



Consultation Meeting on Integrated Management of the extended Drin River Basin

24 November, 2008

Tirana, Albania

Information Note

Organized by the

**Albanian Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Water Administration
UNECE
Global Water Partnership – Mediterranean**

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In the framework of the
Petersberg Process Phase II / Athens Declaration Process
UNECE Water Convention
GEF Strategic Partnership for the Mediterranean
Mediterranean Component of the EU Water Initiative (MED EUWI)

Introduction

The Petersberg Phase II Process / Athens Declaration Process (Process) for the South Eastern Europe is jointly coordinated by Germany, Greece and the World Bank.

The Petersberg Process, initiated in 1998, concerns cooperation on the management of transboundary waters. The Petersberg Process – Phase II is intended to provide support to translate into action the current developments and opportunities for future cooperation on transboundary river, lake and groundwater management in the SEE. It is supported by the German Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety and the World Bank.

The “Athens Declaration” Process concerning *Shared Water, Shared Future and Shared Knowledge* was initiated in 2003. It provides a framework for a long-term process to support cooperative activities for the integrated management of shared water resources in the SEE and Mediterranean regions. It is jointly supported by the Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the World Bank.

The two processes progressively came together in order to generate synergies and maximize the outcomes for the benefit of the SEE region. The Global Water Partnership – Mediterranean (GWP-Med) is the technical facilitator of related activities.

The main joint objective is to build capacity and share experience on Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM), and to develop IWRM plans for shared water bodies as a response to the targets of the 2002 Johannesburg Summit. The Process supports a series of complementary activities that provide a forum for transboundary water management issues in SEE.

The Process complements the EU integration processes and other ongoing initiatives in the region. It contributes directly to the scope and objectives of the Mediterranean Component of the EU Water Initiative (MED EUWI) and the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) Strategic Partnership for the Mediterranean Large Marine Ecosystem.

For more information visit www.watersee.net

The **UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (UNECE Water Convention)** is the only existing international legal framework for transboundary water cooperation. The Convention was signed in Helsinki in 1992 and entered into force in 1996. As of September 2008, 35 countries and the European Community are Parties to the Convention, including Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Romania and Slovenia.

The Convention aims to protect surface and ground water by preventing transboundary impacts on health, safety and nature, which in turn affect the quality of life. It also promotes ecologically sound management of transboundary waters, and their reasonable and equitable use as a way of avoiding conflicts.

Parties to the Convention are obliged to conclude specific bilateral or multilateral agreements providing for the establishment of joint bodies (institutional arrangements such as river basin commissions). These joint bodies must agree on a common action plan to reduce pollution, in addition to agreeing on water quality objectives and waste-water emission limits. They are also required to cooperate on information exchange and monitoring and assessment. Early warning systems must be established to warn neighbouring countries of any critical situation such as flooding or accidental pollution that may have a transboundary impact. Parties to the Convention are also required to inform the general public of the state of transboundary waters and any prevailing or future measures.

The Convention provides a legal framework for regional cooperation on shared water resources. Several bilateral and multilateral agreements between UNECE countries are based on the principles and provisions of the Convention, including, in SEE, the Danube River Protection Convention and the Framework Agreement on the Sava River Basin.

Under the Convention, the Protocol on Water and Health and the Protocol on Civil Liability were adopted in 1999 and in 2003, respectively.

The programme of work adopted every three years by the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention is a useful tool to support Parties' and non-Parties' implementation, identify joint priorities and address emerging challenges. SEE is considered a priority action area, thus the 2007-2009 programme of work includes a number of activities to support ratification by non-Parties and foster cooperation on transboundary waters in the region.

For more information visit www.unece.org/env/water

The **Global Environmental Facility Strategic Partnership for the Mediterranean Large Marine Ecosystem (GEF SPM)** is an initiative primarily funded by GEF aiming to assist Mediterranean basin countries in implementing reforms and investments in key sectors that address transboundary pollution reduction, biodiversity decline, habitat degradation and living resources protection. It will serve as a catalyst in leveraging policy, legal and institutional reforms as well as additional investments necessary for reversing degradation of damaged large marine ecosystem and their contributing freshwater basins, habitats and coastal areas. The GEF SPM is linked to an Investment Fund for the Mediterranean, managed by the World Bank. Overall, the activities will be implemented over a period of 5 years.

An Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) component of the GEF SPM has been prepared under the lead of GWP-Med that involves the promotion of IWRM planning at transboundary, national and regional levels as a means to reduce pollution from land based activities in the Mediterranean. It aims to support targeted countries in the progressive adoption of IWRM policies, the implementation of IWRM practices in pilot areas and associated capacity building. The Development of Integrated River Basin Management (IRBM) in globally important river basins and adjacent coastal areas is one of the activities anticipated to be implemented within the project. The possibility of Drin river basin to be one of the areas of focus is being explored.

