

UPDATE

on National Policy Dialogues

in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia



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- EUWI EECCA working group discusses its workplan for 2014
- Moldova launches a Clearing house for information on water and health
- NPD Kazakhstan identifies priorities for 2014–2015

About National Policy Dialogues on Water

National Policy Dialogues (NPDs) are the main operational instrument of the Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) Component of the European Union Water Initiative (EUWI). EUWI, including its EECCA Component, was launched at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002. It contributes to the implementation of Millennium Development Goals and to Post-2015 Development agenda.

It is through the successful implementation of NPDs that the vision of the EUWI will materialise, key objectives will be attained and policies and institutions will be reformed.

The objective of each NPD is to facilitate the reform of water policies (covering both water supply and sanitation and integrated water resources management) in a particular country. Each NPD involves high level representatives of all key partners, including national and basin authorities, representatives of relevant international organisations, civil society (NGOs) and private sector.

UNECE and OECD act as strategic partners of the EUWI in EECCA. UNECE focuses on legal and institutional reforms for IWRM while OECD specializes in the economic and financial dimension of water policies.

Dear friends,

I am happy to present to you the seventh issue of the Update on the European Union Water Initiative (EUWI) National Policy Dialogues (NPDs), implemented in the countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA).

In the second half of 2013, NPD Steering Committee meetings were organized in Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Moldova. In Moldova the Clearing house on water and health issues was established in October as a hub for information, an innovative initiative in the region. In Kazakhstan a working group meeting was held in December with representatives from key ministries to discuss the priorities of NPD for the coming years. The main highlight of the NPDs during second half of 2013 was the EUWI EECCA working group meeting, kindly hosted by the Government of Finland in Helsinki. The meeting of 24-25 October concentrated on 'big picture', discussing challenges caused by changing global policy framework.

The results and plans of the NPDs were presented at the Meeting of Parties to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) - World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe (WHO/Europe) Protocol on Water and Health in Oslo, November 2013. Participants welcomed the support provided by NPDs to the work on water and health issues. The sessions on water and health have been recently discussed at Steering Committee meetings in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova and Tajikistan.

The ongoing work in the region under EUWI framework is well structured to meet these challenges. The outline of the regional workplan for 2014 includes many of the new policy approaches, namely the water-energy-food security nexus; green economy; and water diplomacy. What is important is to think of ways to facilitate more exchange of knowledge within the EECCA region to implement best practice for sound water management. In many countries national working groups and international experts are already working on economic instruments for water management and on water legislation with promising results expected in 2014.

I hope that, by continuing cooperation between the countries and experts of UNECE and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), we will continue to keep EECCA region as a frontrunner within EUWI.

*Gheorghe Constantin
Chairman of the EUWI EECCA Working Group
Director, Ministry of Environment and Climate Change
ROMANIA*

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NPD profile: Kazakhstan

by Serik Akhmetov



Kazakhstan joined the NPD process following the request sent by the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the European Union in 2010. The process was initiated in 2012 with support from UNECE and OECD. In Kazakhstan, the dialogue focuses both on the integrated water resources management and water supply and sanitation issues.

As estimated in the State Water Resources Management Programme, Kazakhstan has already come across a certain water resources deficit and, according to the recent studies, it may face a significant deficit of water resources of up to 50 per cent of actual needs by 2040. The NPD process is one of the mechanisms supporting the attainment of objectives set in the State Programme.

The launch of the NPD process in Kazakhstan was preceded by a joint UNECE-OECD mission to Astana held on 24-26 May 2012. The mission aimed at gathering representatives of the relevant government agencies and other stakeholders to discuss priorities for the protection and use of water resources in Kazakhstan and to identify priority topics for the NPD. It was decided that, prior to the establishment of the NPD Steering Committee, a working group meeting with all NPD stakeholders would be held. This intergovernmental preparatory meeting, which took place in Astana on 14 September 2012, agreed upon priority topics at the working level and decided to include them in the agenda of the first meeting of the NPD Steering Committee.

