practices and lessons learned which are intended for presentation at the conferences of the UNECE region are also considered [5].

These principles have been already laid down at the first Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe" which produced a set of guidelines for European cooperation on the development of environmental programs for the region (1991, Dobris, Czechoslovakia).

At the Second Ministerial Conference, the declaration has been adopted, that defines political framework of the "Environment for Europe" process, a wide-range strategy to implement the Action plan for Central and Eastern Europe and survey programs of environmental efficiency of ecological activity in countries of transition economies have been approved (1993, Lucerne, Switzerland).

Third, Fourth and Fifth Ministerial Conferences "Environment for Europe" discussed the implementation phases of Action plan in the sphere of environmental protection in Central and Eastern Europe as an integral part of the political framework for cooperation in environmental protection in Europe with the participation of all sectors of civil society. In this case, Kiev

Conference has adopted an innovative "Environmental Strategy for countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia", and supported the efforts of Central Asia countries to develop Central Asian Initiative for the Environment, Water and Security "Invitation to Partnership". A number of other important decisions related to sustainable use and conservation of energy, water and land resources, biodiversity and improving education in sustainable development, harmonization of production and consumption has been adopted (1995, Sofia, Bulgaria, 1998, Aarhus, Denmark, 2003, Kiev, Ukraine).

As one of the most effective tools in solving environmental problems the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in environmental matters has been adopted and signed by 35 countries, two new Protocols to the Convention on Transboundary Air Pollution on long-range distances were adopted and signed by 33 countries and the European Community. At the Fifth Conference: the Framework Convention for the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians; protocols to the conventions of the European Economic Commission of the United Nations on Environmental Impact Assessment in a transboundary context; on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents and on Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes; on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers to the Aarhus Convention have been adopted and prepared for signature.

Sixth Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe" has been hold under the aegis of the "Bridges to the Future" (2007, Belgrade, Serbia). Ministers stressed the importance of reforming EfE process to ensure focused and oriented to the needs of regional policies, reflecting the changing of environmental and socio-economic conditions [6].

Thus, the "Environment for Europe" processes and environmental protection in Asia and the Pacific are aimed at encouraging further "greening" the economy and promotion of "green" growth. As a mechanism for integration and mutual reinforcement of these processes the Astana "Green Bridge" Initiative has been developed, which implementation is proposed to carry out as part of inter-regional EU-Asia-Pacific Partnership Program on promoting green growth policy.

The main function of the Partnership Program is to create favorable conditions for the Green Economy in Europe, Asia and the Pacific in order to further sustainable growth. The program was presented at the Seventh "Environment for Europe" Ministerial Conference in 2011 in Astana and at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012 in Brazil [7].

The growing global threat of climate change, the problems of energy, water and food security, and regional conflicts require new solutions and integrate the efforts of the world community. This is reflected in the global idea of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio +20: "The Future We Want", which based on the concept of transition to a "green" economy.

In the main outcome of Rio +20 Partnership Program is reflected: "We welcome regional and cross-regional initiatives for sustainable development, such as the Green Bridge Partnership Program, which is voluntary and open for participation by all partners" [8].

Opportunities and priorities of the Partnership Program realization is aimed at creation / improving favorable socio-economic conditions to support and promote the sustainable development way. Involvement all interested parties in "green" growth. Improving the consumer awareness on environmentally sustainable products, services, including traditional lifestyles, cultural and spiritual values. Introduction in education the basic principles of "green" growth, formation and implementation of regional and sub regional projects on education. Promotion of nature use mechanisms based on the principle "polluter pays" taking into account specific of countries. Creating and replicating successful models of partnership with private sector, encouraging green investment and innovation, information exchange on the implementation of "polluter pays" principle, the transfer of know-how and technology to achieve sustainable "green" consumption and production patterns. Consideration the possibility for environmental costs accounting into market prices and economic and market instruments use. Public awareness and investment in strategies and action plans for climate change adaptation.

Based on a wide range of goals the realization of Partnership Program includes several steps (picture 2).



Picture 2. Stages of implementation mechanisms for the transition to "green" growth

2011-2012 - preparation of proposals for the UN Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio +20. Contribution to the implementation of the Program of the Millennium Development Goals: 2011-2015. Implementing decisions of Earth Summit Rio +20 and the Millennium Development Goals: 2012 - 2020.

Main tasks of implementing the Partnership Program are strengthening regional cooperation to promote environmentally sustainable economic growth, or "green" growth, as a prerequisite for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Promoting of collaborative research to develop and implement strategies and tools for the "green" growth, including environmentally safe technologies and access to them. Promoting of networks for knowledge, experience and results exchange, lessons learned in projects related to sustainable development. Enhancing technical assistance and exchange of information and experience in the field of "green" economics and international trade; the implementation of the Astana "Green Bridge" initiative and low-carbon development, including "green" growth in the context of global trends, the development of treaties on climate change, eco-efficient use of natural resources and investment in ecosystem services. Promoting "green" growth principles and the "Bridges to the Future" process under implementation of Astana "Green Bridge" Initiative and Partnership Program.

In the implementation of the Partnership Program are expected to participate on a voluntary and equal basis of states, relevant bodies and agencies of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, UN Economic Commission for Europe, UN and multilateral financial institutions, intergovernmental organizations, private sector, NGOs and civil society and other interested parties (picture 3).



Picture 3 - Partners of the Program

Program participants can provide comprehensive support, including financial and technical assistance for the implementation of Astana "Green Bridge" Initiative which aims at development of regional, inter regional and inter sectoral cooperation in accordance with the changing political and economic conditions, environmental priorities and the growing needs of countries.

