

Notes of the consultation meeting on the Protocol on Water and Health and equitable access to water supply and sanitation in Armenia



Date: 5 December 2017

Venue: Hotel Marriott Armenia, Yerevan

Attendance: The meeting was attended by 25 participants representing key national stakeholders, such as the Ministry of Health (MoH), Ministry of Energy Infrastructures and Natural Resources (MEINR), Ministry of Nature Protection (MNP), International Organizations (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Armenia and Asian Development Bank (ADB) Armenia) and Projects (European Union Water Initiative Plus (EUWI+)), private sector (“Veolia Jur” closed joint stock company (CJSC) – water supply and sanitation service provider), academia (Institute of Water Problems and Hydrotechnics after Academician V. Yeghiazarov), Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Armenian Women for Health and Healthy Environment (AWHHE) and Association “For Sustainable Human Development”), independent experts and United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).

The meeting was organized by UNECE with logistical support of UNDP within the EUWI+ and a UN Development Account (1415AF) projects and was **Co-chaired** by the State Committee on Water Economy (SCWE) of the Ministry of Energy Infrastructures and Natural Resources (MEINR) and the



Water Resources Management Agency (WRMA) of the Ministry of Nature Protection (MNP) of the Republic of Armenia.

The aim of the Consultation meeting was to discuss:

- i) ways and means to implement the Action Plan for 2018-2020 for the Provision of Equitable Access to Water Supply and Sanitation in Armenia; and
- ii) modalities for the revision/update of the targets set in the context of the UNECE/World Health Organization (WHO) - Europe Protocol on Water and Health to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) and the support required for possible ratification of the Protocol by Armenia.

In the **opening session** Co-chairs of the consultation meeting Mr. Volodya Narimanyan, Deputy Chairman of the State Committee on Water Economy and Mr. Vahan Davtyan, Head of the Water Resources Management Agency welcomed participants of the meeting. Opening statement was also made by a representative of UNECE. After opening remarks they congratulated participants with the signing of the Armenia - European Union (EU) Agreement on Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership.

Session 1: Equitable access to water supply and sanitation in Armenia

The first session was chaired by Mr. Narimanyan who presented the main points of the agenda. The meeting participants adopted the agenda as it was presented.

Afterwards, Mr. Narimanyan summarized the status of activities in the context of the Protocol on Water and Health by stating that although Armenia is not yet a Party to the Protocol, it has successfully implemented projects, such as “Target setting process under the Protocol on Water and Health in Armenia, 2013-2014”, “Assessing equitable access to water and sanitation in Armenia, 2016” and “Development of an equitable access action plan, 2017”.

Ms. Armine Arushanyan, Chief Specialist of the Department of Water Supply and Sanitation Systems of SCWE presented the adopted Action Plan on Equitable Access to Water Supply and Sanitation in Armenia for the period 2018-2020. The development of the Action plan was based on the results of the assessment of the equitable access to water and sanitation in the country by applying the UNECE Equitable Access Score-card.

Ms. Elena Manvelyan, Head of the AWHHE NGO, made a presentation on public participation in the implementation of the Protocol on Water and Health, particularly emphasizing Article 5 (i) of the Protocol and the Aarhus Convention; and AWHHE’s role in the conducted public consultations.

The presentations were followed by the Q&A session. The participants asked clarification questions and commented on the equitable access to water and sanitation in Armenia, particularly paying attention to geographical disparities, emphasizing issues related to 579 communities, which are not served by professional water utilities; and vulnerable groups and possible financial sources to implement the Action Plan.

In the discussion session on the implementation of the Action Plan several issues were discussed and possible actions to address them were suggested:

- Possible funding options to implement the Action Plan: By adopting the Action Plan Armenia demonstrated political will to implement the principles of equitable access in its water and sanitation sector. But the financial means to implement action plan are not yet ensured.



The first action of the Action Plan is “To analyse the water legislative framework and identify legislative barriers to ensure the implementation of the Equitable Access Score-card”. The Plan was circulated among the stakeholders and was agreed that the first action is very important to ensure equitable access. There are seven co-implementers for the first action, such as the MoH, Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, etc. The estimated budget for the implementation of this action, as indicated in the Action Plan is 25 mln. AMD (approx. 51500 USD).

To make access to water and sanitation affordable for different income groups, it was suggested to introduce such a tariff for water and sanitation that would ensure financial sustainability and affordability for the poorest. This means that users shall pay different amounts for different consumption levels, e.g. the rate per unit of water increases as the volume of consumption increases. In Armenia, the approach is opposite, the rate per unit of water decreases as the volume of consumption increases.

