



**Hellenic Presidency  
of the European Union**



**World Bank**

**International Conference on**  
"Sustainable Development for Lasting Peace:  
Shared Water, Shared Future, Shared Knowledge"

## **ATHENS DECLARATION**

"Actions to Promote Sustainable Management of  
Transboundary Water Resources in the  
Southeastern Europe and Mediterranean Regions"

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION**

**May 6-7, 2003**

**Astir Palace Hotel, Vouliagmeni  
Athens, Greece**

## **ATHENS DECLARATION RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION**

Vouliagmeni, Athens, Greece  
May 7, 2003

***The Conference adopted the following "Athens Declaration" concerning "Shared Water, Shared Future, Shared Knowledge." The Declaration provides a framework for a longer-term process to support cooperative activities for the management of shared water resources in the Southeastern Europe and Mediterranean regions.***

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

1. At the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) held in Johannesburg during August-September 2002, the international community recognized that to achieve our goal of sustainable development we have to revisit, reorient and enhance our efforts at the international, regional and national level to promote peaceful and mutually beneficial management of our shared natural resources. Environmental security is at the core of a peaceful coexistence and collaboration between peoples. The development of a diplomacy for environment and sustainable development can promote cooperation on environmental issues, support alleviation of the looming global water crisis and contribute to poverty reduction.

2. The Summit recognized that a water crisis, associated with both the quantity and quality of water, is foreseeable in the future. It could affect every aspect of life, from ecosystems and the environment, to food security, to health, human rights and cultural heritage. Such a crisis could shape significantly the policies and politics within and among countries, which are at different levels of economic development; give rise to serious stress within countries; and may provoke conflicts at various levels. The WSSD Plan of Implementation includes the target for national integrated water resources management (IWRM) and water use efficiency plans to be developed by 2005.

3. In the Southeastern Europe and Mediterranean regions, both surface and ground water resources are under various natural and man-made pressures. Since these resources often need to be shared among many users there exist risks for conflict as well as opportunities for cooperation and conflict prevention. To address these issues, the Hellenic Presidency of the European Union, acting through the Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, organized jointly with the World Bank an International Conference on "Sustainable Development for Lasting Peace: Shared Water, Shared Future, Shared Knowledge" focused on cooperative management of trans-boundary waters. The Conference was conducted in collaboration with the Hellenic Ministry for Environment, Physical Planning and Public Works.

4. The Conference provided a forum, during the International Year of Freshwater, to share lessons learned and identify the mechanisms that can be used to increase effective regional cooperation, promote sharing of benefits and assist in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and Johannesburg targets. The organizers viewed the event as a sub-regional contribution to the ongoing global dialogue on water issues—a building block in the continuum Marrakech–Hague–Bonn–Johannesburg–Kyoto—of high level meetings on water resources management. They also noted the importance of the WEHAB approach of the WSSD, European Union

Water Initiative and the recent Kyoto Ministerial Declaration. It was designed to provide input to the Sustainable Development Strategy for the Mediterranean to be discussed at the Mediterranean Commission for Sustainable Development (MCSD) in Dubrovnik (May 14-16, 2003); the Kiev "Environment for Europe" Conference (May 21-23, 2003); and the G-8 Summit in Evian (June 1, 2003).

5. The Conference served as a platform to assemble leaders, experts and civil society representatives from the countries of Southeastern Europe and the Mediterranean regions and beyond to share lessons learned and identify the mechanisms that can be used to increase effective regional cooperation and promote sharing of benefits from the cooperative management of transboundary waters. The Conference resulted in the adoption of the Athens Declaration, which provides a framework for a longer-term process to support cooperative activities for the management of shared water resources in the Southeastern Europe and Mediterranean regions.\*

## II. CHALLENGES – SHARED WATER, SHARED FUTURE, SHARED KNOWLEDGE

6. The Conference examined the challenges presented by the potential for international and domestic conflicts as a result of water scarcity and inadequate cooperation in the management of shared waters, and evaluated ways that these shared water resources can instead become a catalyst for cooperation—presenting an opportunity rather than a constraint for development. It also provided a forum to share lessons learned and identify mechanisms that can be used for better regional cooperation and sharing of benefits.

