

Regional Roundtable
**“Strengthening public participation in trans-boundary water management -
exploring the synergies of the Espoo, Helsinki and Aarhus Conventions”**

25-26 March 2015, Tirana, Albania

REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The South-Eastern Europe (SEE) Regional Roundtable of Aarhus Centres was organized on 25-26 March 2015 in Tirana, Albania, to provide the framework for stronger activities of the Aarhus Centres in the region in promoting public awareness and participatory decision-making on environment and security issues related to transboundary water management, and to strengthen their regional network. The Roundtable gathered around 40 representatives of Aarhus Centres, local authorities and relevant government agencies from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia as well as of international and regional actors, including the Austrian Development Cooperation which funded this activity.

Presentations by experts – both academics and practitioners - increased the knowledge of the participation mechanisms under the *Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context* (Espoo Convention) and the *Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes* (Helsinki Convention). They introduced basic features and mechanisms of public participation under these conventions, which provide a link to the Aarhus Convention. This was accompanied by practical examples of public participation in transboundary water management from the Sava River Basin, Drin River Basin, Serbia, and Germany. The presentations and discussions confirmed the synergies between the Espoo, Helsinki and Aarhus Conventions and the potential of the Aarhus Centres to strengthen the involvement of civil society to foster the implementation of these international conventions in South-Eastern Europe, contributing to overall democratic and sustainable development in the region.

The Aarhus Centres representatives expressed the need, interest and commitment to co-operate at national and regional levels in addressing common environmental challenges with particular focus on the management of water. During group discussions, the participants identified common challenges for public participation in transboundary water management in the region and developed recommendations for Aarhus Centres to improve public participation in

transboundary water management and environmental impact assessments in transboundary contexts. The following five priority measures have been identified.

- Memorandum of Understanding between the Aarhus Centres of the South Eastern Europe region to establish a regional network with the purpose to facilitate systematic exchange of information and conduct joint activities at transboundary level;
- Organize the exchange of good practices with EU member countries;
- Awareness raising campaigns on existing river basin agreements, transboundary EIA process and public participation rights;
- Memorandum of Understanding between the respective authorities in charge of environmental issues and the Aarhus Centres on information exchange about transboundary water projects;
- Capacity development of Aarhus Centres in the areas of transboundary water management, Espoo, Helsinki and Basel Conventions; including the creation a regional online communication platform between the Aarhus Centres and the establishment of a mechanism of communication between Aarhus Centres and authorities.

IN DETAIL

Opening

Speakers:

- Mr Robert Wilton, Deputy Head of OSCE Presence in Albania (PiA)
- Mr Heinz Habertheuer, Head of the Coordination Office for Technical Cooperation of the Austrian Embassy to Tirana;
- Ms Jenniver Sehring, Environmental Affairs Adviser of the Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities (OCEEA)

Mr Robert Wilton opened the event by saying that transboundary waters are a linking element of countries and peoples, hence it needed an inclusive approach in their management. Bringing the example of Albania, Mr Wilton said that one of the most important challenges is the effective implementation of legislation. To address the challenges and ensure water management in a sustainable way, it is key to have a wide participation of stakeholders and give constant, solid response to them. The Aarhus Centres (AC) are particularly well suited as partners in inclusive water management, and the OSCE PiA has continuously supported the improvement of environmental governance in Albania.

Referring to the floods that struck the Balkans in the recent years, **Mr Heinz Habertheuer** said that climate change is having a great impact on countries' stability. Moreover, the growth of the population is putting pressure on the available natural resources. For this reason, the Austrian Development Cooperation supports the Nexus approach as a means to enhance integrated and sustainable management of natural resources and to assist in the adaptation to climate change. Highlighting some of the core obligations set out at the Espoo and Helsinki conventions, Mr Habertheuer said that the South-Eastern European (SEE) countries need to improve pollution control of waters, whose management should be done at cross-border level in order to provide sustainable solution to the problems and mitigate the risks of conflicts.

In her opening speech, **Ms Jenniver Sehring** emphasised the timeliness of the event in light of the focus of the OSCE's second dimension on water governance under the 2015 Serbian Chairmanship. Ms Sehring listed the expected results of the roundtable, being: the identification of common public participation challenges in the region in trans-boundary water management; increased knowledge of public participation mechanisms under the Espoo and Helsinki Conventions; and practical recommendations for ACs to improve public participation in trans-boundary water management and environmental impact assessments in trans-boundary contexts.

