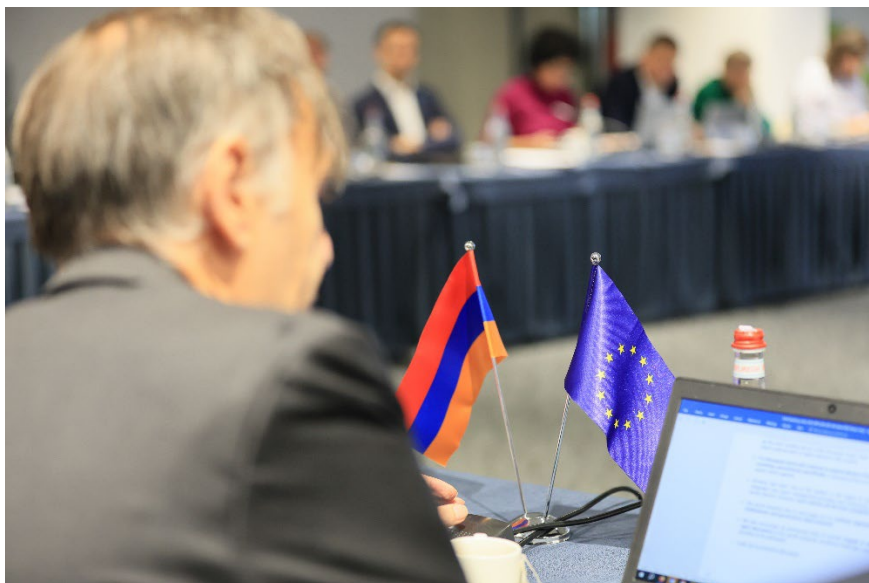


## PROCEEDINGS OF THE

### 21st Meeting of the Inter-Ministerial Steering Committee of the National Policy Dialogue on Water Issues in Armenia

October 26, 2023  
Yerevan, Armenia



The Summary Record and the meeting documentation were prepared by the Implementing Partners (the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, the Austrian Environment Agency, the Austrian Development Agency and The International Office of Water).

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## 1. Proceedings

On 26 October 2023, the 21st Meeting of the Inter-Ministerial Steering Committee of the National Policy Dialogue (NPD) on Water in Armenia was held in Yerevan. It brought together a broad and engaged group of representatives from across national and sub-national authorities, academia, civil society, and international organisations. Opened by Ms Gayane Gabrielyan, Deputy Minister of Environment of the Republic of Armenia and organised with the support of the European Union, the NPD tackled challenging issues facing Armenia's water sector, including financing water security, improving availability of water and environmental data, advancing River Basin Management Planning, transboundary cooperation, implementing key water-related EU Directives, and improving irrigation efficiency and effectiveness. The agenda for the meeting can be found [here](#) and the list of participants [here](#).

The meeting was opened with remarks from Deputy Minister Gayane Gabrielyan, Mr Frank Hess, Head of Cooperation Section of the EU Delegation to Armenia and Mr Alexander Zinke, Environment Agency Austria and Head of the Consortium for the EU4Environment Water Resources and Environmental Data programme. The Deputy Minister emphasised the importance that the Ministry places on advancing progress on water. She noted that she was grateful for the support of the EU4Environment Water & Data Programme, and for its consistent willingness to keep working and supporting Armenia on these challenging topics. Mr Frank Hess highlighted the critical role of water for human health, ecosystems, and economic growth. He also noted the long-term support of the EU to Armenia's water and environmental sector and the progress in the implementation of the EU-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA). Finally, Mr Alexander Zinke spoke on behalf of the EU4Environment Water & Data Programme partners, sharing some of the important progress to date under the programme.

Session 2 focussed on how water is valued in Armenia, with discussion centring around the complexities for policy makers of valuing water and balancing the focus on the present economic value, the ecosystem services it can provide, and the trade-offs between conservation, fair price, and affordability. Participants also discussed the provisions guiding how water should be valued in Armenia's Water Code. Several interventions returned to the point that dialogue is crucial for these discussions and that the NPD itself serves that critical purpose. During the session, the high-level findings of three new pieces of analysis from the EU4Environment programme related to financing water security in Armenia were shared, including an assessment of the enabling environment for financing water security, analysis of the technical and economic performance of Water User Associations, and on reforming the current system of water abstraction fees and water pollution taxes. The findings provoked strong reactions, including notes that in addition to any legislative changes, there was a public awareness issue around how people value water.

