www.unece.org/index.php?id=32539

Representatives of different water users in the Neman River Basin — shared by Belarus, Lithuania and Kaliningrad Oblast (Russian Federation) — will discuss potential measures to minimize risks and protect the population, infrastructure and natural landscapes at a stakeholder workshop on 19 March in Minsk.

The workshop is being organized as part of the project, "River basin management and climate change adaptation in the Neman River Basin", carried out by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Belarus, in the framework of the Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC).

According to project findings, climate change will bring warmer winters and less snow to the Neman Basin. Temperatures are expected to rise, with the greatest increases felt in winter, where a 2.0°C–2.8°C increase is projected within the next 35 years. Other probable impacts include increased precipitation in winter and run-off changes. It is also likely that the basin will see a growth of dangerous hydrometeorological phenomena, including summer droughts As a result, w ater quality is expected to deteriorate, with potential negative impacts on health, and there could be a decrease in biodiversity in forests, fish and wetlands, including the introduction of invasive species. Change in run-off is furthermore expected to affect the water supply for industry, fisheries, agriculture, ecosystems (wetlands) and infrastructure.

During the workshop — which will bring together representatives of the ministries of environment and water agencies of Belarus, Lithuania and the Russian Federation, regional representatives, different water users, the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention), UNDP, ENVSEC and international experts — the main results of the project to date will be presented and discussed, as well as the newly created Internet platform (database) for sharing information about the state of water resources in the basin (http://www.cricuwr.by/neman).

The workshop will make it possible to identify and prioritize climate change impacts and potential adaptation measures, through round-table discussions focusing on climate change impacts in specific regions and sectors, as well as interactive group discussions. International experience on development of adaptation to climate change strategies will also be presented, including the experience of Lithuania and the Danube basin.

**Note to editors:**

The project "River basin management and climate change adaptation in the Neman River Basin" was launched in 2011 and is funded by Finland and Sweden in the framework of ENVSEC. It is one of the pilot projects on climate change adaptation in transboundary basins under the UNECE Water Convention (see http://www1.unece.org/ehlm/platform/display/ClimateChange/). The project is implemented by the UNECE Water Convention and UNDP Belarus and covers the territory of the Neman River Basin (Belarus, Lithuania and the Kaliningrad Region in the Russian Federation).

The overall objective of the project is to improve integrated river basin management and transboundary cooperation in times of a changing climate in the Neman River Basin. The project aims to strengthen the capacity of the countries sharing the Neman River to adapt to climate change through supporting dialogue and cooperation on the needed steps to design an adaptation strategy in the transboundary context. It aims to reach a common understanding on future water availability and water use, taking into account possible climate change impacts.

The project has, for the first time, enabled modelling and forecasting of climatic and hydrological characteristics for the entire transboundary Neman River Basin. Pilot implementation of the assessment of surface water quality using agreed indicators and criteria also was performed for the first time.

The project has led to a common understanding among riparians that in the future the basin will likely suffer from stronger droughts in summer (increased air temperature combined with reduced flow), as well as increased and earlier floods in the lower part of the basin. The expected climate change impacts will affect agriculture, industry, water quality and other sectors. Some regions within the basin are especially vulnerable, such as the delta region in Kaliningrad (Russian Federation), which is located partly below sea level. The expected impacts may require countries to revisit their flood protection measures and infrastructure.

According to project results, forecasted water use by the industry in Belarus will grow by 0.5%–2.0% per year in the optimistic scenario of economic development; however, the impact of climate change will likely be more important on run-off in the Neman River Basin on the territory of Belarus in comparison with forecasted impact of water use changes.

Water quality in the basin is expected to decrease, in particular dissolved oxygen content in surface water in summer which might lead to a possible deterioration of nutrient and hydrobiological characteristics. The study on monitoring system in Neman River Basin has resulted in a recommendation to construct 21 new stations, out of which 5 meteorological and 16 hydrological. Upgrade of the monitoring stations in Belarus is needed to the same level of efficiency of Lithuania and the Kaliningrad Region. It was proposal to create five dedicated interconnected Control Centers.

The project clearly showed the need for a transboundary approach to river basin management and climate change adaptation. It was noted that a basin-coordinated approach to operating water reservoirs could support flood protection in the lower-lying Russian part of the basin. Lithuania also recognized the importance of incorporating information from the entire basin, including the upper Belorussian part, into its river basin management plans to be revised in 2013–2014, and the important and useful role which the group of experts and officials created through the project could play in that regard.

The project and its outcomes are also expected to support and strengthen the negotiations of the Neman basin agreement between the three countries of the basin and the European Union.

For more information about the project, please contact Iryna Usava, Manager of the project in Belarus, +375 29 755 6097 iryna.usava@gmail.com.

Or Sonja Koeppel, Manager of the project at UNECE, tel: +41 22 917 1218, email: Sonja.koeppel@unece.org.