

PROCEEDINGS OF THE
8th MEETING OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE OF THE
NATIONAL POLICY DIALOGUE ON INTEGRATED WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT IN
GEORGIA

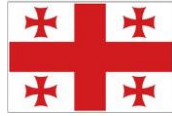
31 May 2021
Tbilisi, Georgia

The 8th Meeting of the Steering Committee (SC) of the National Policy Dialogue (NPD) on Integrated Water Resources Management in Georgia was opened and chaired by Ms. Nino Tandilashvili, Deputy Minister of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia (MEPA), and Ms. Nino Tkhillava, Head of the Environment and Climate Change Department of the same Ministry. The meeting was held online and focused on discussing recent progress in modernizing the national water policy, extending access to water supply and sanitation, as well as on enhancing transboundary cooperation. The meeting offered an opportunity for addressing remaining tasks in conjunction with the priorities and activities of the country-specific EUWI+ work program, as well as discussing next steps for ensuring sustainability of the results and to reflect on further needs and priorities in the water sector beyond EUWI+.

Representatives of relevant departments and Agencies of MEPA, main stakeholder ministries and institutions, international and national experts in the field of water resources management and use and the NGO sector attended the meeting.



In the **opening session** welcoming remarks were given by Ms Nino Tandilashvili – Deputy Minister of Environment Protection and Agriculture of Georgia, Ms Mzia Giorgobiani – Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure, Mr. Alexandre Darras, EU Delegation to Georgia, and Mr. Alexander Zinke - Team Leader of the EU Member States Consortium under the EUWI+ project on behalf of all partners. During the session the crucial role of the National Policy Dialogue was underlined to facilitate implementing the Integrated Water Resources Management approach in Georgia in a coordinated manner, ensuring proper coordination and getting common understanding among national stakeholders. This is a very important aspect to meet the country's commitments under the Association Agreement with the EU and to the successful adoption of sustainable water resources management



policies. In addition, the Deputy Minister of MEPA expressed special thanks and gratitude to the EU in the general, the EU Delegation in Georgia and to the EUWI+ project for the very significant assistance and support in a very important process in Georgia of planning and implementing reforms in the field of water resources management. She hoped for the continuation of this successful cooperation to achieve fruitful results together in line with the WFD guidelines.

After the tour de table and the adoption of the agenda, a short video on the main achievements and results of the EUWI+ project was shown to the SC meeting participants.

The **first session** of the Steering Committee meeting aimed to examine recent progress in modernizing national water policy and governance and discuss future priorities. The session also focused specifically on the progress in approximating the national legislation to the EU water directives in line with the Association Agreement of Georgia with the European Union.

Ms. Mariam Makarova, Head of the water division under the environment and climate change department (MEPA), gave a presentation about the legislative approximation to the EU directives with a focus on the draft Law on Water Resources Management, including its process of adoption.

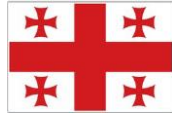
Mr. Pierre Strosser, OECD expert, presented scenarios for the implementation of the reform on economic instruments and recommendations in the field of surface water abstraction charges and ways for integrating the proposed reform in the current institutional and governance system in Georgia.

Ms. Tatiana Efimova, OECD, explained options for future priorities of water policy work in Georgia, in particular underlining the importance of good enforcement mechanisms and „smart“ costing of the reforms, better alignment of sectorial investment plans (irrigation, WSS, hydro energy) to enhance cost-efficiency during river basin management plans implementation and the synergetic effect of investments on environment.

The **second session** was devoted to the progress in transboundary water cooperation with the neighboring countries, the implementation of SDGs in the water domain, and key aspects of the recently demonstrated Strategic Environmental Assessment in the water field. The first topic of this session was dedicated to the reporting under SDGs 6.5.1 and 6.5.2, where Ms. Gvantsa Sivsivadze, Water Division of MEPA, presented the results of the recent reporting exercises at the national level, and Mr Alisher Mamadzhanov, UNECE, highlighted the existing gaps identified for reporting, including with respect to data availability and ways to improve the current situation. In these regards, the importance of transboundary cooperation and the finalization of bilateral agreements was also underlined.

