

Fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Water and Health

High-level session: "The Protocol on Water and Health:
catalysing sustainable development in the pan-European region"

Panel 2: Cooperating to ensure safe, sustainable and equitable water and sanitation services

Mr. Goran Trivan, Minister of Environmental Protection, Serbia

Question: What projects did Serbia implement to better understand and resolve differences in access to water and sanitation in Serbia?

I am glad to have this opportunity today to present you with our examples of good practice in the implementation of the goals of the Protocol, through projects that the Ministry of Environmental Protection has successfully implemented in 2018, with the aim of providing equal access to hygienically safe water for drinking and sanitation, of key importance for all segments of the population: the impoverished, vulnerable, and socially excluded groups.

We have seriously dedicated ourselves to working towards the achievement of these goals, always having in mind that access to safe water and sanitation is a basic human right. Through the support of UNECE (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe), i.e. the guidelines and tools that were made available to us, we have found ways to analyse existing inequalities and differences in access to healthy water faced by citizens of our region.

We have implemented the first project in 2015, with the financial support of the Italian Ministry for Environment, Land and Sea, where, using the World Health Organization methodology, we worked on the assessment of the current status of the quality of water for drinking and sanitation for children in 245 rural schools across Central Serbia.

The assessment was conducted in two regions and thirteen municipalities; furthermore, in cooperation with the Ministry of Health and the Regional Development Agency from Kragujevac, we organized trainings for staff working in the field, and thereafter we presented the project through two national workshops and two international events, thus informing the general public about the results of the project and plans on how to improve the existing situation, in accordance with SDG indicators and European standards.

And imagine, estimates have shown that only 50 million dinars in total were needed to be invested in the schools that did not meet the required standards of access to hygienically safe water and sewage.

Later, municipalities had the obligation to financially assist the schools that failed to meet these criteria.

The most important result of the project was showing how much the intersectoral cooperation between the Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and other partner institutions in the project contributes to quality solutions, and ensuring the sustainability of the project: we can replicate it in other parts of Serbia, using the same methodology and plans. At this moment, we wish to continue project activities in Vojvodina, having in mind that the quality of potable water is the worst in this area, particularly in rural communities.

The results of this first project have served as our basis for our next project, implemented in 2017 through financial support by UNECE, and for the first time using the “score-card” methodology. Project results have shown that measures for achieving equal access to water and sewer systems are not sufficiently present in regulations or practice.

It turned out that local self-governments, despite having regulations that can provide them with a basis for improving equitable access to water and sewage systems, did not incorporate these in their strategic documents.

Those that have strategic documents and that have partially incorporated the basis for improving equitable access to water and sewer systems failed to determine objectives, measures and activities to achieve this equitable access.

The identified deficiencies were used to create an Action Plan with measures aimed at both the local and the national level, with proposals for the adoption of new and amended strategic development documents at the local self-government level that will regulate equitable access to healthy drinking water and sewer systems.

The projects we have implemented are of great importance, not just for the implementation of the goals of the Protocol on Water and Health, but also other international treaties, strategies and regulations in the field of waters.

Furthermore, I would like to note that the projects we have implemented are just one example of how with a little effort and funding it is possible to significantly improve the situation regarding water and sanitation. Of course, premises for children, such as schools and preschool institutions, should be the priority of every local community, and we will also endeavour in the coming period to continue intensive work on achieving European standards, to provide a higher quality of life for our citizens.

And I am certain that our project ideas and proposals can serve as examples of good practice to other countries, to apply the same methodology and measures to improve their situation.

Question: How do you mobilize the necessary resources to implement the national targets under the Protocol on Water and Health and the EU directives?

Meeting EU requirements and standards in the field of water policy is one of Serbia's priorities and an important condition in the process of European integration, which is why we are working intensively on harmonizing the national with EU legislation. Aware that the work ahead requires much effort and investment of large financial resources, through drafting the Negotiating Position we have approached Specific Water Directives very seriously in order to achieve the EU's objectives as soon as possible. Considering the existing infrastructure in the water sector, full implementation of EU regulations will require a longer period of time (20-25 years), and huge financial investments (around EUR 5.6 billion). At the same time, we find that the Water and Health Protocol is a significant instrument for achieving Sustainable Development Goals.

The assessment of the funds needed to invest in the water sector has been prepared in detail through the calculations made in section 4 of the most financially demanding Specific Water Directives, which are supplementary material to the PG 27 Negotiating Position:

1. The Water Framework Directive
2. The Drinking Water Directive
3. The Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive
4. The Nitrates Directive

The process of drafting Specific Implementation Plans for the above directives also included the estimation of indicative budgets required for their implementation.

By all means, the costs that also relate to the implementation of the national goals set out by the Protocol on Water and Health have been planned within the framework of the Drinking Water Directive, as well as the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive.

I would like to mention that thus far, a portion of funds required to implement the goals and targets of the Protocol were provided from a donation given by the Italian Republic (e.g. for assessment of potable water quality, sanitation and hygiene in rural schools in Šumadija and Pomoravlje District), and also from the UNECE; in addition, the opening of Chapter 27 will give us an opportunity to use IPA funds, as well as other financial assistance and loans.

Furthermore, the planned funds are allocated from the budget every year, based on the relevant plan and prioritization of relevant activities.

Pursuant to the Law on Budget 2019, 250 million RSD were earmarked for implementing the programme activity relating to the improvement of the wastewater management system, that is to say, for development of technical documentation for construction of a wastewater treatment plant, as well as an additional 70 million RSD, in September this year, to support wastewater treatment facilities construction projects. The funds provided by the Ministry for aforementioned purposes represent significant support to local governments. Let me also mention that allocation of over 35

million RSD for projects in the field of assessing the drinking water and sediment quality has been planned.

Ministry of Environmental Protection has earmarked 190 million RSD in 2019 in order to fund the capital project of building communal utility infrastructure.