

UN CSD16 – EU Side Event
“Review of CSD13 Decision on Water and Sanitation”

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Thank you Mr Chairman,

Allow me to briefly share with all the delegates and participants some of our experiences, in the transboundary context of cooperation on water issues on sub-regional level of Southeastern Europe and the Mediterranean.

The management of transboundary Rivers is a major issue for Greece, as the majority of North Greece's rivers originate in neighbour countries. Greece is the downstream country in four out of the five shared rivers and roughly 25% of the country's renewable resources are "imported". Inevitably, the applied management policy of the upstream countries affects directly every economic activity, as well as the status of important ecosystems in Northern Greece.

Effective management of transboundary waters is a complex issue, which has to overcome many challenges. Water quality and quantity management, ensuring an ecosystem's approach, the management of emergencies including forecasting and mitigation of floods, issues regarding information exchange, as well as the different institutional, legislative and socio-economic conditions between neighboring countries are only a few of the challenges that have to be addressed and require concerted efforts on a cross-border basis.

Greece, being a country of the region and sharing many water bodies is facing, together with its neighbors, all these challenges.

Transboundary cooperation, should aim, inter alia, to preserve the natural environment of the shared water bodies, and to secure the interests of all parties and most importantly the interests of local populations within an IWRM context.

Experience indicates the need for a common will to resolve problems. There should be confidence between the parties and their co-operation should be based on the principles of good neighborhood and reciprocity.

Effective transboundary cooperation on shared waters can be a means to achieve long-term peaceful and prosperous co-existence.

Taking the aforementioned points into account, Greece, in cooperation with Financial Institutions, initiated in 2003, the Athens Declaration Process, which promotes capacity building and synergies for the drafting of Integrated Water Resources Management Plans for the transboundary water bodies in southeast Europe. This process has been combined with another process focusing also on the funding of joint plans.

Regarding transboundary cooperation generally in the Mediterranean, Initiatives such as the Mediterranean Component of the EU Water Initiative are extremely helpful to start comprehending the actual problems and challenges regarding implementation, on the ground.

I would therefore like to take the opportunity to share with you the experience that is being gained on the issue of financing through the activities of the Mediterranean Component of the EU Water Initiative and particularly the Country Dialogue Processes that are being facilitated in partner countries. At the moment, the Mediterranean Component of the EU Water Initiative led by Greece is facilitating local partners, from the very high level of political hierarchy down to civil society stakeholders, to carry out Country Policy Dialogues in many Mediterranean Countries.

The Dialogue in some of these countries focuses on re-developing a realistic IWRM plan, on the national level, based on reformed basin level IWRM plans. The issue of funding the implementation is a crucial one and experience so far has shown that it cannot be achieved if commitment is not anchored at the highest political level and without catalysing a reform of the whole national budgeting policy.

In some other Mediterranean countries, the Dialogue focuses much more on financial issues that will result in the development of a Sustainable Financing Strategy for the Water Supply and Sanitation Sector, on national level, by defining financially realistic targets for the development of the sector and identifying the financing sources to achieve them and to help countries to tap all possible sources, in the most effective way. Within this process, one of the most important elements that are being assessed is the impact of alternative cost recovery and pricing policies in the water supply and sanitation sector in terms of affordability for households and in terms of social acceptance, so that implementation can actually be secured in practical terms.

Therefore, the key idea is not only to plan but to plan realistically so that there are actual results on the ground.

Thank you very much for your attention.