7. The Conference reviewed the experience with transboundary water resources management in three complementary areas: river basin management; lake basin management; and shared aquifer management. In addition, it considered long-term development trends, legal instruments and institutional developments in the concerned regions; these in turn were linked to socio-economic developments that can influence the broader setting in which cooperative programs for transboundary water resources management are undertaken. It recognized the importance of development of water resources for drinking water supply, sanitation, food production, water storage and renewable energy. The economic benefits of water resources management and development were seen as necessary for responsible growth and poverty reduction. The vital role played by aquatic ecosystems and their biodiversity received emphasis given their importance to sustainable development and nature conservation.

8. ***Transboundary Water Management.*** Transboundary water management activities are being undertaken at a number of locations:

- *Progress to Date.* Experience with transboundary water resources management in the Southeastern Europe and Mediterranean regions includes successful programs that have been initiated in a variety of surface water and shared aquifer management settings and which provide models for future actions. The Danube River Basin Program and the Nile Basin Initiative constitute good examples of broad based cooperation, while the Nestos River and Lake Ohrid provide examples of successful bilateral cooperation for management of a shared resource.

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\* This Declaration, as adopted, has not been formally negotiated under the established procedures of the United Nations.

- *Major Challenges.* While progress has been made in a number of transboundary water resources management issues within the two regions, these initiatives need to be complemented by activities for the management of adjacent transboundary river basins, transboundary lake basins and shared groundwater aquifers. In many cases these activities should be combined with improved land use practices and integrated coastal zone management.
- *Important Linkages.* Measures should be taken to increase efforts for sustainable management of shared aquifers which are an important component of the hydrological system, giving special attention to improving the legislative framework for their management. Expanded efforts need to be made to link the management of river basins and groundwater with the coastal zone, consistent with integrated approaches to resource management.

9. ***Shared Water*** Improved management of shared water provides an opportunity to benefit cooperating countries:

- *Integrated Water Resources Management.* Transboundary water resources management activities can support comprehensive actions for policy and planning, management measures, investments of a variety of types and scales, and institutional strengthening and human resources development activities.
- *Preventive Measures.* Transboundary activities, at the policy, planning and technical levels, should include preventive measures such as water conservation programs or land use planning to protect aquifer recharge zones. Environmental impact assessments should be prepared for water management projects with significant potential impacts. The use of preventive measures is critical to address major management challenges linked to current and future social and economic development and in many cases are considered the most cost effective intervention. Major opportunities exist to incorporate such measures for water management, including the transboundary dimension, in the context of physical, economic and environmental planning processes. The precautionary principle, which support risk avoidance, can be used as an important management tool.
- *Curative Measures.* The use of preventive measures should be complemented by carefully identified and costed curative measures to restore water quality and aquatic habitats such as investments in wastewater treatment or wetland restoration. Often, these interventions need to be undertaken in a phased manner due to the high investment and operational costs involved, the limited access that countries and communities have to resources for capital investments, and the financial implications to users for meeting recurrent costs.
- *Use of Economic Instruments and Incentives.* The application of economic instruments and incentives, at the national and local level, was noted as a tool for effective water management. This includes the use of realistic pricing of water, especially for agriculture, in accordance with the “user pays” and “polluter pays” principles, with proper provisions to protect the poor. These measures, while challenging to implement, are necessary to internalize the value of water and reduce externalities that encourage irrational and wasteful use of water resources.
- *Water Conservation and Demand Management.* Balancing competing water uses presents a major challenge. Appropriate education and public awareness activities in combination with a wide range of technical interventions—including water

conservation technologies and practices and appropriate, careful recycling and reuse of properly treated wastewaters—together with economic instruments such as pricing and incentives, will facilitate conservation of water resources and promote demand management among all major user groups.