Considering scarce financial means, some participants suggested to implement pilots aimed at ensuring equitable access to water and sanitation.

Participants were informed by SCWE, that although, the Action Plan was considered to start in 2018, some activities are underway to ensure access to water and sanitation for non-served communities.

- Linkages with five EU Directives (Water Framework Directive, Flood Directive, Urban wastewater Directive, Drinking Water Directive and Nitrate Directive): By signing the Agreement on Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership, Armenia agreed to harmonize the national legislation with the EU legislation. The first step for the harmonization is to analyse national water legislation with regards to five EU Directives. This will be partly supported by UNECE in the frames of the EUWI+ project through the development of a roadmap for harmonization of the national legislation.

The participants of the Consultation meeting suggested the national assessment of the water legislation from the equitable access perspective and in terms of the application of above mentioned EU Directives be implemented in parallel.

- Involvement of donors: UNDP - Armenia representative mentioned that water is not a topic only for drinking purposes but for wider use in other fields, such as social dimensions, health, agriculture, etc. The activities aimed to improve other fields also indirectly contribute to improvement of drinking-water supply and sanitation sector. It was suggested to assess relationship between water supply and sanitation and other fields and respective inputs.
- Linkages with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): UNDP - Armenia informed the participants that Armenia would be finalizing its national SDG targets in the first half of 2018 and recommended to include the consideration of the above mentioned actions into that process.

The results of the first session discussions and its decisions are summarized below:

- *Taking into consideration that the Action plan for the provision of equitable access was considered as a priority for the country, the consultation meeting participants requested the EU and UNECE to support the implementation of the analysis of the water legislative framework and identification of the legislative barriers for ensuring implementation of the equitable access to water and sanitation through the EUWI+ project.*



- *Considering that Armenia signed the Agreement on Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership and has obligation to harmonize the national legislation with the EU legislation, meeting participants agreed to discuss work in relation to the five EU Directives during the next EUWI NPD meeting which will be held in March 2018. The EU and UNECE were requested to assist Armenia in the preparation of an initial roadmap for the application of the 5 EU directives related to water through EUWI+ project and taking into account the provisions of the new EU-Armenia partnership agreement.*

Session 2: Application of the UNECE/WHO-Europe Protocol on Water and Health in Armenia

During the second session issues related to application of the Protocol in Armenia were discussed. The second session was also chaired by Mr. Narimanyan, Deputy Chairman of the State Committee on Water Economy.

Ms. Emma Anakhasyan, senior independent expert on drinking water and sanitation in Armenia, presented national target indicators set in the context of the Protocol in Armenia in 2013-2014, their relevance to current situation and need to revise and/or set new targets and target dates. These targets and target dates were not officially adopted.

In her presentation, Ms. Anakhasyan described the results of the rapid assessment regarding the relevance of the set targets and target dates with respect to: a) structural changes that occurred in key ministries responsible for the implementation of targets; b) legislation changes, amendments to legal acts, new legal acts and strategies that were developed in the sector; c) changes in drinking-water and sanitation service providers; d) completed/expired short-term target dates; e) some implemented targets or targets in the stage of implementation; and f) currently irrelevant indicators.

Furthermore, Ms. Anakhasyan suggested to conduct an in-depth situation analysis and revise targets and target dates taking into account the following aspects: a) transition from the presidential to parliamentary structure in Armenia; b) signing of the Agreement on Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership; c) the need to ensure consistency with the national SDGs; d) policy focus on wastewater treatment; and e) the adoption of Equitable Access Action Plan.

The participants were asked to reflect on the recent developments.

Mr. Mushegh Karapetyan and Ms. Armine Arushanyan from SCWE updated on recent developments in water and sanitation sectors of Armenia. They particularly mentioned about the non-served 579 communities and existing strategies to improve situation regarding drinking-water and sanitation services. Mr. Karapetyan stated that it is the first time that the Government addressed the issue of the non-served communities in its action plan for 2017-2022. Moreover, it was the first time that comprehensive assessment of the communities' water supply and sanitation has been done. In 2018, a new operator will be selected for non-served communities and "Veoil Jur" CJSC is also interested to participate in the tender. "Veoil Jur" CJSC has obligations according to the Lease Contract to invest 37.5 billion AMD (approx. 77.4 mln. USD) in the sector over the period of 15 years to improve situation with drinking water supply and sanitation.

