

Civil society criticises EBRD's Public Information Policy

On 27 April 2011 the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) held a public consultation in Moscow with civil society organisations and other interested parties on revising the bank's Public Information Policy (PIP). Representatives of civic organisations from Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Mongolia took part in the meeting. The EBRD provides project financing for banks, industries and businesses in a vast region, stretching from Eastern Europe to Central Asia. A



number of projects involve substantial environmental and social risks and the bank's PIP defines to a large extent the scope of public influence on such projects.

During the meeting the proposed PIP and the bank's activities as a whole were heavily criticised. The EWNC coordinator Andrey Rudomakha argued that the draft policy does not provide for timely and sufficient information to the public about projects incurring risks to society and the environment. A positive change would require the provision of detailed information about risky projects to the greatest possible number of stakeholders as early as possible. According to Mr Rudomakha such steps would contribute to the sustainability of the bank's operations.

WWF's representative, Mikhail Babenko, suggested to the bank to reconsider its attitudes towards the public and accept a Public Engagement Policy instead of PIP to secure genuine public involvement in the bank's decision making. Said Yakhyoev from Bank Information Center asserted that EBRD's document is outdated and lags behind the public information practices of other international financial institutions, such as the World Bank. Andrey Andreev from Legal Initiative, Kazakhstan, criticised the blurred definition of many articles in the draft document, giving way to withholding important information from the public on the grounds of confidentiality. He maintained that many projects in the oil and gas sector in Kazakhstan, supported by the bank, have brought large areas into a state of environmental disaster. Many other representatives of civic organisations expressed their criticism during the discussions.

The new Public Information Policy will be accepted in the autumn of 2011. Civil society organisations hope that the bank will take into account the serious remarks made during the consultations and will amend the policy document towards enhancing transparency and accountability and fostering good governance in its activities, so as to promote sustainable development in the region.