- *Watershed and Flood Management.* Management and conservation of watersheds for river and lake basins and the recharge areas for aquifers remains an important area for transboundary cooperation. Flood management, especially in South-eastern Europe, presents a major challenge and opportunity for such cooperation, through coordinated actions such as forecasting, monitoring, and early warning systems, combined with appropriate management measures.
- *Ecosystem Management and Wetland Conservation.* Management, conservation and restoration of aquatic habitats and their biodiversity, especially wetlands, are increasingly recognized as cost effective preventive and curative measures for water management at the transboundary level; examples of such measures include establishment of protected areas and rehabilitation of degraded wetlands. Throughout Southeastern Europe and the Mediterranean, a range of actions can be taken to protect these valuable ecosystems and to ensure that they have a prominent place in management programs. In water resources planning and water allocation processes, recognition needs to be given to the environment as a priority use category.

10. ***Shared Future.*** Effective management of transboundary water is an important element of a shared future:

- *A Role for Diplomacy.* The Conference noted that environmental diplomacy could be the cornerstone of a proactive approach and a policy instrument to facilitate dialogue between peoples, thus contributing to international and regional cooperation to support sustainable development and to avoid conflict. It is recognized that such diplomacy, at a variety of levels and using a number of mechanisms, could promote environmental interests and perspectives in the medium and long term. It could also assist in formulation and negotiation of bilateral and multilateral agreements concerning transboundary waters, within the wider foreign policy context.
- *Key Resources for Sustainable Development and Responsible Growth.* The effective management of transboundary water resources is necessary at the global level and central to sustainable development in the Southeastern Europe and Mediterranean regions. Actions should be taken in a coordinated way at the regional, national and local level by a variety of stakeholders to assure the long-term ability of these shared resources to support human and natural uses in a compatible manner. Water management is a pillar for responsible growth, a development approach that is receiving increasing support since it combines economic growth with social equity and environmental and social sustainability.
- *Changes in Attitudes and Behavior.* To meet many of the water management challenges in the Southeastern Europe and Mediterranean regions will require changes in institutional and public attitude and behavior. Management of these shared resources must place greater emphasis on making their use sustainable by involving citizens and civil society organizations and making water an issue for everybody.

- *Consensus Building.* The processes used for development, planning and implementation of transboundary water management activities provide mechanisms to support consensus building on shared objectives for sustainable development. Active and meaningful participation of a wide range of stakeholders will contribute to developing consensus on many aspects of such activities and facilitate their realization at the ground level.
- *Sustained Commitment.* Sustained political commitment and public support are necessary for successful management of surface and groundwater resources in both national and transboundary settings. Time and patience are needed for management programs, especially those focused on restoration, which require continuity and long-term time frames for visible results.
- *Resource Mobilization.* Realization of effective water resources management at the transboundary, national and local levels will require increased funding for the development of new infrastructure and rehabilitation of existing infrastructure. The size of demands for investment, even with successful demand management and conservation programs, will require: funding from national and local governments; international financial institutions and donors; and through innovative financing approaches such as Public Private Partnerships (PPP) and Build, Operate and Transfer (BOT) involving the private sector.
- *Broad Based Partnership.* Experience from within the Southeastern Europe and Mediterranean regions as well as others identified the critical need for the development of broad based partnerships for success in cooperatively addressing transboundary water management as a key element of sustainable development. It is important that such partnerships be inclusive and provide opportunity for a diversity of parties including organizations, groups and individuals to bring their skills and experience together to develop, implement and achieve water resources management objectives.

