



United Nations Economic
Commission for Europe



Regional Cooperation Council

**International Workshop on
“Transboundary Water Resources Management in
South-Eastern Europe”**

Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina,
18-20 May 2009

Information Note

Organized jointly by the
Regional Cooperation Council
and the
United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

In cooperation with
Global Water Partnership – Mediterranean
and the
International Sava River Basin Commission

In the framework of the

UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and
International Lakes



The **Regional Cooperation Council (RCC)** was officially launched on 27 February 2008, as the successor of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe.

The RCC is an operational arm of the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) and functions as a focal point for regional co-operation. It acts also as a forum for the continued involvement of the international community engaged in the region.

The RCC focuses on regional cooperation in South East Europe (SEE) through a regionally owned and led framework that also supports European and Euro-Atlantic integration. The key RCC role is to generate and coordinate developmental projects and create a political climate that will enable overall economic and social advancement in SEE, to the benefit of the people in the region.

The work of the RCC focuses on five priority areas: economic and social development, infrastructure and energy, justice and home affairs, security cooperation, and building human capital and parliamentary cooperation.

The organization maintains close working relations with all actors of relevance in these areas, such as governments, international organizations, international financial institutions, regional organizations, private sector and civil society.

The RCC membership consists of 45 countries, organizations and international financial institutions. The RCC has a Secretariat based in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, headed by the Secretary General Hido Bišćević. Apart from the Sarajevo headquarters, the Secretariat has a Liaison Office in Brussels with European and Euro-Atlantic institutions.

The Secretariat provides technical, analytical and organizational support to the RCC Secretary General and the organization as such, as well as to the SEECP Chairmanship-in-Office. It serves as a coordination framework for regional cooperation activities within SEE and acts as an information and focal point for such activities.

For more information visit www.rcc.int.

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 April 2009, 35 countries and the European Community are Parties to the Convention, including Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Romania and Slovenia. Moreover, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia are in the process of acceding to the Convention.

The Convention aims to protect surface and ground water by preventing negative transboundary impacts on human health, safety, nature and socio-economic conditions, 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 and promoting development.

Parties to the Convention are obliged to conclude specific bilateral or multilateral agreements on their shared waters providing for the establishment of joint bodies (institutional arrangements such as river basin commissions) responsible for the joint management of the shared waters. These joint bodies must, inter alia, agree on a common action plan to reduce pollution, water quality objectives and waste-water emission limits. They are also required to cooperate on information exchange and monitoring and shall, at regular intervals, carry out joint or coordinated assessments of the conditions of transboundary waters and the effectiveness of measures taken to prevent, control and reduce transboundary impacts. 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. Most of the existing 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.

The assessment of the status of water resources is of fundamental importance, as it forms the basis for rational decision-making. Hence at their third meeting (Madrid, 26-28 November 2003), the Parties to the Water Convention decided to carry out an assessment of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters in the UNECE region. The first Assessment was presented to the sixth Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe" (Belgrade, October 2007) which requested the Convention to prepare a second Assessment by the next Ministerial Conference, tentatively scheduled for 2011 in Astana, Kazakhstan.

Compared to first one, the second Assessment will be broader in ambitions and scope: it will have a more holistic approach, integrate surface and groundwaters, highlight legal, institutional and socio-economic aspects and emphasize cross-cutting themes that are a challenge for transboundary waters, in particular the impacts of and adaptation to climate change.

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

1. Background

About the 90% of the territory of South Eastern European (SEE) countries falls within shared basins. More than half of the thirteen major transboundary rivers and four shared lakes in the region are shared by three or more riparian countries. As for the transboundary aquifers, the first Assessment of transboundary waters in the UNECE region identified more than 50. This reality reflects the importance of cooperation among the riparian countries for the effective management of these water bodies. Emerging challenges such as climate change further enhances this need.

According to studies by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the Blue Plan, the region is among those that are projected to be most severely hit by climate change: by 2100, the rise in temperature is projected to be in the range of 2.2 and 5.1°C, with total annual precipitation decreasing by up to 27% or more. The gradually increasing frequency and severity of droughts, floods and other extreme weather events will not only mean an increased water supply-demand gap, but are also foreseen to have (and have already) other important corollary impacts such as: damages to human health and settlements, forest fires, increasing desertification, soil degradation due to saltwater intrusion, and loss of inhabitable and arable land and natural habitats from sea-level rise in low-lying coastal areas.

Economic activities depending on water availability such as agriculture, tourism, industry, energy will be adversely affected, since increased climate variability will threaten *inter alia* infrastructures, waterways, hydropower, crop yields and timber harvests as well as recreational environments. This in return will exacerbate the already demanding challenge of balancing competing demands among different uses in different countries, stemming from the multipurpose use of the basins.

Water needs to be equitably and sustainably allocated, with the view to ensure the functioning of ecosystems, and to satisfy basic human needs and different economic uses.