Then, Mr. Alexander Belokurov, UNECE, and Ms. Marine Arabidze, NEA, provided updates on transboundary cooperation in the field of water quality monitoring and the new exchange of sampled information in the Ktsia/Khrami-Debed River Basin. They presented the finalized guidance document and results of a joint field survey with Armenia and a proposal for the next steps, including a formalized bilateral agreement.

The last topic of the second session focused on the introduction of Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEA) for RBMPs. Mr. Alexander Belokurov and Ms. Irma Melikishvili, national expert, presented pilot work on the SEA for the draft Alazani-Iori River Basin Management Plan and the SEA RBMP methodology, underlining some lessons learned and recommendations for strengthening related MEPA capacities .



The **third session** of the meeting was dedicated to the progress in river basin management planning in Georgia and in enhancing water monitoring capacities. Mr. Alexander Zinke presented updates on activities during EUWI+ for upgrading the monitoring of surface waters, groundwaters and coastal waters in Georgia by training and equipping laboratories and field stations of NEA and by providing WFD-compliant water monitoring guidelines and methodologies.

Mr. Yannick Pochon, OiEau, gave a presentation on finalizing the development of the River Basin Management Plans for the Alazani-Iori, Ktsia/Khrami-Debed and Ajaristkali (coastal aspects) river basins. The future priorities and timeline on approval of RBMPs was discussed by Ms. Mariam Makarova, MEPA.

The meeting sessions were followed by a Q&A session and a discussion on several key points related to the themes of the meeting. Mr. Jozan Raphael, AFD, underlined the importance of water reforms in connection with AFD activities in the field of water infrastructure rehabilitation and development in Georgia and highlighted the need for coordinated efforts of international projects and donors in this process.

The **fourth session** of the meeting was devoted to the next steps towards successful completion of the EUWI+ with an outlook beyond 2021.

Participants acknowledged the importance of the results achieved with the EU support under the EUWI+ project to advance integrated water resources management in Georgia. They expressed their appreciation to the EUWI+ implementing partners and EU for financial support.

In conclusion of the 8th NPD Meeting of the SC, ***closing remarks*** were given:

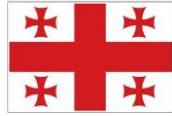
Ms. Tatiana Efimova, OECD, expressed her gratitude to the meeting participants and highlighted the importance of the meeting for moving forward from a planning and design phase to the implementation phase and the ways to make this process more affordable, cost efficient, socially acceptable and climate resilient. This needs more discussions with infrastructure and investment planners, other agencies, organizations, local municipalities and the donor community.

Mr. Alisher Mamadzhonov, UNECE, expressed his gratitude to the EU, MEPA, all partners and contractors for the successful implementation of the EUWI+ project and his hope that the process of implementation of water reforms, which slowed a bit down due to Covid 19 and other reasons, will be accelerated in the near future in order to meet the requirement of Association Agreement between the EU and the Government of Georgia, paving a way for approval of RBMPs and other key initiatives of the reforms, including cooperation on transboundary waters with the neighbouring countries.

Ms. Nino Tkhilava, MEPA, expressed her deep gratitude to the EU and EUWI+ project partners for their valuable support and achieved results in Georgia on finalizing the draft Law on Water Resources Management, piloting RBM planning and strengthening capacities of MEPA and NEA. She hopes for a continued successful cooperation in order to facilitate the next phase of the water reform.

During the **closing session** of the 8th Meeting of the SC of the NPD on Integrated Water Resources Management in Georgia, the Chair recalled the following Steering Committee decisions:





- Accelerate the process of the Water Law adoption to put enforcement and implementation mechanisms in place;
- Start preparations in order to move from planning and design phase of water reforms to the implementation process to ensure “smart” costing of the reforms;
- Ensure better alignment of sectorial investment plans (irrigation, WSS, hydro-energy) to enhance cost-efficiency of river basin management plans implementation and synergetic effect of investments on environment, and involve more infrastructure and investment planners in the implementation process of water reforms;
- Support the introduction of economic reforms in the water sector and strengthen their facilitation to enhance efficiency of water operators and sustainability of the resource use;
- Continue work towards concluding an agreement with Armenia on cooperation in the field of monitoring and exchange of information in the transboundary Ktsia/Khrami-Debed River Basin in near future.