11. ***Shared Knowledge.*** The development, dissemination and application of shared knowledge provides the basis for transfer and application of experience between parties and facilitates the identification and management of current and emerging issues:

- *Significant Opportunities.* Significant opportunities exist for development, dissemination and application of knowledge concerning both management of transboundary water resources and the broader legal, social and economic setting in which these resources are used by both people and nature. A multiplicity of institutions concerned with these issues exists in the Southeastern Europe and Mediterranean regions and greater use can be made of available skills.
- *Economic and Social Dimension.* The management of transboundary water resources requires full recognition of the complex linkages with planned and unplanned economic and social development. The approaches used for planning and management of transboundary water activities in the two regions can benefit from greater participation of organizations, groups and individuals with skills and experience that complement those of the parties more traditionally involved in these issues.

- *Emerging Trends.* The Conference noted the importance of recognizing and addressing emerging economic and social trends in identifying, planning and implementing activities for transboundary water management. The dynamic nature of population growth in many areas, significant population declines in other areas, changes in the physical distribution of population and the expansion of demand for water in rapidly growing coastal communities all provide examples of the major challenges facing planners and managers of water resources at the national and transboundary levels.
- *Climatic and Hydrologic Variability.* A major emerging trend for transboundary water management is climatic and hydrologic variability, which presents a new level of complexity for monitoring, reporting, planning and management. Such factors, which need better study and documentation, contribute to changes in watershed management requirements. They also have impacts on drought and flood management and contribute to the desertification, soil erosion, habitat destruction and biodiversity loss already affecting a number of countries.
- *Legal Instruments.* The use of legal instruments, in the form of global and regional conventions, multilateral and bilateral agreements and other instruments will continue to provide frameworks for cooperation in the management of transboundary water resources and will be continuously adapted to the evolving needs of the cooperating countries. A wide range of planning and management activities in this area can; however, be initiated prior to legally binding instruments being negotiated and agreed between cooperating parties.
- *Engaging New Actors in Transboundary Issues.* The connections between foreign and domestic policy bring new actors to the fore. In order to adequately address global and regional environmental threats, including those to water resources, environmental diplomacy requires an unprecedented degree of cooperation among governments, international agencies, the private sector and the full array of civil society organizations. It also calls for an interdisciplinary approach, which surpasses the limits of traditional diplomacy.
- *Institutional Strengthening and Capacity Building.* In the Southeastern Europe and Mediterranean regions significant needs exist for institutional strengthening and capacity building to address the opportunities and challenges raised by transboundary water management. These activities can take many forms and should be directly linked with the overall development of institutions, infrastructure and human resources for water management as broadly defined at the local, national and transboundary levels.
- *Cooperative Monitoring Programs.* The development of cooperative monitoring programs has often been the first step in cooperation and provided an important mechanism for confidence building as well as the basis for a structured exchange of information. Monitoring has been successfully used to evaluate trends in water quantity, water quality and aquatic habitats and provided the basis for the design and adjustment of management of transboundary actions. In several cases it has also provided important information for flood and emergency management.
- *Water Education and Public Awareness.* Support for water education and public awareness is central to successful public understanding and support for transboundary water programs. These efforts need to go beyond teachers and engage a wide spectrum of parties. Such activities could be undertaken in the context of

the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014).

### **III. RECOMMENDED ACTIONS TO PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF TRANSBOUNDARY WATER RESOURCES IN THE SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE AND MEDITERRANEAN REGIONS**

12. The objective of the recommended actions is to realize and expand the significant opportunities that exist for cooperation in the Southeastern Europe and Mediterranean regions for management of transboundary river basins, lake basins and shared aquifers. The recommended actions have been developed to provide the basis for strategic partnerships and are directly linked with a series of ongoing, planned and potential activities supported by national and local governments, the European Union, international and regional organizations, international financial institutions, bilateral donors, civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations. The recommended actions seek to support progress in sustainable economic development, social development and poverty reduction, as well as measures to promote peace and security.

### **IV. MOVING BEYOND THE CONFERENCE**

13. The conclusions and recommendations of the Conference should be presented by the Hellenic Presidency of the European Union at the following meetings:

- MCSD Meeting on the "***Sustainable Development Strategy for the Mediterranean,***" to be held in Dubrovnik, Croatia on May 14-16, 2003;
- "***Environment for Europe***" ***Ministerial Conference*** to be held in Kiev, Ukraine on May 21-23, 2003; and
- ***Group of 8 Summit*** to be held in Evian, France on June 1, 2003.