It was also emphasised that if there is an increase in what people and institutions pay for water, there needs to be a clear relationship with improvements in service. The Deputy Minister proposed a public hearing on these issues as a possible way forward to engage water users and present the opportunities and needs around the reform of economic instruments, and seek views on issues including affordability and willingness and ability to pay.

Session 3 examined progress on River Basin Management in Armenia, with presentations from government representatives and the implementing partners of the EU4Environment Programme.

Transboundary cooperation was discussed, including tangible progress on joint transboundary monitoring with Georgia in the Khrami-Debed basin, as well as challenges when standards are not mutually recognised, or when political differences do not facilitate dialogue. The session also involved interventions from other international projects supporting water security in Armenia, including advances from USAID on deploying modern monitoring techniques and upcoming public hearings on basin plans, and on implementing River Basin Management in the Lake Sevan basin (EU4Sevan). Participants noted that strong institutions were needed to co-ordinate intersectoral river basin management plans, but that there is a lack of clarity on responsibilities under the current framework. Participants agreed, though, that ultimately, there is no need for new institutions, but instead strengthen existing institutions.

Lack of basin councils and low public participation also emerged as a challenge – while integral to the participatory and bottom-up approach of River Basin Management Planning, the public in Armenia (and other EaP countries) is not necessarily equipped or ready to engage in public policy discussion. There was also a discussion about a need to analyse implementation of the existing RBMPs and their PoMs, to make conclusions about what worked and did not work and how to address this.

Session 4 focussed on irrigation in Armenia, a critical issue considering the importance of the agriculture sector and the existing water stresses in much of the country. A new analysis looking at the technical and economic performance of Water User Associations and the differences in subsidies required for different regions of the country was discussed, eliciting strong reactions from government representatives. International organisations and financing institutions active in the sector, including the ADB, the World Bank, the French Development Agency (AFD) and USAID, discussed their ongoing projects related to irrigation infrastructure and sector reform. The lack of a hydroengineering school in Armenia and the low number of the professionals in the sector make the implementation of water sector reforms challenging. The role of the law in setting irrigation tariffs and the potential for differentiated tariffs based on terrain, land area, and pumped or gravity irrigation was also discussed. It was agreed that further studies and work are needed in this area and that more metering and understanding of water volumes used was critical for decision makers.

Finally, Session 5 discussed the water and health agenda and the progress made with the innovative wastewater-based epidemiology monitoring, Armenia's plans to align with the EU Drinking Water Directive (though support in developing the financial estimate for its implementation is needed) and the UNECE Protocol on Water and Health, ensuring equitable access to water and sanitation for all. There was a discussion about whether health authorities can agree with Veolia to take wastewater samples for COVID-19, and the Water Committee agreed to assist in this.

## 1.1. Key Actions

During the discussions, several key actions were agreed upon by government representatives:

- **Gather more data for decision makers and for effective pricing through more metering of water used for irrigation.**
- **Analyse results of current surveys in transboundary Khrami-Deved basin and proceed with negotiations on the transboundary monitoring agreement with Georgia.**
- **Integrate the data from wastewater epidemiology into public health decision-making processes.**

- **Conduct public surveys to better understand attitudes on water scarcity, use, and on willingness and ability to pay for water services.**
- **Develop a public communications approach on water that emphasises its importance and value.**
- **Organise follow-up consultation on implications of the EU Drinking Water Directive roadmap.**
- **Following legal advice received, continue negotiations on the UNECE Protocol on Water and Health ratification, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.**

## 2. Participation and visibility

Fifty-five participants joined the NPD in person, with 23 female and 32 male participants.

The Water Committee published an [article](#) on their website and [posted](#) on their FB page. The press release of the event was also published at the website of EU4Environment Water & Data Programme.

### About National Policy Dialogues

National Policy Dialogues facilitates policy discussions where stakeholders meet to advance water policy reforms. NPDs are driven by the demand from the host countries and are usually chaired by heads of respective government agencies. A variety of stakeholders participate in the meetings, such as ministries and government agencies and institutions, as well as nongovernmental organisations, the business community, parliamentary bodies, academia. Participants typically include international organisations and EU Member States active in water policy reforms in each country. Under the EU-funded EU4Environment Water Resources and Environmental Data Programme, NPDs are supported in the five Eastern Partner countries.

