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ENV/EPOC/EAP/WATER/M(2009)1



Organisation de Coopération et de Développement Économiques
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

English - Or. English

**ENVIRONMENT DIRECTORATE
ENVIRONMENT POLICY COMMITTEE**

**ENV/EPOC/EAP/WATER/M(2009)1
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**Task Force for the Implementation of the Environmental Action Programme for Central and Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia
Group of Senior Officials on Urban Water Sector Reform**

**13th EUWI-EECCA Working Group Meeting
6th Joint meeting of the EU Water Initiative Working Group and the EAP Task Force Group of Senior Officials for Water Sector Reform in EECCA**

DRAFT SUMMARY RECORD

24-25 November, 2009, Bucharest (Romania)

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English - Or. English

The EU Water Initiative's EECCA Working Group held its 13th Working Group meeting jointly with the EAP Task Force Group of Senior Officials for Water Sector Reform in EECCA, in Bucharest on 24-25 November 2009. The meeting was hosted by the Ministry of Environment in Romania had about 50 participants. The participants included officials from EECCA and EU member States, experts from the water supply, sanitation and water resources sectors, and private sector representatives, IFI, NGOs and international organisations (EU Commission, UNECE, OECD EAP Task Force, UNDP, IWA, and GWP)

The objectives of the meeting in Bucharest were:

- To discuss Progress in implementing the work programme: Ongoing National Policies Dialogues and IWRM projects
- To discuss key challenges in financing water resources management in the EECCA region and possible future work in this area.
- To discuss achievement of the water related MDGs: translating the goals into national targets
- To discuss integrated water resources management under the EUWI in the EECCA region in view of international cooperation and river basin management
- To present ongoing and future projects and initiatives in the region
- To discuss and adopt the work programme of the EUWI EECCA component for 2010 and ideas for cooperation in 2011

In this context:

Opening and adoption of agenda

The Chair of the EUWI EECCA Working Group **Mr. Gheorghe Constantin** on behalf of Mr Cârlan, Secretary of State in the Ministry of Environment of Romania, welcomed the participants to Bucharest and introduced the agenda of the EUWI EECCA Working Group meeting. The participants were further introduced to seminars on Climate, Water and Health and on Nitrate Pollution, which took place back to back with the WG meeting. Mr. Constantin informed the participants that this was the 3rd meeting organised by Romania as EUWI EECCA Chair and that the EUWI Multi-stakeholder Forum meeting in August in Stockholm recognised the good progress that the EECCA component had achieved, making it one of the most advanced components of the EUWI.

Mr Dumitru Dorogan, European Commission, referred participants to the recent agreement achieved at the EU-Central Asia High-level Meeting in Rome that identified the EUWI EECCA working group as the mechanisms that should address water-related co-operation issues between the EU and Central Asian Countries. He also informed that DG Research had expressed an interest in extending the cooperation with EECCA countries in the field of environment if priorities and needs could be identified.

Mr Rainer Enderlein, UNECE, informed the working group that UNECE has been working for more than 40 years on transboundary water management and that this experience conforms the relevance of working on policies and legislation at the national level as well as at the international. The UNECE Meeting of the Parties recently held in Geneva supported a continued involvement of UNECE in EUWI national policy dialogues for the next three years.

Mr Peter Börkey, OECD/EAP Task Force, informed participants that this event is the 5th joint meeting of the EUWI EECCA Working Group and EAP Task Force Group of Senior Officials for Water Sector Reform in EECCA, who are overseeing the implementation of a joint work programme. He also pointed to the linkage of the work of this meeting to the Environment for Europe Conference which will take place in 2011 in Astana, Kazakhstan and where one of two focus topics will be water management. The meeting took note of the opportunity to use this and the following meeting to contribute to the preparations of the Astana Ministerial Conference.

The meeting then adopted the agenda of the EUWI EECCA working group meeting.

Session 1: Progress in implementing the work programme

The meeting took note of the progress that was achieved since the last meeting and which is presented in a Progress Report that was prepared for the meeting. Participants were informed of the National Policy Dialogues on IWRM supported by UNECE in Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine and the increased interest of donors to support new NDP's. A discussion of new Policy Dialogues has been opened with Georgia, and Azerbaijan; UNECE will join forces with the UNDP that already started a policy dialogue on WSS in Tajikistan with the support of the Swiss Development Cooperation Agency (SDC). Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have manifested some interest in launching NPDs and fact finding missions are planned to the mentioned countries in winter – spring 2010. UNECE is currently discussing the possibility of linking a national policy dialogue to work on water that is taking place in Turkmenistan in the framework of the Environment Performance Review process. In Uzbekistan the Environmental Performance Review has recommended that an NPD on water resources management should be launched and Switzerland has committed to support such work, when the EPR has been finally approved by Uzbekistan.

