



3rd Regional Steering Committee Meeting
Environmental Protection of International River Basins Project
Minsk, Republic of Belarus
7 October, 2014

Meeting Report

Venue: Hotel Planeta
31 Poleditelei Avenue
Minsk, Belarus

1. Appointment of Chairperson and approval of draft meeting agenda

Mr Sergey Zavyalov, Head of the Department of Regulation of Pressure on Atmospheric Air and Water Resources of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of Belarus, was proposed and approved chairperson for the meeting.

The draft agenda for the meeting, annex 1 of this report, was approved with no changes.

A list of meeting participants is given in annex 2 of this report.

All meeting presentations are contained in Annex 3 of this report.

2. Summary of Discussion

Session 1: Opening and official welcome

Deputy Minister of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of Belarus, Mr Ihar Lachanovskiy, opened the meeting and welcomed the Regional Steering Committee members. He stressed the importance of the project for Belarus, given that five of country's seven large river basins are transboundary. Belarus ratified the UNECE Helsinki Water Convention in 2003 and since April 2014, a new Water Code is in force in the country, which includes the principles of basin management and improvement of the ecological status, thus the EPIRB activities are very much in line with the priorities of Belarus. Mr Lachanovskiy expressed his satisfaction with the fourth project progress report and the achievements made in identification of water bodies at risk and development of the preliminary program of measures in the pilot basins.

Mr Philippe Bernhard, from the EU Delegation in Belarus, thanked the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of Belarus for their support to EPIRB project. Mr Bernhard, appreciated the such support of Republic of Belarus for the project and its readiness to introduce IWRM and EU WFD principles in their water management framework. Given that IWRM is a cross-

sectorial process and not easy to implement and, as such, EU is playing active role in supporting it within the wider EU-Belarus bi-lateral social, economic and environmental cooperation. Mr Bernhard stated that in this regard support for water governance, particularly transboundary waters, is vital and should be strengthened at all levels. At the end of his speech Mr Bernhard wished everyone a fruitful meeting.

Mr Nicola Di Pietrantonio, Programme Manager for the European Commission, thanked the national authorities of EPIRB project countries for their efforts, particularly during the last year. EPIRB project is instrumental in approximation with EU Water Framework Directive, and together with the EU Water Initiative it aims to help the countries to overcome challenges in introduction of IWRM principles in water management. Mr Di Pietrantonio brought several points to the attention of the participants of the Steering Committee meeting, including that water management is a priority for the EC for the next seven years, and the European Commission will continue to provide support in this field; that EU-funded projects have proved successful in promoting changes in water management; and that the transboundary perspective should be taken into consideration, despite the fact that many activities are implemented at national level. At the end of his speech Mr Di Pietrantonio expressed a hope that the countries will continue their efforts, giving momentum to the preparation of new European Commission interventions.

Mr Ivan Davidov, EPIRB Project Director from Human Dynamics, congratulated the beneficiaries on the good progress over the last year, and the importance of maintaining the project's momentum and ensuring the sustainability of the results. Mr Davidov talked about the RBMPs and stressed the importance of endorsements of the plans by the national authorities.

After opening remarks and introduction of the meeting participants, EPIRB project Team Leader Mr Tim Turner presented the objectives of the meetings and the project progress, paying particularly attention to the progress in development of river basin management plans (RBMP) and development of monitoring programs.

Then EPIRB project Senior Non-Key Basin Management Expert Ms Birgit Vogel made a presentation on "Support to the implementation of the UNECE Water and Danube Protection Conventions in the project countries". Since only Moldova and Ukraine are party to the ICPDR Convention and have certain obligations, in her presentation Ms Vogel focused on EPIRB project support to these countries towards development of Danube RBMP in 2015 and development of River Prut RBMP.

During the second part of the first session of the RSC meeting, chaired by Mr Di Pietrantonio, the EPIRB project key experts continued presenting project activities and plans for the next period.