### About EU4Environment – Water Resources and Environmental Data

This programme aims at improving people's well-being in EU's Eastern Partner Countries and enabling their green transformation in line with the European Green Deal and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The programme's activities are clustered around two specific objectives: 1) support a more sustainable use of water resources and 2) improve the use of sound environmental data and their availability for policymakers and citizens. The programme is implemented by five Partner organisations: Environment Agency Austria (UBA), Austrian Development Agency (ADA), International Office for Water (OiEau) (France), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). The programme is principally funded by the European Union and co-funded by the Austrian Development Cooperation and the French Artois-Picardie Water Agency based on a budget of EUR 12,75 million (EUR 12 million EU contribution). The implementation period is 2021-2024.

### 3. Annexes

#### 3.1. List of participants

##### ***Ministries, National and Regional Stakeholder Institutions***

Gayane Gabrielyan  
Deputy Ministry of Environment  
Ministry of Environment

Lilit Ahrhalyan  
Water Policy Department,  
Ministry of Environment

Liana Alikhanyan  
Water Policy Department,  
Ministry of Environment

Sevak Daveyan  
Water Resources Management Department,  
Ministry of Environment

Ellada Melkumyan  
Department of International Cooperation,  
Ministry of Environment

Arman Avetisyan  
Land and Underground Resources Policy Department, Ministry of Environment

Artur Ghavalyan  
Strategic Policy Department,  
Ministry of Environment

Meri Harutyunyan  
Strategic Policy Department,  
Ministry of Environment

Gayane Shahnazaryan  
Hydrometeorology and Monitoring Centre,  
Ministry of Environment

Martiros Nalbandyan  
Water Committee, Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructures

Gor Meliksetyan  
Water Committee, Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructures

Tigranuhi Baghdasaryan  
Water Committee, Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructures

Avetik Poghosyan  
Water Committee, Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructures

Edvard Badalyan  
Water Committee, Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructures

Nune Bakunts  
National Centre for Disease Control,  
Ministry of Health

Ruben Grigoryan  
National Centre for Disease Control,  
Ministry of Health

Nelli Baghdasaryan  
Statistical Committee of Armenia

Naira Mandalyan  
Statistical Committee of Armenia

Artak Demirchyan  
Department of Agriculture and Nature Protection, Lori Regional Administration

Arkadi Amirkhanyan  
Department of Agriculture and Nature Protection, Tavush Regional Administration

***Academic Institutions, Private Sector, NGOs***

Varazdat Mkrtychyan  
Armenian Territorial Development Fund

Garabet Kazanjyan  
American University of Armenia

Gurgen Yeghiazaryan  
Armenian National Agrarian University

Stepan Khachatryan  
National University of Architecture and Construction of Armenia

