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to the Convention on the Protection  
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Water Initiative National Policy Dialogues

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## **REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION WATER INITIATIVE NATIONAL POLICY DIALOGUES**

### *Summary*

The National Policy Dialogues are the main operational instrument under the European Union Water Initiative in the countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia.

This document gives an outline of objectives, achievements and activities implemented in the period 2017-2019 under the National Policy Dialogues on Integrated Water Resources Management led by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe in those countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, where the work related to the Protocol on Water and Health has been identified as a thematic priority.

## **I. Background and objectives of the National Policy Dialogues**

1. National Policy Dialogues (NPD) on Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) and Water Supply and Sanitation (WSS) are the main operational instrument of the European Union Water Initiative (EUWI) for Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. The EUWI and NPDs support the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda). The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) is the strategic partner for support to the policy dialogue processes on IWRM,

whereas the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is the strategic partner for WSS and financial aspects of IWRM. Altogether, since 2006 the EUWI NPDs have been carried out in ten countries. Since 2016, the work in the six EU Eastern Partnership countries is carried out in the framework of the EU-funded EUWI Plus for the Eastern Partnership programme (EUWI+) with UNECE, OECD and an EU Member States Consortium, which includes the Environment Agency Austria and the International Office for Water of France, working together as implementing partners. Within the EUWI+, the UNECE and OECD are the strategic partners for the National Policy Dialogues.

2. In Central Asia, since 2016 the organization of NPD meetings in partner countries has been supported by the EU-funded WECOOP II programme while some substantive activities were ongoing in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (funded by Finland through the FinWaterWEI II) and in Kazakhstan (implemented jointly with UNDP through an EU-funded Green Economy project). A new project on EUWI NPDs has been launched in September 2019 under the third phase of the WECOOP programme to support water sector reforms in Central Asia. Until 2016, the work on EUWI NPDs at the regional level was coordinated by a Working Group chaired by Romania.

3. With respect to IWRM, NPDs provide practical assistance to strengthen the application of the principles of IWRM as enshrined in the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention), the UNECE-World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe (WHO/Europe) Protocol on Water and Health to the Water Convention, the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD) and to the implementation of relevant Sustainable Development Goals.

4. With relation to work on WSS, NPDs provide practical assistance to the countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia in achieving their global and regional commitments through improving the legal, institutional and regulatory framework in water supply and sanitation and overall sector governance in line with international best practices and OECD expertise.

5. In 2017-2019, the focus on water and health issues in general and the activities under the Protocol, in particular, were increasingly recognized as priority in most countries where NPDs are operational.

6. In particular, over the last three years, the UNECE-led NPDs ensured high-level political commitment and provided significant financial and substantive support to the implementation or application of the Protocol in those countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia where this has been identified as a thematic priority, namely in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Moldova, Tajikistan and Ukraine.

7. NPDs provided a political platform and financial and expert support for target-setting or revision processes in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Moldova, Tajikistan and Ukraine. National Policy Dialogues were also instrumental in promoting accession to the Protocol in all of the above countries (except Azerbaijan, Belarus, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, which are already Parties).

8. In addition to the Water Convention staff managing the EUWI NPD programme from the UNECE side, substantive inputs to activities on the ground have been provided by members of the Joint Protocol Secretariat. Specifically, UNECE and WHO/Europe staff members provided thematic inputs to documents on target setting and revision and other related county-level activities.

9. The Protocol-related activities under the National Policy Dialogues have also established synergies, where relevant, with different thematic areas of work, such as equitable access, and raised awareness on the linkages with relevant SDGs.

## **II. Activities and stakeholders involved**

10. National Policy Dialogues are based on consultations with relevant ministries, agencies and institutions (including science and academia), non-governmental organizations, parliamentary bodies and other national and international organizations. The dialogue process is usually conducted under the leadership of a high-level government representative such as the Minister/Deputy Minister of Environment or the Head of the State Water Committee/Agency, with the involvement of health authorities for issues related to the Protocol on Water and Health. National Steering Committees are established in each country to guide and steer the NPD process. They include representatives of relevant ministries, agencies and institutions, as well as non-governmental organizations.

11. The Steering Committees meet up to two times a year at the national level. They discuss key national water policy issues and adopt decisions on NPD activities. International and donor organizations, such as the EU Delegations, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), WHO, the World Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and bilateral donors are invited to and encouraged to attend the policy dialogue meetings.

12. In addition to their original function of supporting the development of policies on IWRM and WSS, in several countries the NPDs and their Steering Committees have been playing the role of national coordination mechanisms for water-related projects carried out under the auspices of international organizations (e.g. EU, UNECE, UNDP, WHO/Europe, World Bank, OECD) and donor countries (e.g. Finland, Germany, Norway and Switzerland). This contributes to streamlining action in the area of water and to a more efficient use of available funds.