EPIRB Project Key Groundwater Expert Mr Bernardas Paukstys made a presentation on groundwater classification, monitoring programs and training. In particular, Mr Paukstys talked about classification of groundwater bodies in the pilot basins, field trainings of local experts, guidelines prepared for groundwater monitoring programs, groundwater monitoring programs compliant to the approaches of WFD and Groundwater Directive, as well as proposed groundwater monitoring programs and networks in the pilot basins.

EPIRB Project Non-Key Chemical Status Monitoring Expert, Mr Paul Buijs, made a presentation on introduction of WFD-complaint monitoring and assessment of water bodies, and particularly monitoring strategies, which are under development in the project countries. Mr Buijs presented the general development approach and content of the draft monitoring strategies, their major purpose and target audience.

Mr Zurab Jincharadze, EPIRB Project Deputy Team Leader, presented the progress in developing WFD compliant data management tools in the project countries. In his presentation Mr Jincharadze covered the following topics: the need for WFD complaint database, existing EPIRB data registry,

and the need for having standardized GIS/database. He then highlighted the works completed within the first phase of development of the WFD compatible database for EPIRB project countries, and outlined the next steps for the possible second phase of the works.

In the Q&A session Ms Nataliia Zakorchevna, EPIRB Project River Basin Management Expert for Ukraine, asked specific questions about the database, particularly its use by the local experts. Mr Jincharadze informed the meeting that even today local experts in the project countries can use the database developed by the project, but suggested to wait until the results of the second JFS are incorporated. Mr Turner stressed that the data included in the database, particularly the results of the JFSs should be available to everybody, and also asked Mr Jincharadze to identify the training needs in using the database.

Ms Marine Arabidze, Head of the Department of Environmental Pollution Monitoring of the National Environmental Agency of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of Georgia, touched upon some aspects of information sharing. She informed the meeting that recently Georgia has rehabilitated 2 groundwater monitoring observation sites with the assistance from Czech Republic, and that EPIRB prepared guidelines on groundwater monitoring were used in this process. Thus, she highly appreciated the efforts of EPIRB project in that regard, and also in mapping activities in Georgia.

Mr Victor Bujac, EPIRB Project Country Water Management Expert for Moldova, highlighted the importance of EPIRB project assistance in introduction of WFD compliant monitoring. He also called to be practical to the extent possible, taking into consideration funding opportunities by the beneficiary countries.

Mr Aleksandr Stankevich, EPIRB Project Country Water Management Expert for Belarus, continued the topic of WFD compliant monitoring programme. He informed the meeting that in regard to surface water monitoring, Belarus largely complies with the approaches and principles of EU WFD, but assistance was needed in selection of sampling methodology; the hope is to start implementation of the ecological monitoring system by the end of the year and requested advice from the EPIRB project. As for groundwater monitoring, Mr Stankevich mentioned that there is still a lot to do, and the assistance from EPIRB project is highly appreciated.

Mr Jean-Nicolas Poussart, Project Manager of the Cooperation with European Neighbourhood Countries Partnerships and Networks Programme of the European Environment Agency (EEA), mentioned that the work on development of GIS layers is very important and useful, and would be advantageous if the countries could have facility to edit them – he pointed to the experience of WISE system employed at EEA, which includes interactive maps. Mr Poussart expressed readiness to initiate dialogue with EPIRB project to share experience on how such things can be done.

Mr Turner raised the problem of absence of biological monitoring capacity in some of the project countries, indicating it as a key blockage for full introduction of WFD compliant monitoring. In response, Mr Buijs mentioned that the problem is very relevant for the South Caucasus countries, whereas in Moldova and Belarus the situation is better, excluding fish monitoring, and in Ukraine a biological monitoring department has been recently established in the Ministry. Mr Buijs suggested

that capacity building activities should continue in this regard, including involvement of people outside of regular monitoring institutions, such as National Academy Institutes or Research Institutions.

Commenting on the observations of Mr Buijs, Ms Natalia Ungurean, Hydrobiologist of the State Hydrometeorological Service of the Ministry of Environment of Moldova, mentioned that she participated in field surveys organized by the EPIRB project, and thinks Moldova still has some gaps related to identification of collected samples.

