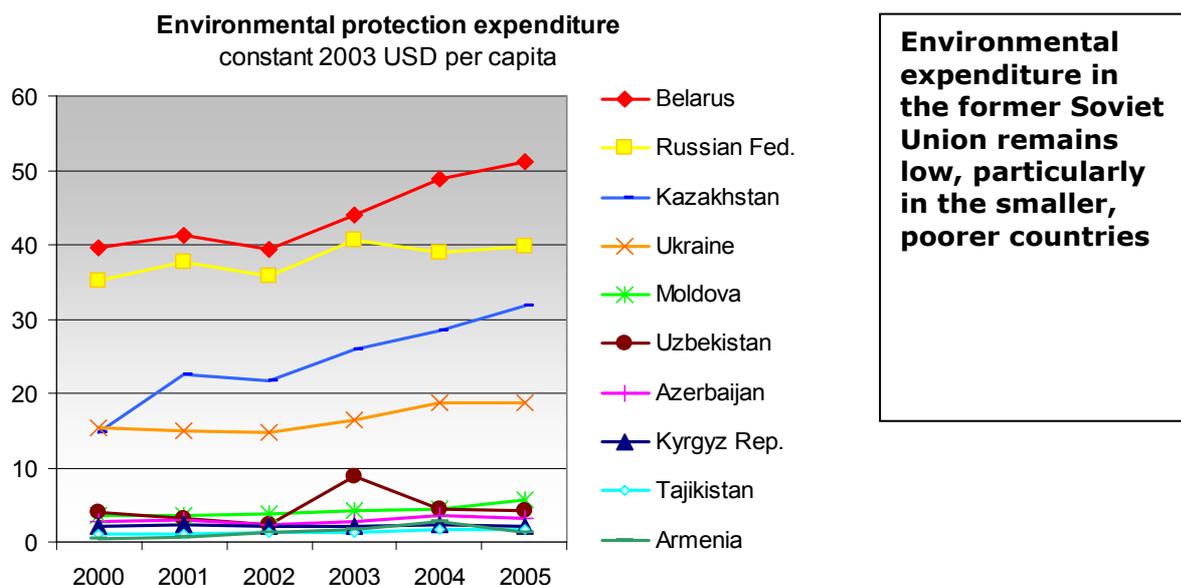


OECD urges former Soviet States to accelerate environmental reforms

In Russia 47 million people are exposed to high concentrations of nitrous dioxide. Half the population in rural Tajikistan, and one-third in Moldova, lack access to clean water. Leaded petrol is sold legally in Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. Many of these problems can be traced back to a common Soviet legacy that includes polluting industries, inadequate infrastructure, and outdated environmental management approaches.

A new OECD-led report “Policies for a Better Environment – Progress in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia” finds that while the region’s economy is growing at 7% per year, environmental policy reforms are not keeping pace. OECD, with the World Bank, UNDP, UNECE, UNEP, WHO and seven regional organisations, has examined the recent environmental performance of 12 eastern European and central Asian countries. Though the report documents many positive actions, such as a growing public voice in environmental decision-making, it concludes that progress is slow and disjointed. While countries in the region have legal and policy frameworks, they do not implement or enforce regulations and spend too little on environmental investments.



Note: Environmental protection expenditure in OECD countries typically exceeds USD 100 per capita and per year. As share of GDP, expenditure in the richest EECCA countries is comparable to the OECD average.

The report recommends steps to ensure that environmental protection and economic growth go hand-in-hand. Countries should make better use of market-based instruments to provide the right incentives to producers and consumers. Though energy intensity in the region is three times higher than in western Europe, these countries are not actively promoting energy efficiency measures. Financing for initial investments in energy efficiency could be mobilised from international markets and generate good returns. The region has the potential to capture up to 40% of the global carbon market, yet its submissions to the Clean Development Mechanism represent less than 1% of global submissions.

The limited support provided by western countries and international organisations has proven catalytic but is declining. Progress in this region will be much slower than in other former Soviet-bloc countries where EU subsidies for new members have stimulated environmental improvements in the last 10 years.

The report provides 63 concrete recommendations in areas ranging from biodiversity conservation to environmental education, as well as a 9-point plan to accelerate environmental reforms. It calls on each country to develop a clear vision of its environmental future, together with more realistic implementation strategies, investments in new skills and engagement of stakeholders.

The OECD-led report complements two others: one on environmental quality in the pan-European region prepared by the European Environment Agency; the other on environmental policy in South East Europe prepared by the United Nations Development Programme. The three reports were jointly launched on the first day of a pan-European conference of environment ministers taking place in Belgrade (Serbia) on 10-12 October.

For further information or to obtain a copy of the report, journalists are invited to e-mail news.contact@oecd.org

Note: The 12 countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) are: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.