The Steering Committee, established at the request of the Prime Minister of Kazakhstan, is an advisory body for conducting the NPD which operates on the basis of the Regulation adopted by the Decree of the Minister for Environment and Water Resources of Kazakhstan on 17 June 2013. Its main tasks include coordinating and guiding NPD activities, defining and endorsing priority themes, developing and approving workplans and documents prepared under the NPD, elaborating sets of measures, as well as endorsing reports on the implementation of NPD activities.

NPD Kazakhstan priorities identified for 2014–2015

The Committee is chaired by the Vice-Minister for Environment and Water Resources of Kazakhstan. The Steering Committee also includes his two deputies – the Deputy Minister for Education and Science and the Chairman of the Committee for State Sanitary Epidemiological Surveillance of the Ministry of Health, - as well as the secretary of the Steering Committee and its eighteen members, including representatives of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Economy and Budget Planning, Regional Development, Industry and New Technologies, Emergency situations, representatives of the Agency on Regulation of Natural Monopolies, as well as the representatives of the private sector and various public organizations. If appropriate, members of the Parliament of Kazakhstan, representatives of international organizations, qualified experts in the relevant fields and other interested parties can also be invited to the meetings of the Committee. The secretarial functions are performed by the Committee for Water Resources of the Ministry of Environment and Water Resources of Kazakhstan.

In accordance with the NPD Steering Committee Regulation, its objective is to develop a package of measures, of both operational and strategic nature, on the development of the water sector in Kazakhstan and to attract financial resources for its implementation.

The first meeting of the Steering Committee was held in Astana on 21 June 2013 with the support of the UNECE and the OECD. The meeting was attended by the Committee members as well as by representatives of the EU, OSCE and the United Nations Development Programme. The meeting discussed a number of topical issues with regard to the use and protection of water resources in Kazakhstan. At the meeting, the following priority areas were approved:

- Analysis of legal, institutional and financial aspects in view of the usefulness of Kazakhstan's accession to the Protocol on Water and Health;

- Sustainable models of operation and financing of water supply and sanitation systems in villages and small cities of Kazakhstan.

The results of the first meeting of the Steering Committee were reported to and endorsed by the Government of Kazakhstan which also requested to continue working on the implementation of the planned activities.

In accordance with the decision of the first meeting of the Steering Committee, the second meeting of the working group was held on 6 December 2013 in Astana with the aim of discussing intermediate results of the first meeting of the Steering Committee as well as preparing the draft workplan of NPD Kazakhstan for 2014–2015, for its submission to the second meeting of the SC, expected to be held in April 2014.

The meeting decided to submit the report on the analysis of the legal and institutional requirements for implementation of the Protocol on Water and Health in Kazakhstan as well as the interim report on implementation of the project "Sustainable models of operation and financing of water supply and sanitation systems in villages and small cities" to the second meeting of the NPD Steering Committee. The meeting also discussed and endorsed the draft workplan of the NPD for 2014-2015.

The draft workplan of the NPD Kazakhstan for 2014-2015 includes the following activities:

- Analysis of legal, institutional and financial aspects of the UNECE-WHO/Europe Protocol on Water and Health in view of the usefulness of joining the Protocol on Water and Health for Kazakhstan;
- Preparing for target setting under the Protocol in Kazakhstan;
- Implementation of the project " Sustainable models of operation and financing of water supply and sanitation systems in villages and small cities";
- Preparing and implementing projects on:
 - improvement of subsidies influencing water management in Kazakhstan (tax and tariff instruments, governmental support of the water sector);
 - reaching greater financial autonomy of operators of water supply systems and other water agencies;
 - strengthening of the targeted support of socially vulnerable groups of population in regard to their payment for water infrastructure services;
 - development of indicators of water use efficiency in agriculture and other sectors;
 - flexible management of limits for water intake and use based on the economic instruments;
 - strengthening of the existing intergovernmental committees and working groups on transboundary rivers with the neighbouring states;
 - improving management capacity at the basin level, including basin authorities and councils, schemes and plans.