## **III. Implementation of the National Policy Dialogues on Integrated Water Resources Management with the focus on the Protocol on Water and Health**

### **Armenia**

During the period from 2017-2019, support to the implementation of the UNECE/WHO-Europe Protocol on Water and Health in the area of target setting has been provided through the European Union Water Initiative plus programme (EUWI+). As a national priority under the Armenian workplan within the EUWI+, a Rapid Assessment of the current relevance of the targets and target dates set in the context of the Protocol on Water and Health in Armenia (2013-2014) was conducted in 2017. A Workshop/Consultation meeting on the Protocol on

Water and Health and equitable access to water supply and sanitation in Armenia was held on 5 December 2017 in Yerevan. Information about the workshop is available under <https://www.unece.org/env/water/npd/countrydialogues/am.html>.

In 2018, a national expert group worked on the revision of national targets and on the analysis of legislative barriers to ensure equitable access to water and sanitation supported by the EUWI+ programme. A National Stakeholder Consultation Meeting on the Protocol on Water and Health and Equitable Access to water supply and sanitation in Armenia was organized on 19 February 2019 in Yerevan. The aim of the meeting was to discuss the draft revised targets and the analysis on equitable access to water and sanitation in Armenia. Information about the workshop is available under <https://www.unece.org/env/water/npd/countrydialogues/am.html>.

Following comments received by participants in the meeting and relevant governmental authorities, the revised targets were finalized in 2019. UNECE is assisting Armenia in the implementation of this activity. UNECE has also continued to promote Armenia's accession to the Protocol throughout the reporting period.

### **Azerbaijan**

In Azerbaijan, the work on setting national targets and target dates under the Protocol on Water and Health was completed during the reporting period, which was one of the national priorities by Azerbaijan identified under the EUWI+.

In December 2017, UNECE provided its final comments on the draft national targets under the Protocol on Water and Health. A Workshop/Consultation meeting on the Protocol on Water and Health and equitable access to water supply and sanitation in Azerbaijan was organized in Baku on 5 July 2018. Information on the event is available under <https://www.unece.org/env/water/npd/countrydialogues/az.html>.

A major achievement under the National Policy Dialogues was the official adoption of the national targets under the Protocol in Azerbaijan in August 2018 by a joint decree of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources and the Ministry of Health.

UNECE, within the framework of NPDs, also provided logistical and methodological expert support in developing the national summary report of Azerbaijan within the fourth reporting cycle under the Protocol.

### **Belarus**

In 2018, the work on updating the targets under the Protocol on Water and Health has been initiated and a kick-off meeting was organized in December 2018 in Minsk. An expert group was formed, which prepared a baseline report and draft revised targets. A Multi-Stakeholder Workshop on the Protocol on Water and Health: Equitable access to water and sanitation and target-setting in Belarus was organized in Minsk by the Ministry of Health and supported by UNECE through the EUWI+ programme on 29 October 2019. The workshop enabled participants to comment on the draft targets. The Ministry of Health invited participants to provide written comments to the draft targets by 10 November 2019 in order to finalize and present them to the National Intersectoral Committee mid-December 2019. Information on

activities implemented under the EUWI+ in Belarus are available at <https://www.unece.org/env/water/npd/countrydialogues/by.html>

## **Georgia**

While no specific activities related to target setting etc. were implemented during the last triennium, NPDs have continued to promote the Protocol and its implementation in the country. During this period, NPDs provided the overall support for the approximation of EU water legislation in Georgia in line with the requirements of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement. Georgian national experts participated in regional training activities related to the Protocol with support of the EUWI+.

## **Kazakhstan**

The process of setting national targets and target dates under the Protocol was supported through an EU-funded project on Green Economy and supported by the NPDs. The project provided an important practical impetus to the announced several years ago intention of the country, which is Party to the UNECE Water Convention, to accede to the Protocol on Water and Health. The project specifically supported the development of national targets for the quality of drinking water and the quality of waste water discharges, as well as for the performance of water supply and waste water treatment systems.

## **Kyrgyzstan**

An important achievement in the period 2017–2019 was the finalization of the project “Implementation of national water and health targets in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan through National Policy Dialogues”, funded by FinWaterWEI II programme and implemented by UNECE in partnership with the national authorities. The three-year project culminated in revised targets for Kyrgyzstan set in the context of the Protocol and a comprehensive action plan with specific activities, analysis of synergies with the Sustainable Development Goals and a strategy to mobilize financial resources by the government and donor community.

In Kyrgyzstan, the action plan was endorsed by the Steering Committee of the National Policy Dialogue in July 2017 and then submitted to the Government of Kyrgyzstan in January 2018. The Steering Committee suggested that the proposed targets and measures should be integrated into the implementation programme for the Kyrgyz Sustainable Development Strategy that was under development. This approach of promoting integration of project results into national legislation has proved successful for the sustainability of project results and can be replicated in future assistance activities under the Protocol.