It is assumed that developed countries can take a leadership role in promoting and transferring knowledge, experience, new technologies and best practices. Assist developing countries in the implementation of the main directions of the Initiative: environmentally efficient use of natural resources and investment in ecosystem services, low carbon development and adaptation to climate change, sustainable cities, promoting green business and green technology, promoting sustainable lifestyles and improving life quality.

One of the priorities of the Partnership Program as a tool to promote the concept of "green growth" and "green economy" is the participation of governments to reduce the rate of degradation and environmental rehabilitation; optimal use of natural resources due to the "green" policies and new approaches; investment for the development of "green economy". Implementation best practices, methodologies, legal and economic instruments of "green growth". Development of strategies and action plans to attract "green" investment and innovative financing policy of "green growth". Creation favorable environment for investment to "green" economy. Building information databases on "green" economy, technologies and mechanisms of "green" financing. Carrying out thematic workshops and training courses, schools, development of websites, portals and community involvement.

Contributions of international organizations to the Partnership Program could be aimed at development of economical tools, operational and financial mechanisms. Development projects on transfer of technology and "green" financing. Development criteria to select more effective projects. Determine the potential for green growth and ranking of countries. Development of strategies and mechanisms for resource mobilization. Training, seminars and workshops on mechanisms of "green" investments and innovative approaches. Development a communication strategy, media plans. Strengthening the capacity of countries to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and implement decisions of the Johannesburg Action Plan and Rio +20 on sustainable Development.

Potential risks and barriers in implementation of Partnership Program are due to lack of interaction between regions, countries and agencies to attract investment in the development of "green" economy. High ratio of "brown" (traditional) technology to "green" (innovative) technology in Asia and the Pacific. These issues can be solved by expansion of integration based on the organization of meetings, joint activities, trainings on the policy of "green growth", harmonize approaches and dissemination of results of joint projects. The transfer of "green" technologies is difficult because of lack of agreed arrangements with partners on mechanisms of resources mobilization. The solution may be to increase funding for the Program through the "green" budget of countries, grants, technical assistance, profitable investments, loans, deposits and donor trust funds. Clear procedures and transparency of Partnership Program implementation and of project financing mechanisms. Providing feedback to the participants in the Program for the implementation of projects and the progress made.

Lack of awareness on the issues of short-term and long-term objectives of the Partnership Program can be addressed in an open discussion of the benefits of the Program's objectives on web-sites, forums, meetings on implementation of projects to introduce "green" growth with business organizations, non-governmental organizations, educational, academic, and research institutes.

"Green" growth is a key strategy for achieving the Millennium Development Goals and sustainable development through the combined effect addressing the issues of poverty and environmental sustainability.

The transition to "green" growth requires a fundamental transformation of economy and society models. It is necessary to reconstruct and transform the economic structure focusing on unsustainable patterns of energy and resources, increasing greenhouse gases emissions on the structure, which is based on the concept of eco-efficiency and low carbon development. This approach will ensure eco-efficiency and resilience to climate change, and will promote viable and dynamic ecosystems.

It is necessary to convert the pricing policy, lifestyle, technology and regulatory framework to ensure the orientation of economies into the eco-efficiency. Quality of economic ("green") growth can be achieved through increased resistance to sharp fluctuations in oil prices, improved competitiveness and creation jobs.

In the social sphere, the quality of development can be achieved by the inclusion of all segments of society in the processes of "green" growth, ensuring equitable distribution of income and improving quality of life and welfare.

Partnership Program as a tool of the "green" economy / "green" growth will help countries to move towards sustainable development models. To move to the "green" growth, the governments need to eliminate: the price gap between the environmental and the market price, long term benefits and short-term cost. Consumers have to pay full price for the use of resources, for example, the price of consumed hydrocarbon energy resources should be included costs associated with the impact of climate change.

The transition to "green growth is possible only in case of a harmonious cooperation and partnership between the public sector, private sector and the public. Governments need to create favourable environment for private sector by providing support and promote "green" business and technology, as well as support for vulnerable groups.

The transition to green economy includes: the transition from "quantity" to "quality" of growth ("green" growth) with a focus on creating jobs.

To ensure the functioning of "Green Bridge" Partnership Program it is necessary to develop: mechanisms of coordination and management of the program and projects, including financing mechanisms and transfer of technologies; package of investment and strategic projects for the development of "green" economy; the agreement between the interested partners.

The private sector should be a full party to this Agreement and to be able to finance projects on long-term interests, including the receipt of income from conservation and growth of natural capital and ecosystem services.

Participation of international organizations in the Agreement is also necessary to provide a neutral platform for trust and cooperation, international experience, technical and financial assistance, as well as international guarantors of the obligations of the parties.

Public organizations could play an important role to ensure the transparency of decisions, as well as engaging the general public in the projects, support projects on education activities.

Interested countries of the Program (governmental, private sectors and international organizations) with the participation of public could create through a partnership the necessary conditions for effective integration of economy and ecology.

The outcomes of the Partnership Program "Green Bridge" will facilitate transition from nature destroying economies to establish a mutually supportive environmental and economic systems. The establishment of institutional structures based on new management tools that eliminate the existing short-term and fragmented approaches to sustainable development. Development new mechanisms for reasonable and long-term use of natural resources, conservation and restoration of vital ecosystems. Ensure slowing down the process of environmental degradation and the suspension of the wasteful use of natural resources by replacing the traditional unsustainable models of production and consumption in the models of "green" economy. Integrating efforts to achieve common goals that are meaningful not only for the countries and region, but also to the entire international community. Creating conditions for more efficient use of global positive experience and capacity, strengthening the security issues.

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