Participants at the first Steering Committee meeting in Astana, 21 June 2013

(Photo: Kseniya Yurkavets)

EU Water Initiative NPD activities in EECCA in July 2013 – January 2014

The 10th Steering Committee meeting in Armenia

26 September 2013 – Yerevan

At the Steering Committee meeting, chaired by the Head of the Water Resources Management Agency, the national expert group presented a draft baseline analysis of the Armenia's health and environmental situation and the existing national and international legal framework on water – a first step towards setting national targets under the UNECE/WHO-Europe Protocol on Water and Health. This in-depth study will be followed by identification and prioritization of problems that would require particular attention. It is expected that targets will be finalized and adopted by mid-2014.

According to the national report of Armenia submitted under the Protocol in 2013, between 2008 and 2012 the country had achieved an important increase in access to drinking water in rural areas — from 92 to 94 per cent. However, access to sanitation for rural dwellers has not seen any substantial improvement in recent years. Moreover, issues like urban wastewater treatment and water losses in water supply systems were also among urgent priorities.

The Steering Committee also discussed preliminary results of the OECD study on facilitating the reform of economic instruments of Armenia. It included development and assessment of the proposed options for reform. More specifically, reform of water abstraction and pollution fees, and the reform of land/property taxes and renting system. The proposed reform of water abstraction and pollution fees raised several important topics to discuss among the SC members. One of the interesting points of discussion was the proposal to charge water users based on permitted volume and not actually abstracted volume. Also the SC considered the proposed options for establishment of water component in the land and property tax/renting system in the vicinity of Lake Sevan as good starting point for further discussion among the stakeholder institutions.



The Steering Committee meeting in Moldova

10 October 2013 – Chisinau

The Steering Committee meeting, attended by around 35 representatives of governmental entities, international organizations and other development partners and stakeholders, reviewed and adopted the initial findings related to one of the key project outputs: the action plan on the implementation of targets on water and health and its resource mobilization strategy.

The second Steering Committee meeting was marked by the official opening of the Clearing House under the Protocol on Water and Health in the Republic of Moldova. The establishment of the Clearing House as a hub for information on water and health issues and a resource centre for governmental officials, non-governmental organizations and the general public is one of the main outputs of the joint project of UNECE and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) to assist the country in the implementation of the national water and health targets adopted by Government in 2010. The Clearing House will contribute to increasing awareness on the Protocol by conducting campaigns, trainings and briefings on themes relevant to the Protocol.

Possible topics for continuing the dialogue on the economic and financial dimensions of water resources management were also discussed, subject to the availability of additional funding. Priorities stated by the Ministry of Environment and other key local stakeholders include an assessment of the use of economic instruments for water management; further work on business models for rural sanitation; a review of financial mechanisms and ear-marked funds to support investment in the water sector; an assessment of mechanisms to address affordability issues in the water sector.

The 10th Steering Committee meeting in Kyrgyzstan

18 October 2013 – Bishkek

Members of the high-level Steering Committee of the NPD on IWRM – over 30 representatives of different stakeholders and donors involved in improving the water resources situation in Kyrgyzstan – approved proposed future priorities for support by the UNECE and agreed with the UNECE proposal to concentrate its assistance on implementation of the national targets with regard to water quality, water supply and wastewater treatment adopted in June 2013. It was decided that continuation of support towards development of the basin management plan of the Chu Basin would remain the main activity of UNECE within the NPD

programme in the coming years. OECD, on the other hand, will contribute, exploring how selected economic instruments can facilitate the implementation of basin management plans. In addition, the meetings discussed interim results of the OECD-led work on the Action Plan for the reform of selected economic instruments for water management in Kyrgyzstan and agreed upon further steps towards finalization of the project.

17th meeting of the EUWI EECCA Working Group

24-25 October 2013 – Helsinki

The meeting with around 50 representatives of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia countries and donors was hosted by the Government of Finland. Delegates from participating countries flagged recent developments in water policies while NGOs underlined the need to give higher visibility of policy dialogues and to further involve stakeholders. Discussions concentrated on possibilities provided by the development of a new global policy framework, including the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); the water, climate, food and energy nexus; green growth and the EU Water Diplomacy initiative.

