

**International Roundtable
on
“Stakeholder / Public Participation for the
Integrated Management of Shared Water Resources –
The Case of Nestos / Mesta River Basin”**

Princess Hotel
Sofia, Bulgaria,
15-16 April 2008

Information Note

Organized jointly by the
**Global Water Partnership – Mediterranean
Global Water Partnership - Bulgaria**

In the framework of
**Petersberg Process Phase II / Athens Declaration Process
GEF IW:LEARN
Mediterranean Component of the EU Water Initiative
GEF Strategic Partnership for the Mediterranean Large Marine Ecosystem**



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Introduction – the *Petersberg Process Phase II and Athens Declaration Process*¹

The Petersberg Phase II Process / Athens Declaration Process (Process) for the South Eastern Europe is jointly coordinated by Germany, Greece and the World Bank.

The Petersberg Process, initiated in 1998, concerns cooperation on the management of transboundary waters. The Petersberg Process – Phase II is intended to provide support to translate into action the current developments and opportunities for future cooperation on transboundary river, lake and groundwater management in the SEE. It is supported by the German Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety and the World Bank.

The “Athens Declaration” Process concerning *Shared Water, Shared Future and Shared Knowledge* was initiated in 2003. It provides a framework for a long-term process to support cooperative activities for the integrated management of shared water resources in the SEE and Mediterranean regions. It is jointly supported by the Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the World Bank. <http://www.watersee.net/>

The two processes progressively came together in order to generate synergies and maximize the outcomes for the benefit of the SEE region. The Global Water Partnership – Mediterranean (GWP-Med) is the technical facilitator of related activities.

The main joint objective is to build capacity and share experience on Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM), and to develop IWRM plans for shared water bodies as a response to the targets of the 2002 Johannesburg Summit. The Process supports a series of complementary activities that provide a forum for transboundary water management issues in SEE.

The Process complements the EU integration processes and other ongoing initiatives in the region. It contributes directly to the scope and objectives of the Mediterranean Component of the EU Water Initiative (MED EUWI) and the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) Strategic Partnership for the Mediterranean Large Marine Ecosystem.

GEF IW:LEARN is supporting synergy in the Petersberg Process Phase II and Athens Declaration Process, and contributions of practical experience from GEF projects working in transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwater in the SEE region as well as elsewhere in the world.

GEF IW:LEARN aims to strengthen Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) by facilitating structured learning and information sharing among stakeholders. The goals of Activity D2 of GEF IW:LEARN Programme 2004-2008 (‘Project’) are to contribute to the cross-fertilization between competent organizations and persons with roles within the river commissions and other joint bodies in SEE and, at the same time, to allow for the introduction of new elements and experiences from outside the region.

¹ Background material and information on the the Petersberg Process – Phase II and Athens Declaration Process, GEF IW:LEARN–Activity D2 and transboundary water resources management in Southeastern Europe, are available at the Transboundary Waters Information Exchange Network for Southeastern Europe website (www.watersee.net).

The Project “Enhancement of Integrated Management of the Nestos / Mesta River Basin”

The project “Enhancement of Integrated Management of the Nestos / Mesta River Basin”, supported by the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC), aims at enhancing the involvement of stakeholders in Bulgaria and Greece for the coordinated management of the Nestos / Mesta River Basin in an integrated and sustainable way and at assisting with/ facilitating the compliance with the provisions of the EU WFD.

The Project Activities entail:

- Elaboration of an *assessment* of the managerial actions undertaken in the River Basin and the challenges currently faced in the context of the EU WFD implementation. The assessment will serve as the main background document for the International Roundtable (see following pages).
- Elaboration of a *stakeholders’ survey*, with an emphasis on public participation, covering the entire shared river basin, drawing upon relevant work already done in Greece and Bulgaria.
- Organization of *two local preparatory consultation meetings*, one for the Bulgarian side and one for the Greek side of the Mesta/Nestos river basin, with the participation of the main stakeholders, aiming to voice interests and extract experiences in preparation of the International Roundtable.
- Organization of an *‘International Roundtable on Stakeholder / Public Participation for the Integrated Management of Shared Water Resources’*, in Sofia, Bulgaria.

The overall implementation period of the Project is between August 2007 and June 2008. The Core Partners engaged in the project’s planning, implementation and monitoring are: Global Water Partnership-Mediterranean and Global Water Partnership - Bulgaria.

Cooperation with competent governmental institutions and other organizations from Bulgaria and Greece are sought.

Synergies with active institutions, processes, initiatives and projects supported by GEF, other IFIs and donor countries, in the field of transboundary water management at the international, regional and national level are also sought.

Background

Public involvement is an integral component of an effective system for managing water resources. Decisions related to the use and management of water resources have impacts on people's everyday lives, their economic well-being, and, not least, on the health of the ecosystems on which all societies depend. The right of the public, and particularly of affected stakeholders, to participate in these decisions has been widely acknowledged by international law e.g. Aarhus Convention. The move to integrate stakeholders into international waters management reflects a broader recognition of the public's fundamental right to be involved in environmental decision-making processes. This recognition was clearly articulated in the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development.

