

Proactive approach needed to advance water in regional strategies

BRATISLAVA, 23 May (GWP CEE) - Parallels between Baltic and Danube regional strategies was the context for a workshop in Budapest, Hungary, on April 5, 2011.

More than 40 experts attended the workshop, “Parallels: Water Resources Management Aspects of European Union Strategies for Baltic Sea and Danube Regions”. The workshop was a joint initiative of the Global Water Partnership Hungary (GWP Hungary) and Global Water Partnership Central and Eastern Europe (GWP CEE).

Participants came from Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Croatia, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, and the international community.

There was a clear message for water users to “be proactive whether you are in transport, hydro-energy or the conservation sector”, said Ms. Martina Zupan, Chair of the GWP CEE Regional Council. “We have to work in partnership with other sectors to advance water issues in regional strategies,” said Zupan.

The regional strategy for Danube basin countries cover

complex development issues from transport to energy, security, social issues, culture, and nature protection. It also includes water resources management as an integral part of economic and social development. This is a step that shows a concrete integration of water aspects into economic strategy. The strategy is institutional, legislative and budget neutral. It means that no new institutions, laws and budget are foreseen in their implementation. In order not to make activities neutral, they count on a proactive approach.

Prof. Istvan Ijjas from Budapest University of Technology and Economics presented parallels between two regional strategies. Similar to Baltic Region, there have been many studies carried out in the Danube River Basin. There are four significant water management issues that need to be solved in the Danube region, comprising pollution from organic substances, nutrients, hazardous substances and hydromorphological alternations.

Experience from the Baltic as presented by Ms. Gabriella Lindholm, Chair of HELCOM, showed that the recipe for success is to build on what is already in place either in form of processes, cooperation or frameworks. Ms. Katarzyna Biedrzycka from the Chief Inspectorate of Environmental Protection in Poland provided substantial input. She underlined importance of stakeholder involvement and communication to increase public awareness about the strategy.



Ms. Gabriella Lindholm, HELCOM Chair giving presentation on HELCOM and the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region at the “Parallels” Workshop. Credit: GWP CEE

In a remark from Dr. Mitja Bricelj, ICPDR President 2010, the strategies are strongly based on trans-boundary cooperation and count on proactive approach. “There is no more central coordination and business as usual, so we have to look outside water box,” said Dr. Bricelj.

Dr. Dejan Komatina from International Sava River Basin Commission suggested that sub-regional level might be the most effective in implementing the Danube Strategy. The model of a sub-basin commission could be replicated in Central Asia, Mediterranean, South East Europe and other regions worldwide.

Dr. Laszlo Perger, Head of Department VKKI (Central Directorate of Water Resources and the Environment) informed about the state of play in Priority Area 4 (protecting environment) that he is coordinating. Collection of projects has been done and next is to label flagship projects. Eco-friendly waste water treatment plants for small communities could be an example of a project under his priority areas.

According to Dr. Peter Bakonyi, Technical Director of VITUKI, Priority Area 5 (focused on management of environmental risks) relies on an integrated approach. Climate change provides an opportunity for development of the Danube Climate Change Adaptation Strategy. Potential projects include but are not limited to conservation of transnational wetlands, follow-up to the Danube Flood Risk project, improvement of retention capacity of Morava-Thaya, accident risks spots inventory, rapid response to industrial accidents, research on local impacts of climate change, spatial planning, structural activities and others.

Dr. Danka Thalmeinerova, Knowledge Management Officer at the GWP Stockholm Secretariat, highlighted the role of partnership in participatory water management. Mr. Miklós Pannonhalmi, Deputy Director of Hungarian Chamber of Engineers, presented ideas on how professional associations could mobilize to promote integrated water management within the regional strategy.

GWP CEE network could use its unique geographical situation since it is covering parts of the Baltic and Danube and non-EU countries to provide neutral platform for dialogues and exchange of experience. Concrete examples could be financing of regional strategies in non-EU members countries from the Danube region and exchange of best practices between Baltic and Danube regions. Project proposals in the area of floods and droughts as well as sustainable sanitation where GWP Country Water Partnerships have local level expertise could be submitted for funding. Responding to this emerging challenge, participants proposed to GWP CEE to establish a new Task Force in order to follow-up on implementation.

Presentations: <http://www.slideshare.net/gwpceewaterpartnership/presentations>

Photos: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/gwpcee>

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The Global Water Partnership (GWP) vision is for a water secure world. Its mission is to support the sustainable development and management of water resources at all levels. GWP was created to foster the implementation of integrated water resources management (IWRM): the coordinated development and management of water, land, and related resources by maximising economic and social welfare without compromising the sustainability of ecosystems and the environment. GWP CEE's international network comprises 12 Country Water Partnerships and over 140 Partners.