Arrangements should also be made for the recommendations of the Athens Declaration to be carried forward as an element of the Italian Presidency of the European Union that begins in July 2003.

## Recommendations for Action

### ***Recommendation 1.      Developing a Diplomacy for Environment and Sustainable Development.***

It is recommended that measures be taken to support development of "Diplomacy for Environment and Sustainable Development" as a tool for enhanced cooperation at all levels of foreign and domestic policy, among governments, international agencies, the private sector and the full array of civil society and non-governmental organizations. Such diplomacy will be particularly useful in the management of transboundary river basins, lake basins and shared aquifers. The role of diplomacy should go beyond its traditional focus on avoiding conflict and crisis management, allowing it to become a comprehensive instrument to facilitate legal, management and technical interventions for transboundary water management at a variety of levels. To this end the Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs proposes to launch an initiative, with other partners, to examine the practical use of this approach in the EU and in the Southeastern Europe and Mediterranean regions.

### ***Recommendation 2.      Southeastern Europe Transboundary River Basin and Lake Basin Management Program.***

It is recommended that a Southeastern Europe Transboundary River Basin and Lake Basin Management Program be developed as a follow-up action to the Athens Conference. This program would build on the implementation process of the European Union Water Framework Directive and complement and draw lessons from the ongoing Danube River Basin Program and Lake Ohrid Conservation Project. It would focus on the series of transboundary river basins lying south of the Danube River Basin, which flow into the Adriatic, Aegean, Black, and Ionian Seas, and on the set of transboundary lake basins in this area. The program would assist countries of the region, in cooperation with relevant stakeholders, to draft IWRM and water use efficiency plans for all major river basins and would include a range of complementary interventions in individual river and lake basins, with a coordination mechanism to allow for exchange of information and experience between activities. It is proposed that this program be considered as an element of the Mediterranean Component of the European Union Water Initiative and for support by other international and national sources.

***Recommendation 3. Mediterranean Shared Aquifers Management Program.***

It is recommended that a Mediterranean Shared Aquifers Management Program be developed to link ongoing programs, in order to: facilitate broader exchange of planning, management and implementation experience; assess interactions of aquifers and surface water; develop a mechanism for initiating cooperative work on additional shared aquifers on a case by case basis; and provide a means for development and dissemination of information on lessons learned and good practices. The program would play a valuable role in highlighting the importance of sustainable management of shared aquifers; the knowledge gained in the Mediterranean could be transferred to other regions that have less experience on this critical topic. It is proposed that this program be considered as an element of the Mediterranean Component of the European Union Water Initiative and for support by other international and national sources.

***Recommendation 4. Assessment of Regional and National Frameworks to Implement Integrated Water Resources Management.***

It is recommended that a comparative assessment be made of regional and national frameworks for implementation of IWRM in countries of the Southeastern Europe and Mediterranean regions. This comparative assessment would review the status of policy, legal, management and technical frameworks for both transboundary and national level application of IWRM. The assessment would make specific reference to the European Union "Water Framework Directive" and IWRM Guidelines prepared by the Global Water Partnership. Reference would also be made to the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes. It would identify actions that could be taken on a cooperative and/or individual basis to more fully address IWRM in planning and management programs. An element of the assessment would be the identification of lessons learned and good practices in the application of the European Union Water Framework Directive and IWRM in the two Regions. It would also examine measures used for freshwater, coastal and marine resources management.

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**For more information please contact:**

GWP Med Secretariat  
c/o MIO-ECSDE  
28, Tripodon str., 10558 Athens, Greece  
T: +30210-3247490, -3247267, F: +30210-3317127  
E-mail: [secretariat@gwpmed.org](mailto:secretariat@gwpmed.org)  
Web site: [www.gwpmed.org](http://www.gwpmed.org)