Delegates discussed the OECD/UNECE programme of work under the EECCA component of the EUWI for 2014. The activities will be developed within the following areas:

- Water-energy-food security nexus. This covers activities which promote the use of economic instruments to make the best use of available water resources and to strengthen the economic dimension of water policies (projects in Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan);
- Green economy. This covers activities which combine water and health, support the expansion and reliable provision of water supply and sanitation services (Armenia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan), or strive to manage water as a driver for economic development (Lake Baikal region, Russia);
- Water diplomacy. This particularly covers activities in transboundary basins (Azerbaijan - Georgia and Kazakhstan-Kyrgyzstan) and also benefits from activities which promote water efficiency in upstream countries (e.g. projects in Tajikistan).

Presentation at the third session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Water and Health in Norway

26 November 2013 – Oslo

Activities in support of the Protocol on Water and Health implemented under the EUWI NPD process

were presented at the Meeting of Parties to the Protocol. Presentation was made by Romanian delegation as the Chair of the NPD working group. NPDs are involved in the field of water and health by: (1) supporting of the target setting process and (2) providing platform for feedback and reporting at national level through regular NPD Steering Committee meetings. Cooperation between the NPD programme and the water and health related activities at the national level is currently ongoing in Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova and Tajikistan.



The 1st meeting of the NPD working group in Kazakhstan

6 December 2013 – Astana

In spring of 2013 Kazakhstan became the ninth country in the region of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia to join the NPD process. Conducted within the framework of the EUWI, the NPD process provides a platform for closer cooperation between different ministerial agencies for discussion of the direction of national water sector policy.

The working group meeting was chaired by Mr. Bulat Bekniyaz, head of the Water Resources Committee at the Ministry of Environment and Water Resources. A draft workplan for 2014-2015 was discussed and endorsed at the meeting, with two main areas of work for next year: UNECE will support Kazakhstan in studying the possibilities for joining the Protocol on Water and Health; and OECD will help to develop economic models for water supply and sanitation in rural areas of Kazakhstan.

The 11th Steering Committee meeting in Armenia

12 December 2013 – Yerevan

At the Steering Committee meeting, the working group presented the final baseline study on Armenia's health and environmental situation and legal framework on water. Main challenges included:

- Out of 22 wastewater treatment plants in the country, only 4 are currently operating and are providing only primary, mechanical treatment.
- Water losses in the water supply systems for the five main water operators range from 74 to 84 per cent.
- 560 rural settlements are not covered by water operators and manage their small-scale systems themselves.
- Out of 14 main water basins in Armenia only 4 have management plans.

The meeting, which gathered more than 35 representatives of stakeholders, discussed the results of the study and prioritized nine key target areas for the subsequent process of national target setting. These areas cover such high priority issues for Armenia as access to drinking water and sanitation, the quality of drinking water supplies, the quality of treated wastewater discharged into water bodies and reduction of water-related diseases and their outbreaks. The project working group is expected to present the draft targets at the next Steering Committee meeting, while the whole process of setting national targets and target dates will be completed by mid-2014.

OECD presented the results of the study on facilitating the reform of economic instruments of Armenia. The proposed options for reform, including detailed assessment of expected impacts and requisites for implementation were discussed by the meeting. More specifically, OECD made the suggestions on the reform of water abstraction and pollution fees, as well as the reform of land/property taxes and renting system nearby valuable water bodies. A comprehensive assessment of selected economic instruments for water management will be completed in 2014. Results of this assessment have already been used by the Government of Armenia for reforming water abstraction fees for the fishery sector. Proposed adaptations in water abstraction fees for fisheries have been considered in the revision of the law on "Nature Protection and Natural Resources Fees" that has been approved by the Government (September 2013) and the Parliament (December 2013).

