

PECE LAUNCH EVENT – ELLIOT MORLEY’S SPEECH

I am delighted to see such a range of organisations come together today to celebrate the launch of PECE. This is a tremendous demonstration of our collective commitment both to sustainable development and to reaching out beyond the EU to the wider European region. Most importantly, this is a partnership aimed at delivery, whose success will be measured through projects that deliver results across the “EECCA” region.

The UK Government is committed to playing an active part in PECE. Defra, along with DFID, FCO and the Cabinet Office, have signed up as founding members. We have worked over the last year to draw up a mission statement, objectives and principles and test them through a series of pilot projects. A number of other partners have been involved in this process, including Groundwork and LEAD international, to whom we owe a special word of thanks. We wanted especially to discover whether there was an appetite for a multi-stakeholder partnership aimed at this region. The fact that we now have 34 founding members is, I think, proof enough that the answer is a resounding yes.

I am also very pleased to see that the list of founding members includes two of Defra’s key delivery and advisory agents – the Environment Agency and the JNCC – as well as the British Council who have played such a valuable role in supporting my Department’s work in the region. So one way or another Government – and, just as importantly, local government - is well represented here today and ready to play its part.

PECE is not however, a Government-only initiative. It is a full-blown tri-sector partnership, making the most of the respective skills and knowledge of the public sector, business and civil society to help protect the environment and promote sustainable development in the EECCA region.

The effectiveness of multi-stakeholder partnerships has been proven. Following the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002, the UK launched several partnerships that have taken on such challenges as water in Africa, renewables and energy efficiency and sustainable tourism. They work because they bring together the right mix of talents. And they are innovative because they require Government to reach out to business and civil society as never before. We all know that without properly engaging the private sector we will not achieve more sustainable patterns of development, and this is all the more important in those societies and economies that are undergoing rapid change.

So why does this region– Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia – matter to us so much? There are several reasons. This region comprises some of the world’s poorest countries and also some of its most rapidly growing economies, which are major consumers of natural resources. In short, it faces some of the most severe economic, environmental and social challenges in the world.

These countries, with a combined land area over 5 times greater than that of the EU, are in the process of becoming our new neighbours in Europe. We also share a responsibility for, and interest in, their development, as fellow members of the UNECE region. We are politically committed, through the Environment for Europe process, through WSSD and our other international targets, to helping this region develop and develop sustainably.

You have had an illuminating insight this afternoon of how PECE has been put into practice in the Ukraine. Defra has part-funded two other pilot projects in Russia and Azerbaijan, which are showing similar successes, and which are briefly described in the Prospectus.

But this is just a start. I am delighted to announce that, following a further round of applications to the Environment for Europe Fund, Defra has agreed to co-fund a further 4 PECE projects.

- Living Earth and Shell will work with a Russian NGO, Eco-Accord, to train local government officials in Sakhalin, Russia. Trainees will develop the knowledge and skills needed to work effectively with the private sector and civil society on sustainable development. The programme will engage an existing Sakhalin academic institution to accredit future training programmes, ensuring its long term sustainability.
- Groundwork will lead an implementation phase of their initiative in Ukraine, building on the existing PECE pilot project. Working in partnership with the Donetsk Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Roza Vetrov NGO, it aims to facilitate local project implementation by the business members in this industrial region.
- The Natural Resources Institute, in partnership with UK and Kazakh organisations, will lead the third project. The overall purpose of the project is to enhance the livelihoods of poor and vulnerable people whose health is affected by contaminated environments, in the Semipalatinsk region of Kazakhstan. This region, approximately the size of Wales, is one of the ex-Soviet Union's main nuclear weapons testing sites. More than 450 nuclear weapons were exploded there over a 40 year period, from 1949. The project will build on existing environmental educational initiatives and ensure their sustainability.
- Finally, LEAD International will carry out a partnership project in Azerbaijan. Organisations from the private and voluntary sectors will deliver a series of projects that will use Renewable Energy technology to improve the quality of life for communities located along the route of the BTC and South Caucasus oil pipelines. In addition the project will support a programme of environmental education and awareness raising activities.

These projects are excellent illustrations of the principle of PECE – bringing together the skills and resources of different sectors to protect the environment and promote sustainable development. I look forward to hearing of their progress.

I am also pleased to announce that Defra will provide a further £250,000, from the Environment for Europe fund, to co-fund PECE projects next financial year. A call for project proposals will be sent to members, for submission in May.

However, I do want to make it very clear that Defra does not see itself as funding all PECE projects. That would limit the potential of the partnership from day one. So, whilst we are committed to playing our part, we hope that all partners will look seriously at all the funding possibilities, including internationally, in order to make this partnership a success.

Many of you here are already members of PECE. I hope today has strengthened your commitment to the initiative and will inspire you to actively participate. If you are not yet a member, I hope that today has shown you convincing evidence of how PECE can bring significant benefits to its partners, as well as to the EECCA region. I urge you to consider joining us as we work together for a sustainable future.