Mr Di Pietrantonio summarized the topic, indicating that the project will continue works in this regard in the coming months.

The **second session** of the RSC meeting, chaired by Mr Di Pietrantonio, was devoted to presentation of project activities and plans for the next period under expected result 2 of the EPIRB project.

Mr Jincharadze made a presentation on the overview and process of the river basin management planning. He outlined the RBMP process and progress achieved against the requirements of the project's TOR, and summarized the implementation and presented the next steps.

Mr Paukstys presented the results of the groundwater field surveys conducted in Belarus, Armenia and Moldova in 2014. He indicated the purpose of the joint field surveys (JFS), underlined the number of trained experts in each country, talked about the monitoring parameters and field equipment used, and finally presented the results of the 2nd JFS in the above-mentioned countries.

EPIRB Project Non-Key Expert on Hydromorphological Monitoring Mr Peter Roncak made a presentation on joint field surveys. He indicated the overall purpose of the JFS and presented field survey works in EPIRB project pilot basins, as well as in the pilot basins of the EU Kura Phase III project. Mr Roncak explained the criteria for selecting sampling locations, applied methods, and then presented the main outcomes of the JFS works and the planned next steps.

Afterwards, Ms Vogel presented the overview of the technical approaches in development of RBMPs in the project countries. She described in detail the WFD planning process, including basic characterization, typology and water body delineation, pressure and impact analysis/risk assessment, and the set-up of the program of measures according to 5 implementation steps.

Mr Buijs made a presentation on the design of the water monitoring programs for the pilot river basins. In his presentation Mr Buijs talked about the design of the monitoring program, including the design of surveillance, operational and investigative monitoring, and highlighted the quality elements, relevant for the assessment of ecological, chemical and hydromorphological status for surface waters, and quantitative and chemical status for groundwater.

Following the presentations on RBMP development and design of WFD compliant monitoring programs, the sub-contractors and EPIRB project country water management experts (CWME) briefly presented the progress on development of RBMPs in their respective pilot basins.

Mr Stankevich described the process of risk assessment in pilot basin of Belarus, where 12 water bodies are assessed as "under risk" and 8 as "possibly under risk". He added that the JFS conducted in September 2014 would help Belarus to clarify the status for the water bodies "possibly under risk". Mr Stankevich mentioned that the preliminary Programme of Measures would be available before the upcoming workshop in Kiev, Ukraine, in early December, after which a road-map for the adoption of the RBMP would be developed.

Ms Zakorchevna, from Ukraine, talked mainly about the process of risk assessment in the Upper Dnieper and River Prut basins of Ukraine, which are to be fine-tuned taking into consideration the

results of the JFS, conducted in September 2014. She mentioned that the Ukrainian sub-contractor is in the process of setting the environmental quality objectives and the target for delivery of the preliminary RBMP is January 2015.

Ms Martha Korchemlyuk, Head of the Laboratory of the Carpathian National Nature Park of Ukraine and representative of “Mama 86” NGO, described the progress in development of RBMP for Prut River Basin of Ukraine in more detail.

Ms Korchemlyuk reported that the water bodies “at risk” report was ready, and, as in the case of Belarus, there are several water bodies assessed as “possible under risk”, for which the results of September JFS will help status clarification. Ms Korchemlyuk thanked EPIRB project experts for the guidance documents, which have helped streamline the development of RBMPs. She then mentioned that currently the sub-contractors are in the process of setting environmental objectives and development of program of measures to achieve those objectives.

Mr Bujac briefed the participants of the RSC meeting on the status of development of RBMP for the Moldovan part of the Prut River Basin. He stated that the pressure and impact analysis and water bodies at risk reports are finalized, and the sub-contractors have moved forwards with the next steps of preparation of the plan. As a challenge, Mr Bujac highlighted the harmonization with the draft plan of the Ukrainian part of the Prut River basin.

