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13th International "EUROPE-INBO 2015" Conference on the Water Framework Directive implementation

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The 13th conference of the "EUROPE-INBO" group took place in Thessaloniki, Greece, from 21 to 24 October 2015, at the invitation of the Greek Ministry of Reconstruction, Production, Environment and Energy and the Special Secretariat for Water.

It gathered 193 participants, representatives of national administrations and basin organizations as well as of international and regional organizations and NGOs, coming from 32 countries

The Conference allowed reaffirming that integrated water resources management in the basins of lakes, rivers and aquifers is unavoidable to ensure the preservation of this resource, face the multiple identified pressures, and to adapt to the effects of climate change.

The conference was organized around four roundtables :

1- Measures for adaptation of water resources to the effects of climate change ; "water" component of the COP21 in Paris in 2015 and preparation of the 2nd River Basin Management Plans (2016-2021).

Taking into account the effects of climate change requires efforts and additional resources for adaptation measures to be quickly developed and applied in national and transboundary basins.

Actions have already been undertaken for the preparation of the 2nd River Basin Management Plans and their Programs of Measures (2016-2021).

But it is clear that, for the preparation of the 3rd cycle (2022-2027) required by the WFD, it is necessary that adaptation measures be thought of when developing the River Basin Management Plan, so that they become an integral part of the latter.

Integration with other EU Directives, such as the Flood Risk Management and Marine Strategy Framework Directives, is to be entirely achieved as quickly as possible.

Natural Water Retention Measures should be introduced when taking into account the benefit that can be expected from them for the adaptation.

A multisectoral approach is essential and stronger harmonization between the Water-related Directives and the sectoral policies of the European Union should be looked for, especially regarding agriculture, energy and waterways transport.

It is also necessary to promote and formalize the signing, at the highest level of the represented Countries and Organizations, of the **Paris Pact for adaptation to the effects of climate change in the basins of rivers, lakes and aquifers**, launched on INBO initiative on the occasion of the COP21 2015 of Paris and of the official day of December 2 dedicated to "water and climatic change".

Many experiments were undertaken for adaptation to climate change : the most significant are recorded in the publication **"Water and Climate Change Adaptation in Transboundary Basins : Lessons Learned and Good Practices"** published by the United Nations (UNECE) and INBO and now available in French and English.

2- Water governance in Transboundary Basins ;

To improve governance in transboundary basins, it is necessary to strengthen the International Commissions of the corresponding Districts that have a key role in the implementation of the EU Directives, even beyond the EU borders, and we must go towards effective implementation of United Nations conventions : the 1992 Water Convention and 1997 Convention of New York.

Cooperation agreements should be signed between riparian (EU or EU neighboring) countries, if they do not already exist.

The already established Commissions should be privileged tools for achieving appropriate governance, based on mutual trust, common understanding of the basin issues and accurate, accessible and shared data, and on the field practitioners' involvement on both sides of the border.

The work conducted by INBO and UNESCO within the **OECD's Water Governance Initiative**, may also enable

progress in the governance of national and transboundary basins inside the EU and beyond, including in EU neighboring countries.

3- The financing of water policy and economic analyses ;

The funding of Programs of Measures for the effective implementation of the WFD and its "daughter" Directives remains a concern for managers and is a condition for achieving the objectives.

The polluter-pays and user-pays principles and the need for cost recovery should guide the establishment of multi-year and stable financing systems that are up to the investment and operation needs in the basins.

The 2nd and 3rd River Basin Management Plans should be based on a more comprehensive economic analysis of pressures on water resources and proper quantification of costs and impacts of the measures needed to comply with the WFD objectives.

This will determine the combinations of measures that have the best cost/efficiency ratio.

For such a purpose, clear and transparent methodologies should be established as well as economic research increased to better understand the cost of inaction, the disproportionate costs and have reliable cost / benefit analyses that are comparable between the Member States.

The participants underlined the need for action at European and national levels to increase the consistency of EU environmental objectives and sectoral policies, especially for agriculture and to better ensure synergy of available funding possibilities.

An effort should be made so that the financial resources available at European level and at other levels find greater use in the measures for water resources management.

The EU and Member States should also maintain a high level of financial support for solidarity with the Southern and Eastern neighboring countries, to promote better governance and the realization of investments and actions that are essential, especially in shared basins.

It is also necessary to support the development of solidarity financing for access to water and sanitation both for public health purpose and for preventing the degradation of water quality.

4- Local processes for the application of the Directives, participation of local stakeholders and public involvement.

The involvement of stakeholders and the public is crucial to improve water resources management. Their participation since the beginning in decision-making processes need to be developed for greater appropriation of the measures of River Basin Management Plans, which implies that their access to the outcomes of monitoring and to knowledge on water should be facilitated.

It is also essential to ensure the active participation of local public and private contracting authorities and economic sectors in the WFD implementation process as they are mainly the ones in charge of applying the recommended measures.

The participants in the conference recommended that European basin organizations and decision makers promote the development of local approaches that lay out overall goals for use, development, quantitative and qualitative protection of water resources on a suitable local scale.

Cross-border local approaches can also help to ensure the consistency of actions undertaken on both sides of the borders in the same transboundary basin.

Information sharing and harmonization, including spatial information, must go beyond the EU territory and concern all the riparian countries of the same transboundary basin, thus promoting the emergence of coordination in the development of River Basin Management Plans.

The "EUROPE - INBO 2015" conference is a new important step not only for assessing the implementation of the first cycle of River Basin Management Plans (2010-2015), but also for formulating proposals to improve the implementation of the WFD and associated Directives and better take climate change into account in the next cycles,

especially for the 2016-2021 period.

While welcoming the progress made in WFD implementation, as presented by **Mr. Pavel Misiga, Chief of the Water Department of the DG Environment**, in his speech at the Opening Ceremony of the Conference, the EUROPE-INBO Members consider that the efforts made in the implementation of measures should be markedly increased so that all Water Bodies achieve "Good Status" within a reasonable time.

The "EUROPE-INBO" Group thanked **Mrs. Daniela Radulescu** (Romania) for the effectiveness of her Presidency (2014 – 2015).

Professor Jacques GANOULIS, Special Secretary for Water in the Ministry of Environment & Energy of Greece, was elected President of the EUROPE-INBO Group for the year to come, until the next conference in October 2016. **The next two EUROPE-INBO meetings will be held respectively in Lourdes and Dublin in October 2016 and 2017.**