Emma Anakhasyan  
“Armenian Women for Health and Healthy Environment” NGO

Varazdat Mkrtchyan  
Armenian Territorial Development Fund

***Donors, Projects and IFIs***

Arusyak Alaverdyan  
World Bank

Garik Arabyan  
Eurasian Fund for Stabilization and Development

Adibek Ghazaryan  
Eurasian Fund for Stabilization and Development

Vardan Karapetyan  
Asian Development Bank

Anna Dalaryan  
World Food Programme

Marthe Everard  
World Health Organization – Armenia

Vigen Shirvanyan  
UNICEF

Hovhannes Ghazaryan  
UNDP

Svetlana Harutyunyan  
UNDP

Gayane Gharabekyan  
UNDP

Christian Henschel  
EU4Sevan Project - GIZ component

Aleksandr Arakelyan  
EU4Sevan Project - GIZ component

Edgar Pirumyan  
EU4Sevan Project - GIZ component

Astghik Danielyan  
EU4Sevan Project – UNDP component



Armen Varosyan  
USAID Armenia Improved Water Management Program

Aram Karapetyan  
USAID Armenia Improved Water Management Program

Hayastan Stepanyan  
USAID Armenia Improved Water Management Program

Armen Sergoyan  
USAID Armenia Improved Water Management Program

***EU Delegation, EU4WD Implementing Partners***

Frank Hess  
Cooperation Section,  
EU Delegation to Armenia

Zuzana Sorocinova  
EU Delegation to Armenia

Matthew Griffiths  
OECD

Delia Sanchez  
OECD

Guy Halpern  
OECD

Alexander Belokurov  
UNECE

Tamara Kutunova  
UNECE

Philippe Seguin  
French International Office for Water

Alexander Zinke  
UBA

Gabriele Vincze  
UBA

Johannes Mayer  
UBA

Tamar Loladze  
EU4Environment – Water and Data

Vahagn Tonoyan  
EU4Environment – Water and Data

Total number of participants – 55  
of which 23 were female and 32 male

## 3.2. Agenda

Time	Item	Speaker
09 <sup>00</sup> -09 <sup>30</sup>	Registration and welcome coffee	
09 <sup>30</sup> -10 <sup>00</sup>	<b>Item 1. Opening and welcoming statements</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adoption of Agenda</li> </ul>	- Ministry of Environment of the Republic of Armenia - F. Hess, Head of Cooperation Section of EU Delegation to Armenia - A. Zinke, EU4Environment Water and Data Programme
10 <sup>00</sup> -11 <sup>00</sup>	<b>Item 2. Water as an economic asset: Valuing water in Armenia under increasing pressures</b> <p>The panel discussion will include progress on work on economic instruments under EU4Environment Water and Data, and interventions from representatives from ministries, the private sector, the European Commission, IFIs and ongoing water sector projects in Armenia.</p>	Moderator: EU4Environment Water and Data Programme  - Ministry of Environment of the Republic of Armenia - EU4Environment Water and Data Programme - Water Committee, Ministry of Finance, Statistical Committee - European Commission - IFIs
11 <sup>00</sup> - 11 <sup>30</sup>	Coffee Break	
11 <sup>30</sup> -13 <sup>00</sup>	<b>Item 3. Progress on river basin management</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adoption and implementation of river basin management plans</li> <li>Water indicators and accounts</li> <li>Addressing water pollution – update on current progress and priorities</li> <li>Transboundary cooperation in the Khrami-Debed River basin and other basins</li> </ul> <p>Questions for discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is progress on integrated river basin management sufficient and what could be done to speed up action?</li> <li>What are the barriers to implementation of Programmes of Measures?</li> <li>How will the results delivered under the ongoing initiatives help policymaking on the ground?</li> </ul>	Moderator: Ministry of Environment  - Ministry of Environment, Hydrometeorology and Monitoring Centre, Water Committee - EU4Environment Water and Data Programme - Representatives from other projects (including USAID, EU4Sevan)
13 <sup>00</sup> -14 <sup>00</sup>	Lunch	
14 <sup>00</sup> -15 <sup>30</sup>	<b>Item 4. Water management for enhanced irrigation</b>	Moderator: Water Committee

Time	Item	Speaker
	<p>Session will cover the coordination of ongoing initiatives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• KfW project on IWRM/Akhuryan River Construction of Kaps Reservoir and Gravity Irrigation System</li> <li>• AFD project on Construction and Vedi Reservoir and Irrigation Scheme</li> <li>• World Bank Water and Irrigation Services Enhancement project</li> <li>• Projects/interventions of other organisations, donors, IFIs, NGOs and academia</li> </ul> <p>Guiding policy question: How do these projects support the overall strategic priorities of Armenia's water sector including contribution to River Basin Management Plan implementation? What lessons can be learned and replicated elsewhere in Armenia?</p> <p>The panel discussion will include interventions from high-level representatives from ministries, the European Commission and IFIs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- EU4Environment Water and Data Programme</li> <li>- Projects representatives</li> </ul>
15 <sup>30</sup> -16 <sup>00</sup> 16 <sup>00</sup> -17 <sup>15</sup>	<p>Coffee Break</p> <p><b>Item 5. Water and health agenda</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wastewater-based Epidemiology Monitoring</li> <li>• Water and Health Protocol</li> <li>• The Drinking Water Directive</li> </ul> <p>Guiding policy question: What are the current challenges and how to address them?</p> <p>Q&amp;A and discussion</p>	<p>Moderator: UNECE</p> <p>UBA, UNECE</p> <p>Interventions from the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Infrastructure, Water Committee</p>
17 <sup>15</sup> -18 <sup>00</sup>	<p><b>Item 6. Concluding session:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meeting summary</li> <li>• Decisions and recommendations</li> <li>• An introductory overview of workshops on 27 October</li> <li>• Next steps</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ministry of Environment of the Republic of Armenia</li> <li>- EU4Environment Water and Data Programme</li> </ul>
18 <sup>00</sup> -19 <sup>30</sup>	Networking Cocktail	

### 3.3. Pictures