The working group took note of progress in National Policy Dialogues on the financing of water and sanitation, supported by the EAP Task Force. In Kyrgyzstan a strategic financial plan for water and sanitation has recently been finalised and tools to link this strategy to the budget process has been developed. In 2010 work will focus on supporting the development of new sector policy. In Moldova a strategic financial plan for water and sanitation has been finalised and work to link it to the budget process has recently started. For 2010 the plan is to develop an action plan which is to be linked with the medium-term expenditure framework (MTEF). In Ukraine a dialogue focusing on challenges resulting from decentralisation was launched in 2009 and will go on next year. In Georgia the dialogue on a strategic financial plan for rural water and sanitation has come to a conclusion early this year. In Armenia an exploratory mission has identified financing of water resources management as a new issue with a possible focus on the Marmarik Basin. Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan are two new countries where the potential to establish new NPD's will be explored in 2010. The working group was also informed about a number of additional activities under the EAP Task Force water programme. There are activities in three areas: national policy dialogue on financial reforms; managing the water sector more efficiently and effectively; and monitoring of water sector reforms. A detailed description of these activities can be found in documents ENV/EPOC/EAP(2009)2 and ENV/EPOC/EAP(2009)1/REV1 which had been distributed at the meeting.

The meeting was also informed that OECD and UNECE are aiming at merging WSS and IWRM dialogues wherever this is possible, ie in Armenia and possibly Kyrgyzstan.

Session 2: Challenges of decentralisation for water and sanitation – What are they and how could they be addressed?

The working group took note of the challenges that are posed to the water sector as a consequence of decentralisation, ie the fragmentation of responsibilities and functions at decentralised levels. Aggregation was suggested as a possible solution to achieve economies of scale and inter-municipal cooperation (IMC) and regionalization are potential solutions that can achieve this. IMCs can vary in scale and scope. Implementation challenges are linked to the transfer and ownership of assets, entry and exit conditions for municipalities, tariff harmonisation, different institutional forms and distribution of responsibilities. Further it is important to understand that central governments play a crucial role in setting up the framework that enables municipalities to engage into IMC, ie by creating an appropriate regulatory and legal framework, as well as financial mechanisms.

Ukraine informed the meeting that the decentralisation in Ukraine has led to over-fragmentation of responsibility, reduced water quality in some places, inefficient use of energy, low investments and lack of capacity to operate and maintain infrastructure and to prepare bankable projects. Ukraine is aiming at overcoming the challenges in decentralisation by legal reforms and institutions changes and through introduction of public-private partnerships. Next steps to be taken includes improvement of the domestic borrowing framework, new regulatory framework, improved tariff methodology, development of public-private water partnerships, capacity building and increased public relations. A public-private partnership the Donbass Water, a private water company providing water to 196 settlements in the Donetsk region has been efficient in providing water services. The challenges are tariff regulation- as all 196 settlements have their own tariffs- and the difficulties in attracting loans as a private company cannot guarantee loans.

Session 3: Financing water resources management in the EECCA region – Key challenges and the way forward

The meeting took note of work initiated by OECD on a “reference framework” for financing water resources management (WRM) including analysis of benefits and beneficiaries, costs, and the financing mechanisms to pay for water resources management. Armenia has requested to focus on the financing of water resources management in its NPD and other countries may follow. Key questions that will be addressed in such dialogue relate to the cost-effectiveness and the affordability of measures that are being proposed in river-basin plans, as well as the potential sources of funding to support their implementation.

The meeting was informed that the water code in Armenia is based on Integrated Water Resources Management and since 2005 the principle of river basin management was introduced in Armenia. Five basin management authorities have been established. Several challenges exist in the legal framework implementation and there are needs for capacity and institutional development, coordination and cooperation. A pilot project in Marmarik basin (12 settlements, 7700 inhabitants, 418 km²) has been developed with support from UNECE and after a process of identifying desired water conditions a plan with more than forty measures has been developed and a preliminary costing undertaken.