Mr Aram Gevorgyan, River Basin Planning Expert of “Resource Management” LLC from Armenia, presented that progress in development of RBMP for Akhuryan Basin Management Area of Armenia. He mentioned that the pressure and impact analysis and water bodies at risk reports are finalized, and currently they work of setting environmental objectives and development of program of measures. According to Mr Gevorgyan, draft RBMP for Akhuryan Basin Management Area will be ready by January 2015.

Mr Rafiq Verdiyev, EPIRB Project Country Water Management Expert for Azerbaijan, updated on the status of development of RBMP in the Central Kura River Basin of Azerbaijan. He went into details with water bodies at risk report, highlighted the combination of several pressure factors for several water bodies. Mr Verdiyev also mentioned that sub-contractors have already developed the preliminary program of measures, and currently are working on details.

Ms Eliso Barnovi, representative of the Consortium of REC Caucasus and “Greentect” LLC, described the progress in development of RBMP for Chorohki-Adjaristskali pilot basin of Georgia. The pressure impact analysis in the pilot basin is complete, and, according to the results, all groundwater bodies have good status. Due to lack of monitoring data the sub-contractors had difficulties in exact assessment of the pressure from livestock production, but thanks to the second round of JFS, they were able to make expert judgments. Ms Barnovi mentioned that they have just started the work on development of program of measures, and expressed her satisfaction with the 3rd RBMP workshop held on October 6, 2014 in Minsk, which has helped them to move further with preparation of the plan.

Ms Imola Koszta, Junior Water Management Expert from REC for Central and Eastern Europe, made

a presentation on public involvement and awareness raising activities. In her presentation Ms Koszta described the activities carried out within the project, lessons learned and plans in public involvement and awareness raising for the next 12 months.

Afterwards, Mr Turner made a presentation on pilot projects. In his presentation he described the objectives and types of pilot project, overall budget and timeline of implementation. His presentation was followed by detailed presentations of Country Water Management Experts (CWME), in which the progress for each pilot project was given.

EPIRB project CWME for Armenia, Mr Vahagn Tonoyan, presented the following pilot measures, being implemented in Armenia: (i) Improvement of groundwater monitoring in Akhuryan Basin Management Area of Armenia; and (ii) Improvement of water resources management and ensuring efficient water use through development of a system for an automated, centralized, on-line control of actual water use in Metsamor sub-basin.

CWME Mr Verdiyev presented the following pilot measures, being implemented in Azerbaijan: (i) legal support project; (ii) Water use studies and IWRM in Zayamchay and Goshgarchay River basins; and (iii) Investigative monitoring in the upper Kura basin to establish a pollution baseline.

CMWE Mr Stankevich presented the following pilot measures, being implemented in Belarus: (i) Assistance in preparation of methodological documentation for WFD compliant monitoring programs in support of implementation of the 2014 Water Code of the Republic of Belarus; (ii) Flood risk assessment and mapping of the Upper Dnieper basin, including determination of the most at risk areas, field surveying of critical sites, mapping and initial design of protection measures; and (iii) Detailed assessment of pollution sources for potable groundwater sources supplying the "Novinki" regional in the territory of Minsk.

Mr Jincharadze presented the following pilot measures, being implemented in Georgia: (i) Prefeasibility study to design and construct hydrological and water quality monitoring stations in the pilot basin; and (ii) Drafting secondary legislation for the new Water Code of Georgia, including development of normative acts to support EU-Georgia Association Agreement for implementation of the EU WFD.

CWME Mr Bujac presented the following pilot measures, being implemented in Moldova: (i) Refurbishment of groundwater monitoring network for the assessment factors, influencing groundwater quality in Prut River basin; (ii) Baseline monitoring and design of WFD compliant surveillance monitoring program for "Lake Beleu" protected area in the Lower Prut; and (iii) Initial development of water resources information system, including GIS mapping of water abstraction and wastewater discharge locations for the Prut pilot area in the Republic of Moldova.

CWME Ms Zakorchevna from Ukraine presented the following pilot measures, being implemented in Ukraine: (i) Preparation and development of the draft of new legislative act, based on the IWRM principles and in accordance with the requirements of the EU WFD; and (ii) Investigation of municipal waste treatment plans as a major pressure in the Ukrainian part of the Upper Prut pilot River basin.

