



REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA

MINISTRY OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND SPATIAL PLANNING

MINISTER'S OFFICE



## **International Roundtable on “Integrated Management of Shared Groundwater in Southeastern Europe”**

Brdo pri Kranju, Slovenia,  
14-16 November 2007

### *Information Note*

Organized jointly by the  
Slovenian Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning  
and  
Global Water Partnership – Mediterranean

In the framework of

**Petersberg Process Phase II / Athens Declaration Process**

and

**GEF IW:LEARN**

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## **Background**

Groundwater resources represent an invaluable social and cultural inheritance and are of strategic importance for socioeconomic development, improved welfare and public health. In most countries of Southeastern Europe (SEE), being an important source of freshwater, it covers about 70 per cent of the total water consumption.

Geological formations have no regard to national boundaries. Aquifers are to a large extent shared between two or more countries. The draft UNECE Assessment of Transboundary Groundwater in SEE (April 2007) identifies more than 60 transboundary aquifers. These provide a share of total water usage in their respective area that ranges from 15 to 90 or even 100 per cent in some of the Dinaric karstic aquifers of Bosnia, Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro and Albania.

Main uses include drinking water supply, irrigated agriculture and in some cases hydro-electric power generation (using discharging of the aquifers, taking advantage of the large altitude drops within the karstic system). Other smaller uses include small amounts for industry, livestock production, and tourism / recreation.

National and shared groundwater resources, as well as the related land resources suffer from growing pressures which result in many cases in qualitative deterioration of water, decline of water level, salt water intrusion and subsequently in degradation of ecosystems etc.

Management at national level is not sustainable due to considerable gaps in the legal frameworks of the countries and ineffective application of management measures. In many cases inadequate knowledge of the characteristics of the aquifer systems and inadequate monitoring exacerbate the situation. Management practices need to be improved and furthermore to be integrated with the river basin management, in accordance with the Water Framework Directive and the coming Groundwater Directive applicable to EU member states as well as to many of the neighbouring countries in the Region.

Issues are becoming more complex because of the differences in socio-economic conditions, geography, institutions among the countries in the Region. Solutions need to take account, among others, of the nature and severity of such issues, the size and importance of shared resources and the number of the countries involved.

The necessity for cooperative management of transboundary surface water bodies has been acknowledged and a number of bilateral and multilateral agreements have been signed. In some river and lake basins, international water commissions are established aiming to promote the application of the principles of Integrated Water Resources Management. Unlikely there is lack of transboundary cooperation and relevant bilateral agreements for the management of the majority of shared aquifers.

As a result of increasing pressures and inadequate cooperation for their management, degradation of shared water resources in terms of quantity and quality poses a risk to stability and economic development of SEE countries. There is a demanding need for identification, design and application of solutions through which these shared water resources can become a catalyst for cooperation. Allowing these transboundary water resources to present an opportunity rather than a constraint to development, has led the SEE region countries and the international community (including the European Union, Donor countries, International organizations, Intergovernmental and Non-governmental organizations) to undertake initiatives many of which are complementary.

*Reference should be made to the Petersberg Process (since 1998) and the more recent Athens Declaration Process (since 2003) which through their joint action and cooperation with GEF and IW:LEARN, seek further enhancement of progress (since 2004).*

## **The Petersberg Process Phase II / Athens Declaration Process**

The Petersberg Process is an initiative jointly coordinated by the German Government and the World Bank, launched in March 1998. Under Phase I of the process a ministerial level roundtable was held at Petersberg, Germany that resulted in the "Petersberg Declaration" which supports "water as a catalyst for cooperation." This was followed by roundtables of senior level experts on transboundary river basin and lake management (Berlin), lessons learned from management of transboundary waters in the Baltic Sea Region (Vilnius), experience in the Rhine River Basin (Bonn); and a special meeting on transboundary water management to support preparation of the World Bank Water Resources Strategy (Berlin).

Although the Petersberg Process has been global in scope, a major focus of 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 SEE.

The Athens Declaration Process, jointly coordinated by the Government of Greece and the World Bank, was launched during the major International Conference on Sustainable Development for Lasting Peace: Shared Waters, Shared Future, Shared Knowledge, 6-7 May 2003, Athens, Greece. The Conference was an important element of the Hellenic Presidency of the European Union.

The "Athens Declaration concerning Shared Water, Shared Future and Shared Knowledge" provides a framework for a long-term process to support cooperative activities for the management of shared water resources specifically in the SEE and Mediterranean regions. The Athens Declaration Process is intended to assist SEE countries, in cooperation with relevant stakeholders, to prepare IWRM and water efficiency plans for major river basins and lakes, including a range of complementary interventions, with a coordinated mechanism to allow for exchange of information and experience between activities.

