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"EUROPE-INBO 2007", Rome - 8 - 10 November 2007

- International Office for Water - Cooperation - International actions - Integrated water resources management (IWRM) -

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The 5th Conference of the "EUROPE-INBO" Group took place in Rome from 8 to 10 November 2007, at the invitation of the Italian Ministry of the Environment and the Italian Basin Authorities. It gathered 200 representatives coming from 33 countries.

The Conference was organized simultaneously with the General Assembly 2007 of the Mediterranean Network of Basin Organizations (MEMBO).

The "EUROPE-INBO 2007" Conference was opened by Mr. Alfonso PECORARO SCANIO, Italian Minister for the Environment, with many Italian personalities (City of Rome, Parliament and Regions), Mrs. Lubka KATCHAKOVA, Vice-Minister in Bulgaria, and Mr. Lazlo KOTHAY, State Secretary in Hungary and World President of INBO.

The Basin Organizations of the Member States of the European Union have made significant progress in the implementation of the Water Framework Directive (WFD): administrative adaptations, economic analyses, public information and involvement of water stakeholders, characterizations, development of monitoring networks, etc.

The "EUROPE-INBO 2007" Conference allowed noting the increasing interest in the WFD of countries of the Mediterranean region and Eastern Europe, of Caucasus and Central Asia.

The next step is to formulate Management Plans and Programs of Measures for 2009, with a preliminary public consultation in 2008.

The conference was thus organized around three topics:

- * preparation and cost of the Programs of Measures,
- * account taking of global warming,
- * public consultation.

As the meeting was taking place in Italy, special attention was paid to the Mediterranean aspects.

37 papers were presented and many recommendations were formulated, in particular:

Preparation and cost of Programs of Measures

Involving the local stakeholders is essential especially the Local Authorities. Actions should also include the preparation of local management plans and programs of measures at sub-basin level.

Speeding up agricultural and sanitation measures is also necessary, as these two sectors are, with the hydro-morphological changes in rivers, the main factors of the Risk of Not Achieving Good Status: integrating the "Urban Waste Water" and "Nitrates" Directives is a prerequisite.

Increasing the means devoted to the management of aquatic environments and wetlands and to hydro-morphology is essential.

It is unavoidable to significantly increase the financial resources, based on the "polluter-pays" and "user-pays" principles.

Economic studies are essential for WFD implementation to justify exemptions regarding deadlines and levels as compared to the Good Status objective, to assess the cost-benefit of the measures, to optimize the efficiency of the Program of Measures. It is necessary to develop an economic culture and train economists specialized in the water field.

The participants wished sharing experience, harmonizing methods (environmental cost assessment, rate of cost recovery, cost-effectiveness models for measures, etc.) and developing socioeconomic indicators or reference

values, in the International Districts as a priority (disproportionate cost concept, etc.). Giving explanations to the consumers and decision-makers is necessary to make the stakes understandable and the (often unavoidable) water price increase acceptable.

In International Districts, coordination should be fostered (common catalogues of measures, coordinated objectives, common socioeconomic indicators, etc.) by strengthening the action of the International Commissions.

Account taking of global warming

The WFD does not directly take climate change into account but provides tools that should be effectively used in the Programs of Measures (quantitative status, hydro-morphology, pricing and cost recovery, etc.).

A common approach seems essential at the European and Euro-Mediterranean level: research programs, upstream-downstream common cause, data sharing and coordination of activities between basins, especially in International River Basin Districts.

It is necessary: to evaluate the hydrological consequences of climate change in each basin according to various scenarios; to supplement the monitoring networks planned by the WFD; to set up National Water Information Systems; to develop and coordinate warning systems for floods and droughts; to pass from a policy of offer development to a policy of water demand reduction.

Management Plans for drought should be developed with the stakeholders, not only in time of crisis but also planned in the long term.

Facilitating the implementation of the Water Framework Directive

Public consultation

The Basin Organizations have organized the first two steps of public consultation planned by the WFD. They allowed better knowing the populations' expectations. The limiting factor is the lack of human and financial resources. Involving the stakeholders and the public from the first stages is a factor of success and this information effort should go further than the official times for public consultation planned by the WFD.

It is necessary to coordinate the process and timetable at the national level and in the International Districts, while favoring the basin and sub-basin scale for the consultation,

Distinguishing information from consultation is needed because these are two different objectives. It is recommended to rely on Basin Councils or Committees when they do exist. It is important to mobilize local elected officials and NGOs, to raise the young's awareness in school, to explain the stakes using local problems, to combine various information tools, not limiting itself to questionnaires and websites but also organizing local public debates.

It is important to communicate in a less administrative and more pedagogical way (joint work by water and communication specialists) and ensure transparency (communicating on uncertainties, explaining the decisions made and reporting on the obtained results).

The main meeting of 2008 should not be missed!

These consultations have a cost and it is necessary to plan specific budgets. Experience sharing is necessary to define the most suitable methods according to situation and cost-effectiveness of the various tools.

Situation in the Mediterranean Basin

The Mediterranean Basin is likely to be one of the areas most affected by climate change over the world.

The problem of water sharing between irrigation, tourist areas and basic human needs (drinking water) is now arising

in many places. The real problem is not so much to mobilize new resources but to better use water!

Among the mentioned proposals there are: a Mediterranean Observatory of Water Resources; a policy for fighting against wastages; not supporting the development of irrigation in water deficient areas; defining maximum abstraction quantities, preparing "drought" action plans; a water pricing policy; the re-use of treated wastewater and the desalination of sea water; making up for lost time as regards sanitation, etc.

Modernizing the institutions and capacity building are also necessary: integrated water management at the level of river basins, creation and strengthening of Basin Organizations and International Commissions, the planning and programming of investments with financing based on the polluter-user-pays principles, water users' participation, etc.

It is advisable to develop the management of community services of municipal and irrigation water and basic and continuing professional training.

Access to information should be facilitated especially by creating and networking the National Water Information Systems, that are developed within EMWIS, and by more widely disseminating research results, within the European IWRM - Net project for instance.

The participants wished to work on adapting the general principles of the Framework Directive to the Mediterranean Basin while emphasizing the importance of the Euro-Mediterranean common cause and of the next Ministerial Conference planned in the second semester of 2008.

The participants underlined the interest of continuing the twinning agreements between basins initiated by the TWINBASINXN project, especially for the Mediterranean Basin and the EECCA Region (Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia), of establishing common socioeconomic indicators and performance indicators allowing making the necessary comparisons between Basin Organizations and of creating a base of practical references on the methods used for public consultation.

Mr. Jacky COTTET, President of the French Rhone-Mediterranean and Corsica Water Agency, was congratulated for the effectiveness with which he held his Presidency in 2006-2007 and Mr. Roberto GRAPPELLI, Secretary General of the Tiber Basin Authority (Italy), will take the chair until the next "EUROPE-INBO" conference, which will be organized by Romania in autumn 2008.

The final resolutions, papers and photographs are available on the website: www.inbo-news.org.