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"EUROPE-INBO 2011" and General Assembly of the Mediterranean Network of Basin Organizations (MENBO)

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The ninth Conference of the "EUROPE-INBO" group was held in Oporto, Portugal, from 27 to 30 September 2011, at the invitation of ARH Norte.

The "EUROPE-INBO 2011" conference gathered 254 participants, representatives of National Administrations and Basin Organizations as well as NGOs and companies from 46 Countries.

This meeting was jointly organized with the 9th General Assembly of the Mediterranean Network of Basin Organizations (MENBO).

The 9th "EUROPE-INBO 2011" International Conference in Oporto was organized around successive round tables addressing the following issues :

- * Water Governance in Transboundary River Basin scenarios ;
- * Adaptation to long term challenges linked to climate change and prevention of extreme phenomena ;
- * Water and Energy ;
- * River hydro-morphology, restoration and protection of water ecosystems ;
- * Application of the WFD in countries non-members of the European Union.

75 papers were presented during these five round tables.

The recommendations and proposals were presented at the World Water Forum in Marseilles, from 12 to 17 March 2012, during the sessions of the Region Europe :

- * Transboundary Water Management

Cooperation among the riparian countries to better manage transboundary rivers, lakes and aquifers in Europe and the Mediterranean should be improved.

Transboundary river basins and aquifers should be managed in an integrated manner, based on legal frameworks common to all the riparian countries, a shared understanding of the challenges, based on the exchange of data and analyses, and on the involvement of all the different stakeholders to define a "shared vision" and a common strategy for the future to share the benefits.

It is advisable that all UNECE countries ratify the "Water Convention" (Helsinki 1992) as well as the amendment opening the Convention to countries outside the region.

Many basins still lack effective frameworks for cooperation.

The joint bodies responsible for transboundary cooperation on water are still few, often with a limited mandate and limited operational capacity.

It is advisable to provide increased support to interested countries for the signing of new agreements on transboundary basins, as well as for the creation of new River Basin Organizations or for strengthening existing ones.

The implementation of the European Water Framework Directive (WFD) is a path that other regions can explore, especially neighboring countries that share the same transboundary basin with EU Member Countries.

It is necessary to strengthen and widen the mandate of International Commissions and their means for carrying out their tasks of exchange and coordination at the level of their entire transboundary basin.

The Basin Management Plans should be the key instruments for this integration of transboundary efforts.

* Cross-sectoral integration and adaptation to climate change

The basin management approach seems the best way to manage water resources : common cause between upstream and downstream basins should be strengthened, particularly for adaptation to climate change.

It is essential to improve coordination between the WFD and the other European Directives on water resources management.

But, above all, water management is linked to many sectoral policies of the European Union : cross-sectoral integration is the only way for sustainable water resources management in the future.

The "Good Status" of many Water Bodies, especially groundwater, will not be achieved in the entire European Union in 2015 and sometimes beyond, without a significant strengthening of agri-environmental measures especially in the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy.

It is necessary to introduce new practices to prevent droughts and water shortages affecting a large part of the territory and of the European population, and to provide "sustainability" to irrigated agriculture, essential for increasing food production, for securing farms' economy and production quality

It will be necessary to reduce water consumption and enhance the effectiveness of all uses.

We must quantify the economic value of the services provided by aquatic ecosystems, to better justify their protection and restoration.

Climate change will occur with more severe droughts or floods throughout Europe.

It is urgent to develop a better "Science and Policy Interface" (SPI) to anticipate changes and provide field operators with new tools for adapting to climate change to be introduced in the next 2015 - 2021 and 2021 - 2027 cycles of the Basin Management Plans and Programs of Measures.

It is necessary :

- to reduce the risk of floods and marine flooding ;
- to prevent water scarcity and drought risk (especially with a demand management policy) ;
- to introduce innovative and ambitious measures for adaptation to climate change and to its consequences on hydrological cycles.

* Coordination of policies on water and renewable energy

It is essential to balance the WFD requirements with those of the Directive on Renewable Energy.

The improved performance of existing hydropower plants, which have real economic value, is a priority.

Old infrastructure should be rehabilitated to meet the new requirements.

The infrastructures that are no longer economic should be "erased".

Strategic plans for the development of hydropower must be drafted and accompanied by measures to minimize impacts on the environment and improve the built areas versus aquatic life.

Framework agreements, laying down the objectives to be achieved, the requirements to be complied with and the means for follow-up and monitoring, could be usefully generalized.

A review of old hydropower concessions should be quickly considered.

Infrastructures should meet strict requirements, particularly in terms of maintaining an ecological reserved flow for migrating fish species and sediment management.

The new hydropower concessions or the renewal of old ones should be considered in each basin to cover "a complete chain of infrastructures" enabling their integrated management and not for each infrastructure after another.

* Improvement of European and Mediterranean drinking water supply and sanitation services

Water services have a cost and require substantial funding, both in investment and operation.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), in particular, promotes the concept of "3T" (Taxes, Tariffs, Transfers) as viable options for sustainable financing of water services.

The civil society should be informed and take part in the decision-making process.

The vocational training of the employees of water utilities is essential to guarantee the good design, development, operation, maintenance and renewal of infrastructures and the quality of the services provided to the users.

It is essential to make them a condition for assistance from the European institutions and donors.

* Rehabilitation and protection of aquatic ecosystems

It is a priority target of the Water Framework Directive.

One of the barriers is land ownership : the right to intervene in private fields, or to change their use, should be increased.

Mechanisms for regional planning on a large-scale (green and blue schemes) should be developed,

* Strengthening of European cooperation in the field of water

It is undeniable that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), especially in the sanitation sector, cannot be achieved without significant support from the European Union and Member States to Third Countries, especially in Africa, but also in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia and in the Mediterranean.

The focus can be placed on increasing cooperation between EU District Authorities, Local Authorities and NGOs and their counterparts in neighboring countries through innovative financial mechanisms such as the "1% for common cause" allowing the managers of water and sanitation utilities to voluntarily spend up to at least 1% of their income for national, community and international common cause actions.

It is appropriate to continue and strengthen the EU Water Initiative (EUWI), ten years after its launching, by providing it with real means for institutional supports.

Water should be a priority of the EU assistance-to-development policy.

It is advisable that the "2nd EUWI strategy" gives more room to improved governance, financing mechanisms, transboundary basin management, communication and participation.

To achieve these goals, it is advisable to launch again the dynamics of twinning between EU Basin Organizations and their counterparts in neighboring countries.

A "World Pact for better river basin management" was proposed for signature by Basin Organizations from all over the world during the closing day of the World Water Forum in Marseilles on 16 March 2012.

The participants thanked Mr. Laurent Fayein, President of the Rhone, Mediterranean and Corsica Water Agency (France), for his Presidency of the EUROPE-INBO Group during the year 2010/2011. They gratefully accepted Turkey's proposal to host in Istanbul the next EUROPE-INBO 2012 conference.

The Delegates thanked the Portuguese Authorities and the ARH-Norte for their excellent hospitality and their good organization of this 9th Conference.

Mr. Antonio Guerreiro De Brito, President of ARH Norte (Portugal), was elected President of the "EUROPE-INBO Group" for the year to come.

MENBO General Assembly thanked Mr. Fadi Comair, General Director for Water and Energy in Lebanon, for his initiatives launched during his MENBO Presidency.

Mr. Antonio Guerreiro De Brito, President of ARH Norte (Portugal), was elected new President of MENBO until the next General Assembly in 2013

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