The EU WFD sets comprehensive legal provisions regarding public participation in river basin management for all EU member states. Three levels of participation are mentioned in Article 14 – the core public participation provision of the EU WFD: information, consultation and active involvement (modelled after the first two pillars of the Aarhus Convention). The directive gives considerable creative leeway to Member States in the design of public participation, particularly regarding active involvement of stakeholders.

According to the WFD Common Implementation Strategy Document No.8 "Public participation in relation of the Water Framework Directive" (WFD CIS on PP) member states shall ensure consultation and shall encourage active involvement. Encouraging participation in the development and implementation of the management plans (interest parties participate actively in the planning process by discussing issues and contributing to their solutions) can be considered as the core requirement of the Directive for active involvement. Higher levels of participation are shared decision making and self-determination; these two forms are not specifically required by the Directive but may often be considered as best practices.

It is the appointed competent authorities that are responsible for the outcome of the implementation of the Directive –whether it will be successful or not- hence it's up to them to decide to what extent they will share their power with other stakeholders.

It is referred in the WFD CIS on PP that "in principle any level of public participation can be organized at any scale, even in the international river basin scale. The main issue is to find for each issue the right combination of scale, stakeholders, public participation levels and methods". Coordination of the stakeholders as means for successful public participation hence implementation of the EU WFD in a shared water river basin is not a prerequisite of the Directive. Nevertheless experience from Europe (e.g. Danube, Rhine etc.) as well as from outside (e.g. Orange, Okavango) has shown that coordination and engagement of stakeholders from the riparian countries –following different approaches in accordance to the different contexts- has led to a more efficient transboundary water resources management.

Cooperation efforts between Greece and Bulgaria in the field of shared water resources have a long history. A number of agreements and protocols have been signed aiming to regulate relevant issues. Special reference should be made to the Agreement of 1995 which specifically refers to the Nestos / Mesta River waters.

The EU WFD and the relevant to water EU Directives constitute the legal framework for the management of water resources in the EU Member States, hence Bulgaria and Greece. Both countries are taking the necessary measures to coordinate on the Nestos / Mesta river basin on the basis of the relevant prerequisites of the EU WFD as well as the existing bilateral agreements and the international legal framework.

In the case of the Nestos / Mesta river basin, the engagement of the water users and key stakeholders from the two countries, would add value and solidify previous efforts and would assist in moving effectively ahead in compliance with the EU WFD. International

experience has also shown that establishing a “common vision” and promoting ownership through structured public participation processes, within the existing common legal framework of the EU WFD, are key for the successful cooperation in the coordinated or joint integrated management of a shared river basin. Moreover, fostering public participation at transboundary level is not only an add-on to the conventional management regimes; it can also be a strong instrument towards innovative and adaptive approaches under newly arising challenges.

Such a cooperation process among stakeholders, under the guidance and supervision of the competent authorities in both Countries, would build on and assist the framework of bilateral cooperation in the basin.

The International Roundtable

Within this background the International Roundtable on “**Stakeholder / Public Participation for the Integrated Management of Shared Water Resources - The Case of Nestos / Mesta River Basin**” is organized in Sofia, Bulgaria, 15-16 April 2008 by the Global Water Partnership – Mediterranean in cooperation with Global Water Partnership – Bulgaria. The Roundtable is financially supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

The Petersberg Process Phase II / Athens Declaration Process forms a policy framework for the enhancement of transboundary water resources management in SEE. The Roundtable is organized within the framework of the Process, GEF IW:LEARN Activity D2, GEF SPM and the Mediterranean Component of the EU Water Initiative.

Regional and national best practices will be presented while the Nestos / Mesta River Basin will be the main case study to be presented and discussed. An *assessment* of the managerial actions undertaken in the area and the challenges currently faced will serve as the main background document of the International Roundtable. The assessment is complemented by a brief *stakeholders’ survey* in the entire river basin.

Based on the findings of the survey, two preparatory *local consultation meetings* with the major stakeholders of the Nestos / Mesta River Basin were organised in Gotze Delchev, Bulgaria, and Kavala Greece to sound interests and extract experiences on the subject.

- Aims

The International Roundtable aims at:

- sharing international experience and best practices from within and outside the Southeastern Europe region on stakeholder / public participation in shared water resources management;
- elaborating on the progress achieved until now for the management of the Nestos / Mesta River Basin in each of the countries and through their joint efforts;
- enhancing the involvement of the local stakeholders and identify possible next steps for their systematic engagement in accordance to the provisions of EU WFD;
- eventually assist in identifying next steps for the enhancement of the cooperation between the two countries at national and local levels for the integrated management of Nestos / Mesta River Basin in the context of EU WFD.

- Participants

Representatives of national and local stakeholders (e.g. water users associations, national and local authorities, academia, private companies, NGOs and civil society organizations etc.) as well as international and regional institutions and organizations, have been invited to attend.