In the Q&A session Mr Mykhailo Tomakhin, Head of Natural Resources Protection Department of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Ukraine, mentioned that since Ukraine does not have designated basin management authority, there might be some challenges in terms of administrative division of responsibilities. He requested EPIRB project to support the country through the pilot project in decentralizing water management, and called for including the local population in implementation of the pilot project to the extent possible.

The next agenda item was coordination with other projects and initiatives. Mr Turner talked about

several aspects of inter-project coordination. He particularly highlighted the cooperation with ICPDR within the Activity 1.2, and with UNECE and OECD under the EU Water Initiative National Policy Dialogue process. Mr Turner informed the participants of the RSC meeting that currently EPIRB project is exploring possibilities to involve OECD in the economic analysis of pilot river basins. He also added discussed potential collaboration with the EU Environmental Monitoring in the Black Sea (EMBLAS) project, which has recently completed its 1st phase, to investigate monitoring requirements for the coastal zone and to organise a joint meeting in spring 2015. Finally, Mr Turner stated that the EPIRB project is open to cooperate with all water projects and initiatives in the region both on national and regional levels.

Mr Jincharadze continued the topic, describing the cooperation with the Shared Environmental Information Systems (SEIS) and the common ground with the initiative which is currently being explored, particularly cooperation on a WFD compatible database.

In the Q&A session Ms Diana Celac, Chief Consultant of the Ministry of Environment of Moldova, indicated the successful cooperation of EPIRB project with Millennium Challenge Compact in Moldova, which implements similar tasks on Dniester River. She said that many of the outcomes of EPIRB project on Prut River, including methodologies, are taken into consideration and replicated in the Dniester plan.

Mr Boris Iurciuc, Head of Division of the State Fund of Natural Resources Information of the Agency on Geology and Mineral Resources of Moldova, added that methodologies prepared within EPIRB project have served as a locomotive for other projects and initiatives in Moldova, and currently efforts are being made to replicate those methodologies also for Danube basin.

Summarizing the topic, Mr Turner mentioned also the successful cooperation of EPIRB project with the USAID Clean Energy and Water Program in Armenia, and informed that participants about the newly launched large-size USAID project in Georgia, which includes a significant water component.

In the **last session** of the RSC meeting Mr Turner and Mr Di Pietrantonio summarized the discussions and presented concluding remarks.

Mr Turner expressed his appreciation of the progress within the last 12 months and everybody's hard work, including the development of WFD compliant RBMPs. He hoped that WFD compliant monitoring plans will be ready by December 2015 for inclusion in the draft RBMPs. He stated that work has started on development of ecological classification system, and a draft methodology is expected in early spring of 2015. Mr Turner then talked about the progress in development of WFD compatible database, and expressed his satisfaction with the progress. Regarding public participation Mr Turner highlighted the need for CWMEs to work closely with beneficiaries and REC to define the RBMP adoption process. Finally, Mr Turner mentioned the pilot projects, which were progressing well, and he expects the results to be one of the project success stories.

Mr Di Pietrantonio expressed his satisfaction with the level of discussions in the RSC meeting, and provided few considerations: (i) the quality of data the countries collect needs improvements to make sense for policy makers, and it will be good to use the training opportunities EPIRB project

provides to improve data quality; (ii) there is a need for systemization and standardization of data, especially transboundary ones, at the same time improving accessibility of data, and cooperation with EEA on this topic is desirable; (iii) since investments are not priority for the governments of beneficiary countries, it might be useful to focus on some strategic tasks, which will help to outline the equipment needs for the next assistance cycle of the EC. Mr Di Pietrantonio added that there might be certain possibilities for allocation of some funds for equipment supply, and called on EPIRB project to think strategically. Finally, Mr Di Pietrantonio informed the meeting that more detail regarding EC future plans would be available in the next 2 months, when the new EC assistance strategy will be finalised. In the future assistance strategy the achievements and commitments of the countries to continue the reforms will be taken into consideration.