For more information visit www.medsp.org

Background

The Drin Basin (Basin) comprises the watersheds of the Drin River and the Prespa, Ohrid and Shkoder Lakes. The watershed of the Drin River can be considered as the “connecting body” of this system, linking the lakes, wetlands, rivers and other aquatic habitats into a single ecosystem of major importance. Each water body is shared by two or three of the following countries/territories: Albania, Greece, FYR Macedonia, Montenegro and Kosovo (*UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244*).

The riparian countries have different political, social and economic situations and their policies as well as their legal and institutional frameworks are undergoing a revision process. A major driving force in these is the EU accession prospect. Evidently, the re-organisation and furthermore the full approximation to the EU standards will need time and resources.

The Drin regional transboundary system is a fine example that illustrates the interdependences created between different uses (agriculture, hydropower generation, industry, fisheries, urban, tourism etc.) in four major inter-connected inland water bodies and a receiving sea (the Adriatic). It can also be used to illustrate the complexity of the management of water resources in the region which goes beyond the possible achievement of a suitable and effective management in a single sovereign state. It extends to the importance of a coordinated management among countries sharing the resource, taking into account different capacities, legal and institutional frameworks, policies, priorities and interests in each country.

Table: Shared water bodies in the South Western Balkan Peninsula

Water bodies	Prespa Lake	Ohrid Lake	Shkoder Lake - Buna/Bojana River	Drin River
<i>Physically interconnected (through surface waters flow)</i>				
<i>Physically interconnected (through ground-water flow)</i>				
<i>Shared by:</i>	Albania, FYR Macedonia, Greece	Albania, FYR Macedonia	Albania, Montenegro	Albania, FYR Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo (<i>UN administered territory under UN Security Council resolution 1244</i>)

Management cooperation among countries in each of the shared Lakes Basins –subsystems of the Drin Basin- has been or is being initiated. Memoranda of understanding (eg. among the Prespa and Shkoder Lake basins) as well an agreement (for Ohrid Lake basin) have laid the ground for the initiation of a process for the integrated and sustainable management of the water bodies. Of course, there is a long way ahead. The international community has greatly assisted towards this direction and remains active in the region through financing or implementing a series of projects on a number of water-related themes and sectors.

Nevertheless, little action has been taken for the coordination among the countries for the management of the Drin Basin. The coordinated management of this inter-connected hydrological system, using the principles of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM), will have positive effects in the Basin as well as in the adjacent coastal area of the Adriatic Sea (an area of special focus for GEF SPM). To that extend, it will be beneficial for the sustainable development in the entire region. Relevant examples of cooperation exist in

the European continent which can be of inspiration for the way forward in the Drin River system.

The Meeting

Based on these and following up the International Roundtable on “Integrated Management of Shared Lake Basins in Southeastern Europe” that was organized in Ohrid, FYR Macedonia 12-14 October 2006¹, the Albanian Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Water Administration, UNECE and GWP-Med are jointly organizing a Consultation Meeting on Integrated Management of the extended Drin River Basin, 24 November 2008, in Tirana, Albania.

The Consultation Meeting is financially supported by the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency.

The event is organized in the framework of the Petersberg Phase II/Athens Declaration Process and the UNECE Water Convention. The Meeting contributes to and supports the implementation of the GEF Strategic Partnership for the Mediterranean Large Marine Ecosystems (GEF SPM) and the Mediterranean Component of the EU Water Initiative (MED EUWI).

Objectives

The objectives of the Consultative Meeting are to:

- § Exchange information among national competent authorities and key international actors regarding:
 - the current status of water resources management in the Basin and
 - the on-going and planned initiatives and projects related to integrated water resources management in the Basin;
- § Sound opinions, interests and needs from the key stakeholders in the Basin and identify challenges for promoting IWRM planning and application;
- § Identify opportunities, synergies and ways of coordination towards transboundary cooperation for the integrated management of the Basin.

3. Participants.

Targeted representatives of key stakeholders involved in the management of water resources in the extended Drin River Basin, including competent governmental institutions, regional authorities, international organizations and institutions, NGO's, etc. will be invited to participate.

¹ The International Roundtable was organized jointly by GWP-Med and the Lake Ohrid Watershed Committee within the framework of Petersberg Phase II / Athens Declaration Process and GEF IW:LEARN Activity D2. The group of 55 participants included representatives of competent authorities, national and international organizations and donors working on shared water resources management in the area. It was the first time that key stakeholders from the riparian countries were brought together to discuss common challenges and aspirations on the integrated management of shared lakes in Southeastern Europe. Among others, the Ohrid Roundtable concluded the following:

- *Sharing of experiences among the three examined sub-systems namely Prespa, Ohrid and Shkoder, is beneficial to strengthening cooperation and identifying synergies. It is important to be further encouraged and stimulated. The existing formal and informal structures (commissions, committees etc.) should be strengthened and used in an appropriate way in order to move to the next steps, namely to institutionalize the collaboration between the riparian countries and make these structures fully operational and effective;*
- *All available possibilities to gradually build a common vision as a first step towards the integrated management of the greater Drin River Basin should be explored. The Danube – Sava case can provide useful inspiration.*