Workshop on facilitating the reform of economic instruments for water management in Armenia and Kyrgyzstan

16 December 2013– Paris

The main objective of the workshop was to facilitate the exchange of information and experiences drawn from the reform of economic instruments for water management carried out so far in the two countries. To achieve this, discussions during the meeting were mainly focused on the on-going EUWI NPD activities and key developments on the use of economic instruments for water management in the

Caucasus and Central Asia; first results of the OECD study in the two countries; and new topics and ideas for future work, based on preliminary project's results and outcomes of other initiatives in the two countries.

Policy dialogue on the use of economic instruments for water management in the Lake Baikal basin (Republic of Buryatia, Russia)

16-17 January 2014 – Ulan-Ude

The policy dialogue was launched in July 2013 at a stakeholder meeting in Ulan-Ude, where key preparatory issues such as the scope of work, establishment of a Steering group, etc. were discussed and agreed upon. The inter-ministerial Steering group was established by a joint Ordinance, signed in October 2013 by the Ministers of Economy and Natural Resources of Buryatia upon agreement with other stakeholder institutions. Local and international consultants were selected in 2013, and the first field mission under the project was undertaken on 15-18 January 2014. The key objective of the mission was to meet all key local stakeholders, to launch the data collection and to agree upon further steps in the dialogue process, until July 2014.

The 3rd Steering Committee meeting in Azerbaijan

23 January 2014 – Baku

Around 30 representatives of different stakeholders and donors attended the 3rd NPD Steering Committee meeting in Baku on 23 January 2014. The meeting agreed to finalize the long-debated State water strategy within the next few months. Once finalized, it will lay the ground for the adoption of the key IWRM principles and for initiating the process of relevant changes in national legislation, bringing it into line with the EU Water Framework Directive.

Steering Committee discussed the potential of applying new economic instruments in water sector, such as a reform of water abstraction fees. Participants also welcomed the proposal to initiate the process of target setting under the Protocol on Water and Health. In order to meet the priorities set in the 2014 workplan, the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Azerbaijan will establish three working groups under the NPD process. The working groups on economic aspects will look at economic models that could help to achieve financial sustainability of the water management. A legal working group will first finalize the State water strategy, starting then to analyze further legislative changes. The third working group will be dealing with water quality monitoring issues with special attention to the state of transboundary rivers.

Reconciling different uses of water - work on the nexus in transboundary basins

by Annukka Lipponen, UNECE

Population growth, economic development, increased energy and food needs all exert increasing pressures on natural resources. Common development needs have to be met in a sustainable manner, without compromising the functioning of ecosystems. Energy, land management and water resources planning commonly take place in isolation, without adequate consideration of what the planned developments require or assume about other sectors, and of what implications – positive or negative – they have. Shortcomings in inter-sectoral coordination are a major challenge both on the national and transboundary levels, in developing as well as in developed countries. In a transboundary setting, the trade-offs and externalities may cause friction between the riparian countries and different interests. A nexus¹ (or inter-sectoral) approach to managing the interlinked resources can enhance water, energy and food security by increasing efficiency, reducing trade-offs, building synergies and improving governance across sectors. What policies, technologies, actions can help to move in that direction?

Recognizing the related challenges, the Parties to the UNECE Water Convention decided on an assessment of water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus to be carried out by the autumn of 2015. A representative set of transboundary basins in the pan-European region and beyond — based on proposals from the countries — are to be included. The approach to the assessment was presented at the meeting of the EUWI EECCA Working Group in Helsinki on 24 and 25 October 2013.

The assessment aims at identifying, together with the concerned sectors and relevant stakeholders, 1) hindrances to and opportunities for additional and equitable sharing of benefits from stronger integration across sectors, and 2) practical solutions for improving security and for reconciling the different sectors' needs. The process has been designed to support ownership by the authorities, meaningful participation of various stakeholders, learning together and exchanging experience between basins. This assessment under the UNECE Water Convention has parallels with the NPD process through which a cross-sectoral and stakeholder approach is also being implemented.

