



UNECE Weekly

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

Issue N° 146 – 14-18 November 2005

It's just happened ...

Sharing water crucial for sustainable development

Floods in Europe over the last few years have cost hundreds of lives and caused damage assessed in millions of dollars. In Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) most of the population relies on transboundary rivers and lakes for drinking water supply, irrigation and energy production. Proper management of such waters is therefore crucial for sustainable development of the region.

Common policies essential

Reliable and comparable information is fundamental to preparing good water policies and actions. In particular, in transboundary basins there is a need for a common understanding of the status of the shared water resources basis in order to be able to agree on common policies. Improving monitoring and assessment of transboundary waters is therefore essential.



To this end, an International Workshop on *Joint Monitoring and Assessment of Shared Water Basins, including Early Warning and Alarm Systems* was held in Tbilisi, Georgia, from 31 October to 2 November.

Cross-fertilization

The workshop was the third training event organized under the project Capacity for Water Cooperation (CWC) in EECCA, which is part of the work programme of the UNECE Water Convention. The CWC project strengthens the capacity of EECCA decision makers, planners and practitioners. Cross-fertilization among policy, science and practice, and exchange of experience between ongoing projects and countries is a particular feature. CWC also establishes a network of EECCA

Last minute ...

On Friday, 11 November considerable progress was achieved on UNECE reform. Member States agreed on most of a reform package which includes a revision of the mission statement, the governance structure and the priorities of the work programme, as well as a redistribution of resources.

E Task Force explores smelly topics

In the rapidly developing world of information technology, 16 months is nearly an eternity.

The last time the UNECE task force on electronic information tools met, experts grappled with draft recommendations to provide the public with electronic access to environmental information. This week these recommendations, having been adopted by the Parties to the Aarhus Convention, will be presented by UNECE at a side event to the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in Tunis.

WSIS side event

The World Forum on Information Society UNECE/UNEP side event "*Capacity Building for Electronic Information Tools and the Environment*" will be held on 14 November in La Marsa, Tunisia (see <http://irfd.org/events/wf2005/>).

Transparent decision-making

The e-tools experts won't be resting on their laurels for long. At the 4th meeting of the task force, held 7-8 November in Geneva, experts debated a programme of capacity building activities to promote the use of e-tools to make government decision-making more transparent and

democratic. The session featured some of the latest techniques in e-democracy:

▲ Bluelink Network demonstrated a newly developed web platform used to elect NGO representatives to official public commissions and working groups in Bulgaria.

▲ Environment Agency for England and Wales showed off its new electronic public consultation

web tool. In its pilot phase, residents in southwestern England will be able to register for electronic notification of applications for opening waste disposal sites in their community and submit public comments online. Officials hope to encourage dialogue between the public, waste managers and local authorities over the often contentious issue of where to store waste.

▲ European Environment Agency presented The Neighbourhood Project which aims to deliver community-level environmental information through the Internet. EEA plans to post 'point and click' air quality data on searchable web maps during the first phase of the project.

It's a brave (and smelly) new world out there. ❖

For more information contact michael.stanley-jones@unece.org.



experts involved in transboundary water management.

The workshop conclusions will be taken up under international projects carried out in the region and by the UNECE Water Convention.

The workshop was prepared by the Finnish

Environment Institute – which also funded it – and the UNECE in cooperation with the Ministry of Environment of Georgia and the Regional Environmental Centre for the Caucasus. ❖

All information on the workshop is available at: <http://www.unece.org/env/water/cwc.htm>.

Not an official record - For information only

Making PPPs a reality

Public-Private Partnerships refer to concession-based infrastructure projects, which combine the strengths of the private sector – entrepreneurial drive, new technology, and finance – with the public sector's role in regulation and supervision to form partnerships that deliver services in sectors such as transport, energy, communications, health and education. Much is currently discussed about these methods to modernize and develop infrastructure particularly in transition economies. However bringing ideas into concrete reality is challenging, as the skills required are new and tend to be found in the public, not the private sector.

Value for money

To address this challenge the UNECE in cooperation with the UK Government's Department for Trade and Industry organized a conference "*Making PPPs a reality*", on 23-24 October, on the occasion of the 52nd session of the Working Party

on International Legal and Commercial Practices. The meeting explored the UK experience in making PPPs a reality and the key roles played by a skilled professional public administration constituted in PPP task forces or units, an adequate legal and regulatory framework, long-term political support and a broad consensus in civil society in support of private sector involvement in the delivery of public services. The UK experience also showed the importance of independent auditing of projects after they have begun, to verify that the public has received "value for money". The UK success in PPPs is found in the transport sector, health, education and other social services. However, not all the process has been smooth. PPPs in Information Technology have proven far more difficult.

Emerging opportunities

The meeting further examined how to bring this reality to countries starting out in PPPs. A wide-ranging debate was held on the Russian Federation, and

representatives of many Ministries and also of business including the CEO of Veshnekombank discussed the emerging opportunities in PPPs in that country. Also a representative from Ukraine presented his country's policy in PPPs.

Guidelines for standards

Integrating the countries from CIS with the PPP industry will be a key target of the work of the PPP Alliance. In order to raise investors' confidence in emerging markets, the representatives of the UNECE PPP Alliance presented guidelines that set out standards for undertaking projects. By complying with such standards and obtaining certification that such standards have been observed, this UNECE tool, it was argued, can help countries to overcome the private sector's wariness and attract investment.

A first follow up event is planned in the Russian Federation in December 2005. ❖

For more information contact geoffrey.hamilton@unece.org.

Coming up soon ...



WSIS regional commissions' parallel events

As part of the Tunis phase of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) (16-18 November 2005), the five United Nations regional commissions, UNCTAD, and the UN ICT Task Force, are jointly organizing a parallel event on "*Building Regional Partnerships for the Information Society: Regional Perspectives and Global Dimensions*". The event will take place in two High-Level Round Tables, featuring Heads of State, Government Ministers, the Executive Secretaries of the

United Nations regional commissions, as well as high-level representatives of the business community and civil society. The Round Tables – on Regional Perspectives for the Global Information Society and on Women in the Information Society: Building a Gender Balanced Knowledge-Based Economy – will be held in Tunis, on 16 November.

For more information visit: <http://www.unece.org/press/specialevent/WSIS-2005/welcome.htm>



From commitment to action

As part of the official WSIS, two Round Tables will be organized, on 17 November 2005. Mr. Paolo Garonna has been nominated by the Secretary-General of the WSIS Summit to participate in Round Table 1, which will take place on 17 November.

The round tables, organized around the

overarching theme: "*From Commitment to Action: Implementation after Tunis*", aim to give Heads of State or Government an opportunity to engage in an interactive discussion with leaders from organizations and entities attending the Summit on the future of the Information Society. Discussions should preferably conclude with relevant policy suggestions

so that the outcome of the discussions translates into suggestions/proposals for implementation of the commitments to be made at the Summit.

The proceedings of the round table sessions will be broadcast live on the Internet.

November

- 14 Administrative Committee for the Coordination of Work (WP.29/AC.2)
- 14-15 Implementation Committee for the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context
- 14-16 Joint UNECE/WHO Seminar on Measurement of Health Status (Budapest, Hungary)
- 15-18 World Forum for Harmonization of Vehicle Regulations (WP.29)

For further information please contact:

Information Service
UN Economic Commission for Europe
(UNECE)
CH - 1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

Tel: +41(0)22 917 44 44
Fax: +41(0)22 917 05 05
E-mail: info.ece@unece.org
Website: <http://www.unece.org>