Ms. Gayane Hovsepyan, Deputy Head of the Water Resources Monitoring and Cadastre Division of WRMA updated on recent development in the sector of the water resource management in Armenia. Ms. Hovsepyan mentioned that three river basin management plans out of total six basin districts were developed and adopted. Their adoption had appeared as a target indicator set in the context of the Protocol on Water and Health. She particularly mentioned that the Water Code of Armenia was revised to address the legal gaps identified during the past several years. Issues related to the recycled water use were addressed and a new chapter on sanitation was developed for the Water Code of Armenia, which is now in the Parliament for adoption. Also, the State Water Cadastre



Information System, which is currently used as an informative tool for data storage and dissemination, is now being updated.

Ms. Nune Bakunts, Deputy Director of the “National Center of Disease Control and Prevention” SNCO of the Ministry of Health pointed out that as a key stakeholder they are interested to implement the provisions of the Protocol. Additionally, the situation has been changed in the country during the last three years, which necessitates the revision of the targets and target dates.

Mr. Alisher Mamadzhanov from UNECE presented linkages between the Sustainable Development Goals and the target setting under the Protocol on Water and Health. He emphasized the role of the Protocol as a powerful tool to promote and operationalize the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs. The Protocol has strong integrated and inter-sectoral approach and its provisions and principles fully align with SDG 6 “clean water and sanitation”, SDG 3 “good health and well-being” and other water, sanitation and health related targets. Mr. Mamadzhanov also introduced the latest JMP¹ estimates for Armenia, especially estimates for safely managed drinking-water supply and sanitation services. Those estimates will be used by JMP as a baseline for the SDG 6 attainment.

He also introduced proposed modalities for the process of the revision of targets and target dates, including the timelines for the revision process and the proposal to establish of a core group of experts/working group to work on the revision/drafting process.

In the Q&A session the participants welcomed the establishment of the working group and asked clarification questions on the related issues. Particularly, the discussion focused on:

- Tariff changes in case of introduction of new operator for non-served communities: One of the remarks on this question was that it is expected to have a new governmental decision ensuring service for those non-served communities and tariff shall remain as it is for the served communities (180 AMD per 1000 litres).
- Concerns regarding investments from “Veolia Jur” CJSC: The reflection was that the obligations are strict and the drinking-water and sanitation systems after 15 years of operations shall be returned in the same conditions. Additionally, according to the Lease Contract water loss shall be decreased about 30% after the mentioned period. In case of not meeting the obligations, fines are very high.
- Drinking-water quality assurance: The drinking-water quality standards were set by MoH. MoH regularly and on monthly basis monitors the drinking-water quality and informs SCWE about the results of the investigations. These results are sent to “Veolia Jur” CJSC and, if there are any deficiencies, the company shall take all possible measures to eliminate them and inform the SCWE thereof.
- Classification of non-served communities: Currently, non-served communities are being classified according to their current water supply system conditions.
- A new model for drinking-water and sanitation system: To encourage non-served communities to operate their systems properly, a new “design, build and operate” model could be introduced.
- Few examples of the targets in the context of the Protocol that were implemented: To improve the access of rural population to safe drinking water it was planned to construct and rehabilitate water supply systems in 15 communities by 2016; but actually 25 communities already have improved the access.

¹ The WHO and UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation (JMP) is the official United Nations mechanism mandated with monitoring of global commitments on water and sanitation.

To reduce discharges of untreated wastewater it was planned to construct wastewater treatment plants in Dilijan and Jermuk by 2016. Currently, these wastewater treatment plants and additionally Martuni, Gavar, Vardenis and “Aeracia” (II phase – mechanical treatment) wastewater plants have been constructed and/or rehabilitated.

- Concern related to water reuse, especially waters from fishing farms: The concern was related to the quality of water from fishing farms used for irrigation purposes considering the fact that Armenia does not have irrigation water standards. The concern was related to not only organoleptic characteristic of waters (taste and odour) but also to the quality as it can contain antibiotics. These waters could be used mainly as technical water, for example in the stone processing industry, for cooling, etc.
- Climate change impact on drinking-water and sanitation was discussed. The participants were informed that climate change impact on drinking-water and sanitation was considered during the target setting process in 2013-2014. In this stage, an expert on climate change will be involved in the new working group to revise/update of the targets set in the context of the Protocol.