Pilot project in Alazani basin

To test the methodology that has been developed, assessment of the Alazani/Ganikh Basin, shared by Azerbaijan and Georgia, was initiated to form a holistic picture of the situation and to identify integrated cross-sector solutions where through joint action additional benefits can be achieved by both riparian countries. As a key step in the process, an inter-sectoral basin level workshop was organized involving the economic sectors, notably agriculture and energy, as well as water and environment administrations, companies and civil society representatives. The workshop was organised from 25 to 27 November 2013 in Kachreti, Georgia in cooperation with UNDP/GEF project "Reducing Transboundary Degradation in the Kura Ara(k)s River Basin" and co-hosted by the Ministry of Environment Protection and Natural Resources of Georgia.

At the workshop the participants engaged enthusiastically in group discussions, resulting in broadened understanding of the linkages between different sectors. Overall, it was noted that climate change was likely to increase flooding events as well as scarcity of water in the basin. Therefore it becomes crucial to assess how best to cooperate between countries and sectors in managing water resources. In doing so, participants recognized the decisive importance of energy policies for protecting ecosystems and water resources from the negative effects of deforestation. They also concluded that improving water infrastructure, including for irrigation and treatment, would be a helpful step in reducing pressure on natural resources and improving local economy. A consultative process for reviewing and developing the basin assessment with the riparian countries has been laid out. The findings contribute to the National IWRM plans for Georgia and Azerbaijan being developed with the support of the UNDP/GEF Kura project. It is expected that additional benefits and opportunities related to inter-sectoral coordination will also emerge at national level in the transboundary assessment process. The approach and the results of the series of assessments can inspire reflecting further on inter-sectoral work in the EECCA, including future work under the NPDs. Other transboundary river basins where nexus assessment is expected to be conducted in 2014-2015 include the Sava, Isonzo/Soca, Narva, Syr Darya, Niger, Mekong and the North-West Sahara Aquifer (some pending confirmation).

¹ The nexus term in the context of water, food (agriculture) and energy refers to these sectors being inextricably linked so that actions in one area commonly have impacts on the others, as well as on the ecosystems.

Meetings and events until Summer 2014

(the schedule is tentative, meeting dates may change)

13 February 2014	Brussels, Belgium	Global EUWI coordination meeting
18 March 2014	Dushanbe, Tajikistan	6th NPD Steering Committee meeting
20 March 2014	Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan	11th NPD Steering Committee meeting
4 April 2014	Ashgabad, Turkmenistan	4th NPD Steering Committee meeting
23-24 April 2014	Borovoe, Kazakhstan	Workshop on the Protocol on water and health back to back with the 2nd NPD Steering Committee meeting
2 May 2014	Yerevan, Armenia	12th NPD Steering Committee meeting
6 May 2014	Tbilisi, Georgia	3rd NPD Steering Committee meeting
June 2014	Ulan-Ude, Russia	Policy dialogue on the use of economic instruments in the Lake Baikal basin

Publications and reports

Publications related to the NPD process are available at the UNECE Water Convention website www.unece.org/env/water/npd/publications/

Documents and presentations of the meetings held at the national level in the EECCA region are available at www.unece.org/env/water/npd/countrydialogues

All water-related publications of OECD are available at www.oecd.org/water

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Contact us

UNECE

Bo Libert, Regional Advisor for Environment
T: +41 (0) 22 917 2396
F: +41 (0) 22 917 0621
Bo.Libert@unece.org

Peep Mardiste, Regional NPD coordinator
T: +41 (0) 22 917 3448
F: +41 (0) 22 917 0107
Peep.Mardiste@unece.org

Nataliya Nikiforova, Associate Environmental Affairs Officer
T: +41 (0) 22 917 1927
F: +41 (0) 22 917 0621
Nataliya.Nikiforova@unece.org

OECD

Xavier Leflaive, Principal Administrator
T: +33 (0)1 45 24 92 94
F: +33 (0)1 44 30 61 79
Xavier.Leflaive@oecd.org

Tatiana Efimova, Project manager
T: +33 (0) 1 45 24 14 34
Tatiana.Efimova@oecd.org

Alexandre Martoussevitch, Project manager
T: + 33 (0) 1 45 24 13 84
Alexandre.Martoussevitch@oecd.org