The working group took note of a Romanian case study on improvement of the economic mechanisms for water management where taxation is suggested as a way to balance income and costs for water resources management. The meeting was informed that in Netherlands, the financing for local water authorities comes from local taxes on the basis of cost recovery and the “polluter pays principle”. The Romanian-Dutch project recommends a similar approach for Romania, ie relying more on local financing. Taxation scenarios will be developed in 2010. However not all procedures used in the Dutch system can be applied in Romania.

Session 4: Towards the achievement of the water-related MDGs: Translating the goals into national targets

Participants took note of the approach that consists of defining different scenarios that allow to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) and to cost them out in order to support dialogue on a realistic strategy to achieve the MDGs. One problem for EECCA countries is that the reference year for the MDG's is 1990 where access to water and sanitation services was at higher levels than it is today. However due to lack of financing the state of infrastructure and quality of service has since significantly deteriorated. Two scenarios to meet the MDG's were developed for Georgia- an all in-house tap connection- and an – in-house tap connection plus standpipes scenario. The cost of the latter scenario was about three times less than the first scenario. For the rural water supply and sanitation the financing strategy showed that fulfilling the MDG's would only require about 20% of the costs of meeting the same targets in urban areas.

The meeting took note that financial challenges in the Kyrgyz republic are the low levels of cost recovery, low level of public budget contributions to WSS and the variable effectiveness of external lending. The interpretation of the MDG's in the Kyrgyz Republic is "universal access to piped water supply, ie 35 lcd at a distance of less than 100 meters from the dwelling. For sanitation the goal is "universal access to improved sanitation". Closing the financing gap to meet the MDG's would include increasing domestic tariffs, increasing collection rates and increasing public budget and additional external financing. The next step in the NDP will be the development of a new sector policy for the whole WSS and to integrate the financing strategy in the Medium Term Expenditure framework (MTEF).

Following these presentations, two groups discussed progress towards the MDG's and the challenge of financing water resources management. One group reported that the five countries represented in the group all had some experience in river basin management and that some also have river basin councils established. The group found that cost assessment methodologies are relevant and are needed both for plans to reach the MDG's and for river basin plans. Financial sustainability is an issue for many basin councils and public participation needs to be strengthened. The other group reported that for water basin plans Ukraine was mostly focusing its efforts on transboundary basins, while Armenia has launched such processes in a number of its basins. A challenge arises from the fact that administrative boundaries do usually not coincide with the river basin boundaries and that methodologies to deal with this needs further attention. Much research relevant for basin management in EECCA takes place with support from the EC Research Framework programme. An example is TWIN2GO which reviews, consolidates and synthesises research on water management in basins around the world. (www.TWIN2GO.uos.de)

Based on the result of the group work the Chair concluded that financing of WRM is not only a challenge in the EECCA region and that no country has a perfect model which could be replicated elsewhere. The group work suggested that there is a potential need to extend NPD's to all countries in the region depending on their needs and priorities.

Session 5: Integrated water resources management under the EUWI in the EECCA region – International cooperation and river basin management

The meeting took note of UNECE's work on transboundary waters. The UNECE lead NPD's are focussed on river basin management, inter-sectoral cooperation, stakeholder consultation and participation and on using the existing knowledge in UNECE Environment Performance Reviews as a starting point. UNECE asked for input to the UNECE planning of coming National Policy Dialogue and for more cooperation with other organisations and donors.

The meeting was informed about bilateral and multilateral cooperation in Romania, where most Romanian rivers are transboundary and all reach the Danube river. The bilateral cooperation establishes rules and obligation on transboundary cooperation with focus on exchange of information and holding stakeholder consultations. Romania has agreements with Ukraine, Moldova, Hungary, Serbia and Bulgaria. The WG was informed that bilateral agreements are important, as they are a framework for e.g. solving disputes, improving water quality and protection against floods and accidents.

Participants were also informed about the results of the EC supported “Water Governance in the Western EECCA countries” project involving 6 countries. The project focuses on the development of classification of waters into water use groups on the basis of chemical quality indicators. The project therefore aims at establishing a system based on physiochemical data and has introduced Surface Water Quality Standards developed by OECD in Moldova to other EECCA countries. It was concluded that physiochemical standards are not a panacea, but a useful and pragmatic approach until biological data becomes available. Legal and institutional obstacles remain to be solved and human and institutional capacity must be strengthened.

The meeting took note of the impact of climate change in achieving the water related MDGs in Ukraine where 70% of water for water supply comes from surface water. Climate change is therefore a challenge. The WG was informed about the impacts of recent floods with a high number of people affected and that 27% of the territory is exposed to adverse impacts of waters and that in the south there is scarcity of water. The WG was informed that Climate forecasting scenarios are needed and that the NPD dialogues on IWRM and preparedness for climate change and floods were very helpful in Ukraine. The WG was further informed that Ukraine considers that IWRM and river basin management are seen as an approach which can also assist in adapting to climate change.