As a result of the discussion the following decisions were made:

- *The consultation meeting participants stated the importance of the implementation of the provisions of the UNECE/WHO-Europe Protocol on Water and Health and proposed the revision of the national targets and target dates in the context of the Protocol with the support of the UNECE secretariat with support of the EUWI+ project.*
- *Participants of the meeting welcomed the establishment of the working group to set targets and target dates based on the new situation analysis. The representatives of SCWE, WRMA and MoH were invited to nominate experts (one per each entity) to the working group.*

Session 3: Current status of the Protocol on Water and Health ratification process

The session 3 was chaired by Mr. Vahan Davtyan, Head of the Water Resources Management Agency of the Ministry of Nature Protection of Armenia. Mr. Davtyan reminded the meeting participants that the ratification of the Protocol on Water and Health was initiated for the third time in 2016. Meanwhile, he stated that it would be important to check whether an update of the Roadmap to the ratification of the Protocol may be necessary, taking into account the changes that occurred in the country in the past three years.

Discussion on the update/revision of targets set in the context of the Protocol was continued. Afterwards, the organization of the process of revision (formulation of tasks, stakeholders, schedule of activities) and timelines were discussed.

The project will be governed through the Steering Committee of the EUWI National Policy Dialogue. The national working group of experts consisting from specialists from MoH, SCWE, WRMA and 2 or 3 independent experts will update baseline analysis and targets and target dates. UNECE secretariat will assist to set targets and target dates. Public participation will be ensured by consultation with civil society.

Timelines for proposed work is:

- Update of the baseline analysis - March 2018;
- Meeting of the Steering Committee of the NPD and introduction of the results of the updated baseline analysis - March 2018;

- Setting priorities, developing draft targets and target dates, relevant measures and indicators – June 2018;
- Consultation on draft targets and target dates with civil society - end June, 2018;
- Development of the final targets and target dates - September 2018;
- Meeting of the Steering Committee of the NPD and introduction and approval of the final targets and target dates - September 2018; and
- Adoption of the final targets and target dates - end 2018 - early 2019.

Mr. Vahagn Tonoyan presented the Roadmap to ratification of the Protocol on Water and Health by Armenia developed in 2014 and analysis of relevance and need for update. Mr. Tonoyan specifically mentioned: a) benefits of being a Party after the ratification of the Protocol; b) that legislative and institutional changes were not required; c) review of the ratification process; d) required steps for ratification; e) Donor Programs in Relevant Target Areas; and f) Comparison of the requirements of the Protocol and the National Water Program.

The presentation was followed by questions and discussions:

- Revision of the Roadmap: The revision of the Roadmap was deemed as not relevant at this stage. The suggestion was made to organize two consultations between the Ministry of Nature Protection (MNP) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) on the ratification process. The raised concerns from MoFA could be clarified and addressed with the support of the UNECE secretariat. The reference information note that would be sent to MoFA to re-initiate the ratification process needs to be in line with the recommendation of the Roadmap to ratification.

Specifically, the reference information on the ratification of the Protocol shall be revised, and clearly state that: a) the “polluter pays” principle in the Protocol context is applied within the country in relation to national water management policy; and b) the reference to the Water Convention mentioned in the Article 13 of the Convention is applied only to those countries, that are at the same time Parties to the UNECE Water Convention.

As a result of discussion decision was made:

- *The meeting participants expressed their appreciation to UNECE and EUWI+ project for the support in implementation of the provisions of the Protocol. The preliminary timeline of the work on the revision of targets and target dates was approved and the working group was requested to report the progress of work at the next EUWI NPD Steering Committee meeting.*

Before closing the meeting the chairman of the meeting Mr. Narimanyan recalled the **decisions** made, as follows:

Session 1: Equitable access to water supply and sanitation in Armenia

- *Taking into consideration that the Action plan was considered as a priority for the country, the consultation meeting participants requested from EU and UNECE to support implementation of the analysis of the water legislative framework and identification of the legislative barriers for ensuring implementation of the equitable access to water and sanitation through the EUWI+ project.*
- *Considering that Armenia signed the Agreement on Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership and has obligation to harmonize the national legislation with the EU legislation,*



meeting participants agreed to discuss work in relation to the five EU Directives during the next EUWI NPD meeting which will be held in March 2018. The EU and UNECE were requested to assist Armenia in the preparation of an initial roadmap for the application of the 5 EU directives related to water through EUWI+ project and taking into account the provisions of the new EU-Armenia partnership agreement.

Session 2: Protocol on Water and Health application in Armenia

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Session 3: Current status of the Protocol on Water and Health ratification process

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Report prepared by Emma Anakhasyan

Photos made by Vahagn Tonoyan