In addition to the preparation of the action plan, the project supported the development of rules for operation and control of wastewater treatment facilities and wastewater discharge and rules for industrial wastewater collection in the centralized sanitation systems to be officially adopted by the Government of Kyrgyzstan.

## **Republic of Moldova**

In the Republic of Moldova, support to the implementation of the Protocol on Water and Health in the past triennium was provided in the framework of the EUWI+ programme. The need for revision of the National Programme to implement the Protocol on Water and Health

until 2025 and to implement selected measures was identified as one of the national priorities under the EUWI+ by the Republic of Moldova.

In 2018, the work on the revision of the National Programme has started and is currently ongoing. Several meetings with national experts were held in the reporting period. In the Republic of Moldova, the revision of the National Programme is also being carried out along with the implementation of the target related to equitable access. Specifically, the analysis of legal and institutional barriers to ensuring equitable access is being developed.

NPDs will continue supporting the finalization of the revision of the National Programme and in implementation of national targets on water and health.

## **Tajikistan**

In Tajikistan, the work on revising the targets and target dates set in 2013 in the context of the Protocol on Water and Health was supported by Finland (FinWaterWEI II) and completed in 2018 through the National Policy Dialogue. The three-year project also culminated in a comprehensive action plan with specific activities, analysis of synergies with the Sustainable Development Goals and a strategy to mobilize financial resources by the government and the donor community. The Government of Tajikistan entrusted the Steering Committee of the National Policy Dialogue with the official adoption of the targets and the action plan in November 2018. In addition to the preparation of the action plan, the project supported the development of a methodology for collecting and managing statistical data on drinking water for the Tajik State Statistics Office and draft chapters of the National Water Strategy of Tajikistan.

## **Ukraine**

In Ukraine, support to the implementation of the Protocol on Water and Health in the past triennium was provided in the framework of the EUWI+ programme and revision of the 2011 national targets was one of the national priorities under the EUWI+. A national expert group was established to work on the baseline study, the draft revised targets and their implementation plan. An inter-ministerial working group meeting was organized on 28 September 2017 to present a first draft of the baseline study on water and health.

The national expert group finalized the work on the draft revised targets and their implementation plan under the Protocol on Water and Health in 2018. Public consultations on the revision of national targets under the Protocol on Water and Health were held on 19-20 December 2018 in Kyiv. The final draft of the new revised national targets and their action plan is currently under consideration for adoption at the appropriate government level. The revised targets include a dedicated target on equitable access to water and sanitation.

UNECE within the frame of the National Policy Dialogues also provided logistical and methodological expert support in developing the national summary reports within the fourth reporting cycle under the Protocol.

## **Capacity Development**

In addition to in-country activities, a subregional workshop on synergies and joint implementation of the Protocol on Water and Health, the relevant European Union

Directives, particularly the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive and the Drinking Water Directive recast, as well as the relevant Sustainable Development Goals, was organized by UNECE for countries in the Eastern Neighbourhood region back-to-back with the eleventh meeting of the Working Group on Water and Health (Geneva, 2 April 2019). Information on the workshop is available under: <https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=51497>.

#### **IV. Lessons learned and challenges ahead**

13. In the past triennium, water and health issues and activities under the Protocol were identified as key priority in most countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia where NPDs on IWRM are operational. NPDs played an important role in advancing the implementation of the Protocol and in promoting accession to it in countries of the region.

14. Leadership and commitment of national actors is key for successful implementation of the NPDs. Continuous involvement of representatives of parliamentary and governmental bodies is required for discussing and adopting new policy packages and measures. NGOs, research community and water utilities are important drivers for policy reform discussions and should also be actively involved in the dialogue processes.

15. Sustainable investments and financing in the water supply and sanitation sector at the country level are crucial to ensure the implementation of national targets and to enhance necessary reforms.

16. Political leadership by the European Union is crucial for implementing the NPDs. Close coordination of NPD activities with the EU Delegations, as well as coordination of NPD activities with other EU activities should be continued. This is particularly important for countries, which ratified Association or other type of Partnership Agreements with the EU.

17. Coordination with development partners contributes to ensuring sustainability of the results of NPDs in the medium term: e.g. on several instances, the EU and bilateral donors followed up on specific priority actions and technical assistance needs identified in the policy dialogue processes. Donors and international organizations also find an interest in NPDs as NPDs provide a platform to share expertise and coordinate initiatives.

18. An unstable and rapidly changing political environment in some of the EUWI NPDs target countries is one of the major risks for NPDs implementation. This risk can be minimized by continuous engagement of different stakeholders at the national level.

19. NPDs evolve over time. They are typically set for several years and require a medium/long term perspective. It is important that financial support reflects this dimension. Financial support by the EU is crucial as it contributes to ensure the sustainability of the processes over several years. In the past, recurrent and stable funding from Finland, Germany, Norway and Switzerland were also key for implementing specific projects in the NPDs framework.

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