The two processes are linked in order to generate synergies and maximize the outcomes for the benefit of the SEE region, rather than duplicate activities and consequently efforts. The *Petersberg Process Phase II / Athens Declaration Process* has become a reference for many other processes and activities in the region. The Process would complement European Union (EU) integration processes, the Stabilisation and Association process of the European Union 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 GEF Strategic Partnership for the Mediterranean Large Marine Ecosystems.

Activities focus on transboundary water bodies lying south of Danube River.

The main objective is to build capacity and share experience on Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM), and to develop IWRM plans for these shared water bodies as a response to the targets of the Johannesburg Summit, 2002. The activities are fully integrated in the MED EUWI Work Plans.

The Berlin Roundtable (December, 2005) has been a milestone in the Petersberg Process Phase II / Athens Declaration Process. More than 60 participants, representatives of competent Ministries of the countries of the SEE, water stakeholders, representatives of the German and Greek Governments, World Bank, GEF, European Commission, UNESCO, UNECE, UNEP, KfW, GTZ, InWEnt and GWP-Med, participated.

The Roundtable reviewed the progress on cooperation in the field of transboundary water resources management (TWRM) in the region and underlined its importance for succeeding stability and prosperity in the SEE. It reaffirmed the, common, interest for the continuing and enhancement of close cooperation and underlined the importance of initiatives that promote such activities. It acknowledged the central role of Petersberg Process Phase II / Athens Declaration Process and provided input and guided the next steps of the Process in the effort to succeed its objectives.

It was recommended that the Petersberg Process Phase II /Athens Declaration Process will:

- Continue to provide a dialogue Forum for identification of new and discussion of all relevant ideas and challenges in transboundary water management in SEE;
- Support measures to obtain and enhance the political, economic and environmental benefits that may be realized through effective cooperation in management of transboundary waters;
- Increase the visibility of success stories and good practices that may inspire similar initiatives; and
- Focus on a set of key areas and conduct activities at an increasingly local level to facilitate a broader range of participants in the dialogue.

The Process would not directly support investments. However it would provide the framework for exchange of the necessary information and experience that would support the creation of conditions that would facilitate investment to take place.

The 'countries of focus' are Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, FYR Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia. Neighbouring countries – Greece, Hungary, Moldova, Slovenia and Turkey will be included where relevant.

Activities are primarily supported by the Governments of Germany and Greece, World Bank and GEF IW:LEARN. GWP-Med provides technical and administrative assistance. Organizations and Institutions having experience and working in the field of TWRM, such as UNESCO, UNESCO-IHP / International Shared Aquifers Resource Management Programme (ISARM), UNESCO Chair and International Network of Water-Environment Centres for the Balkans (UNESCO Chair/INWEB), and United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) are collaborating partners. Synergies with active institutions, processes, initiatives and projects supported by GEF, International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and donor countries, in the field of transboundary water management at the international, regional and national level, are being developed.

GEF IW:LEARN is supporting synergy in the Petersberg Process Phase II / Athens Declaration Process, and contributions of practical experience from GEF projects working in transboundary river, lake 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.

The goals will be pursued through the organization of a series of capacity building workshops for senior officials, decision makers and experts, and through the facilitation of an internet-based information network establishing a community of practice on transboundary

water resources management with a particular focus in SEE. The project's overall implementation period is 38 months, from May 2005 until June 2008.

### **Aim and Objectives of the International Roundtable**

In the series of activities within the Petersberg Process Phase II / Athens Declaration Process an International Roundtable on “**Integrated Management of Shared Groundwater Resources in Southeastern Europe**” will take place in **Slovenia, 14-16 November 2007**. It is jointly organised by the Slovenian Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning and GWP-Med, and supported by GEF IW:LEARN.

The International Roundtable aims to promote cooperation for sustainable utilization, management and protection of shared groundwater resources in the SEE region. It will address issues of integrated management of shared groundwater resources. Linkages to the management of connected river basins, coastal areas and ecosystems as well as contribution of groundwater to economic development will be addressed. It would build on related ongoing work in the region carried out by international organizations such as UNECE and UNESCO IHP.

Moreover the International Roundtable aims to:

- Identify the most significant problems, pressing needs and challenges for the SEE region relating to groundwater resources management;
- Promote recognition and awareness of the socio-economic and environmental values of shared aquifers as well as the need for integrating shared groundwater management with river basin management;
- Exchange information and communicate good practices and success stories in different aspects of shared groundwater resources management;
- Identify key areas of action where the involvement of Petersberg Process Phase II / Athens Declaration Process, would result in the enhancement of synergies with on-going and planned activities in the region;
- Identify key steps needed to advance a strategy and action programme for the management of shared groundwater in the SEE region;
- Facilitate the establishment of a peer network between persons working in the shared groundwater management area.

### **Participants**

Representatives of: competent national and local authorities, institutions and stakeholders from the countries of Southeastern Europe; donor countries and international institutions and organizations; the Core and Collaborating Partners of the Process and GEF IW:LEARN Activity D2, are expected to attend the Roundtable.