

**Sixth Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention
Budva, Montenegro**

OSCE Statement by Jenniver Sehring, OSCE Secretariat

We in the OSCE continue to support our participating States in the implementation of the Multilateral Environmental Agreements and in doing so we attach great importance to ensuring synergies among these agreements.

Today I would like to share with you information on one of our activities - the South-Eastern Europe Regional Roundtable, which we organized in order to explore synergies of the Espoo, Helsinki and Aarhus Conventions when it comes to strengthening public participation in transboundary water management.

The meeting took place in March 2015 in Tirana and gathered around 40 representatives of Aarhus Centres, local authorities and relevant government agencies from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia as well as of international and regional actors, including the Austrian Development Cooperation which funded this activity.

Presentations by experts introduced basic features and mechanisms of public participation under the Helsinki and Espoo conventions, which provide a link to the Aarhus Convention. This was accompanied by practical examples of public participation in transboundary water management from representatives of the commissions for the Sava and the Drin River Basins, as well as from local level processes in Serbia (flood risk management) and Germany (WFD implementation). Also the case of the Danube-Black Sea Shipping Canal, which was submitted to both Aarhus and Espoo Conventions' Compliance Committees, and the role of NGOs in this process, was presented.

During group discussions, the participants elaborated and prioritized common challenges and solutions for public participation in transboundary water management in South Eastern Europe.

Let me briefly mention the main results:

As main issues in transboundary water management in South-Eastern Europe that would require more public participation, the participants rated highest:

- The Lack of knowledge of transboundary procedures;
- The lack of cross-border exchange of information and communication;

- And insufficient communication between authorities and the public, and authorities and media, including a lack of media capacities for reporting on environmental issues;

The participants suggested the following approaches for public participation:

- Building up a regional network of Aarhus Centres;
- Application of Information Technologies for better dissemination of information to public;
- A more active role of organized local stakeholders/citizens, for example through representation in transboundary water management processes;

As one concrete result, these discussions contributed to the signing of a joint declaration by the 13 Aarhus Centres from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia later that year. In this Joint Declaration for co-operation, the Aarhus Centres state their commitment to strengthen partnership and co-operation among them in order to reinforce the promotion and implementation of the Aarhus Convention, to facilitate a dialogue of civil society organizations across borders, and to more effectively address common environmental concerns.

A report of the meeting outcomes is available on our website and you are welcome to approach us for more information.