Allocation mechanisms should, ideally, balance competing demands and take into account the social, economic and environmental values of water. They should reflect the links between inland and coastal water, growing urbanisation, land management requirements, the need to maintain ecosystem integrity, the threats of desertification and environmental degradation as well as the vulnerability regarding climate change.

Nevertheless, there are still numerous obstacles in achieving the necessary level of cooperation among the riparian countries in all of the basins in the SEE region. These derive from the interdependence and conflict that exist among different uses, coupled with the various levels of infrastructure, legal and institutional frameworks, policies, priorities and interests of each country.

Transboundary cooperation for the management of shared water bodies has been influenced by political and socio-economic developments on the national and regional level, and by bilateral relationships of the riparian countries. Agreements, protocols and other types of treaties have been signed in some cases, but in many others such steps have yet to be taken. This may be explained by the lack of appropriate resources and/or institutional and legal provisions or by low political prioritization of the issue. Still, cooperation between the basin countries has been initiated and is evolving in various ways. The involvement of the European Union (EU) and several United Nations (UN) agencies and other international organizations, in particular the World Bank, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) as well as donor countries has been important in supporting regional initiatives, investments and projects.

Currently, the legal and institutional frameworks in many SEE countries are under revision. A major driving force is the prospect of EU accession. The EU Water Framework Directive provides a suitable framework for water management for many countries of the SEE. Major difficulties and gaps still exist, mostly in implementation of the laws. Full approximation to EU standards will need further major reforms, time, and extraordinary efforts by national and local administrations, along with adequate resources. In addition, the *acquis communautaire* does not affect all countries and definitely not at the same level and with the same urgency. Cooperation leading to shared benefits in the SEE is linked to the reform processes at the national level that are needed to provide the basis for integrated and sustainable management of water resources.

Another important catalyst of cooperation in the region is the Petersberg Phase II Process / Athens Declaration Process (Process), jointly coordinated by Germany, Greece and the World Bank, with the technical support of the Global Water Partnership – Mediterranean (GWP-Med). The Process aims 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.

Conditions and mechanisms that will lead to the building of trust towards cooperation need to be created and supported by the countries of SEE. Joint assessment and monitoring, involvement of local stakeholders etc., are both prerequisites and challenges. Actions such as the harmonization of rules and regulations for the management of shared basins and the establishment of efficient institutions for coordinated or possibly joint management of the shared basins can follow.

The fundamental prerequisite for shared benefits is the creation of a Vision for the management of the shared water resources. Examples such as the Rhine, Danube and Sava River basins provide inspiration and valuable lessons. Replication is feasible. The preparation of common agreed strategies at the basin level and the commitment of governments to work together for their promotion is of utmost importance, followed by provision of the necessary resources.

The involvement of the international community has been in some cases catalytic in the creation or facilitation of enabling conditions for cooperation among the riparian countries.

RCC, the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes and their partners, such as the Petersberg Phase II / Athens Declaration Process are working towards the creation of such favorable conditions to advance cooperation for the management of shared water resources in SEE.

2. The International Workshop

Taking the above into consideration the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) are jointly organizing the **International Workshop on Transboundary Water Resources Management in South-Eastern Europe**, in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina from 18 to 20 May 2009, in cooperation with the Global Water Partnership Mediterranean and the International Sava River Basin Commission. The Governments of Sweden and Switzerland are financially supporting the realization of the event.

The workshop is organized within the framework of the **Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (UNECE Water Convention)** and in line with the RCC's objective to promote regional cooperation in South-Eastern Europe (SEE).

The event contributes to the regional dialogue on transboundary water resources management in SEE facilitated under the Petersberg Phase II / Athens Declaration Process.

The workshop will highlight cooperation on shared water resources management as a crucial component of the stability and prosperity process in SEE.

It will promote a high level discussion on key issues facing transboundary waters and cooperation in the region linked with: (i) institutional and legal settings for cooperation, (ii) multipurpose use of water resources and (iii) climate change adaptation. It will allow sharing good practices, identifying bottlenecks and challenges as well as options for the region on the way ahead.

Moreover the workshop will be a determinant step in the preparations of the second assessment of transboundary waters under the UNECE Water Convention. At the workshop, participants will work together to develop an accurate picture of all transboundary waters in SEE - both surface and groundwaters - with the aim to highlight achievements and challenges, shed light on the effectiveness of the measures taken, identify most urgent actions and provide the grounds for further measures to prevent, control and reduce transboundary impact. It will therefore lay the ground for strategic directions for future work under the Convention and in other political fora. The assessment of transboundary waters in SEE resulting from the workshop will be presented to the fifth meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention (Geneva, 10-12 November 2009).

3. Participants

Targeted representatives of key stakeholders involved in the management of shared water resources in the SEE, including competent governmental institutions, joint management bodies, regional authorities, international organizations, e.g. the European Commission, and NGOs will be invited to participate.