The working group took note of the International Water Association’s views on population, urbanisation, climate change and income level and their inter-linkages and resulting pressures on water management in the future. Climate change in itself will result in water shortages, flooding, impacts on water quality and sea level rise. A major rethink of urban water management is needed using a variety of water sources. Conservation of water will be of key importance as well as the closing of the water loops and using nodal distribution systems (ie more decentralised systems) as opposed to central systems. Moving to a more integrated approach to urban water management is required – and water utilities need to be transformed to be effective at addressing this challenge.

Session 6: Presentation of the ongoing and future projects and initiatives in the region

The meeting was informed that the International Water Association has been working with the region since 2005 and that IWA is planning to develop an IWA Regional Office, covering the neighbouring countries of Romania, in partnership with the Romanian Water Association. The aim is to bring the global community closer to the region and develop programmes and events tailored to the region, raise the profile and visibility of the region and its problems to the global community.

Finland informed participants about their “Wider Europe Initiative” that includes a water sector programme for 2010-2014 and foresees support for the EECCA water sector. The programme currently being drafted and should shortly be approved by the Government. The purpose is to reduce the potential for water disputes inside and between countries in the region through support to water and sanitation and by using the EU Water Initiative and UNECE conventions on water as vehicles.

The World Bank informed the working group about the Bank’s water resources management strategy and plan for Europe and Central Asia (ECA) and stressed the Bank’s comparative advantage as a provider of integrated support with the convening power to bring key stakeholders and interests together.

The Bank's assistance is tailored to country circumstances consistent with Country assistance strategies/country partnership strategies. ECA covers 12% of the total World Bank lending portfolio, with a major focus on water supply and sanitation to meet the MDG's, improve irrigation and drainage, hydropower and water resources management. In South-Eastern Europe, South Caucasus and Central Asia the Bank has 48 water resources management projects of a total value of 3.4 billion USD.

Participants also took note of on-going and future projects and initiatives in the EECCA region financed or co-financed by the European Commission (EC). The EC is supporting a broad array of capacity development and investment projects in the EECCA water sector, some of the assistance is being channelled in the form of sector budget support, such as in the Ukraine and in Moldova. Other examples of ongoing or planned projects are: investment in water and sanitation in Chisinau from the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI); transboundary management in the Kura-Aras basin; Water Governance in Western EECCA; a regional project to improve laboratories equipment in the Kura basin; support for river basin committees in Kura; in the ENPI's 2011-2015 programme 12 million Euro are earmarked to protect freshwater and marine environments in the Black Sea, as well as a range of projects in Central Asia (Groundwater clean-up Kazakhstan; Water Governance East EECCA; a project to introduce IWRM and to strengthen transboundary dialogue in implemented by UNDP. The European Commission is also a key supporter of the EECCA EU Water Initiative.

The meeting took note of a range of activities that are led by UNDP in Central Asia and focus on transboundary and national IWRM as well as on improving access to water services. A Project on IWRM promotion in the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan has been initiated and Uzbekistan has expressed interest to participate. The aim is to develop IWRM plans but also focus on concrete activities like rural WSS, irrigation efficiency, small scale hydropower, and climate change adaptation. UNDP aims to link activities with EUWI National Policy Dialogues and build on these. UNDP also has a project on Human rights based approach to water for all EECCA countries.

Session 7: Future work and adoption of 2010 work programme

The chair informed that Romania will continue to chair the EECCA working group in 2010 and would seek a co-chair to ensure a transition into 2011.

The Chair presented the Work Programme for 2010, which was approved by the meeting. The Chair also encouraged participants to provide the OECD and UNECE secretariat with any written suggestions for work in 2011.

UNECE reminded participants of the need to submit official letters of commitment from EECCA in order to launch National Policy Dialogues. IWA suggested that EUWI EECCA should consider providing support for the establishment of professional water utilities organisations. GWP informed that their country offices are ready to cooperate with and support the EECCA EUWI where this can be of mutual interest.

Finally the chair closed the meeting and expressed his thanks to OECD and UNECE for helping to organise the meeting and to the European Commission for the financial support for the meeting. The Chair informed that he plans to hold the next working group meeting in Bucharest in September or October of 2010.

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