Session 1: Public participation in transboundary water management

Speakers:

- Dr. Dejan Komatina, Secretary of International Sava River Basin Commission (ISRBC)
- Ms. Olivera Zurovac-Kuzman, Environmental Adviser at the OSCE Mission to Serbia
- Mr. Dejan Panovski, Head of Drin River Basin Management Unit and Secretary of Lake Ohrid Watershed Commission, Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning, FYROM
- Dr. Thomas Uhlendahl, Regiowasser e.V., Freiburg, Germany
- Dr. Ralf Peveling, Team Leader & Mr Holger Densky, Advisor of Water Management, Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity at Lakes Prespa, Ohrid and Shkodra/Skadar Project (CBSL), GIZ Albania

Dr. Dejan Komatina highlighted the main issues and challenges in transboundary water management in SEE. He brought the example of the Sava river management from International Sava River Basin Commission (ISRBC), made up of members from the countries where Sava flows through. He explained the legal and institutional framework, as well as the scope of cooperation between the participating countries, including the development of integrated plans and data systems for the basin, of water-related economic activities, harmonization of national regulations with those of the EU and inter-sectorial coordination. For public participation, several tools are used by the ISRBC, such as celebrations (Sava river day), data portals and consultations with the youth through workshops and meetings. Yet, it is recognized that there is much space for improvement of public involvement. This is the reason why a Sava Water Council – to be composed of scholars, independent experts and CSOs – is being established. Dr. Komatina concluded by saying that, despite being demanding, public participation is essential in finding sustainable and faster solutions. While unilateral processes make decision-making easier, they result in difficulties in the implementation phase. Participatory processes take longer time for decision-making, but then implementation is easier.

Questions and Comments

Ms. Jukan, Aarhus Centre Sarajevo, inquired how NGOs can be part of the working groups of ISRBC and how civil society organizations (CSOs) are informed on the work of ISRBC. Mr Komatina answered that all CSOs are invited to apply to become part of the ISRBC's working groups as observers. They are able to participate in such meetings. Moreover, as soon as the Sava Water Council will be established, CSOs would have the opportunity to apply for it. Regarding the information tools, the ISRBC posts updates of its work on its website and is open to suggestions from outside.

Mr. Andrusевич, Resource & Analysis Center "Society and Environment", asked if CSOs can comment on a document and contribute to its drafting. Mr Komatina replied that the ISRBC publishes documents 6 months prior to its meetings, in order for CSOs to have enough time to comment and contribute to them.

Mr. Murataj, Aarhus Centre Vlore, asked which mechanisms of public consultation are in place. Mr. Komatina replied that the Sava Commission has its focal points in the region. They approach the local institutions, with which the communication is not always easy. However, he expects that local institutions will be more open to consultations with the greater involvement of the public.

Ms. Olivera Zurovac-Kuzman presented best practices and challenges of public participation related to the May 2014 floods in Serbia and beyond. Ms. Zurovac-Kuzman explained the whole process of assisting the communities affected by the 2014 floods that struck Serbia. She presented several project activities of the OSCE Mission to Serbia, such as a “Flood Action Alliance at the Timok River” or a “Gender Analysis of the Impacts of the Floods”. One lesson learnt was that the time and resources needed for proper preparation of activities, e.g. the identification and inclusion of relevant stakeholders, has to be taken into account. As a conclusion, she stressed the crucial importance of information and the role that the CSOs could have in contributing to coping with disasters as they are experienced in information delivery activities.

Questions and Comments

Mr. Andrusевич inquired how earlier activities on flood risk management had an impact on the flood event, and vice versa. Ms Zurovac-Kuzman replied that the process contributed to better informing the people for potential future risks.

Mr. Rudež, Ministry of Environment and Tourism, FBiH, mentioned the rehabilitation works on the Sava River and stressed the importance to have intersectoral activities and take climate change effects into account.

Ms. Jukan asked about the concrete activities during the Sava Day. Mr. Komatina answered that the activities are organized by the ISRBC as well as the basin countries and take place in different places.

Mr. Dejan Panovski presented public participation challenges in trans-boundary cooperation in the Lake Ohrid Basin and the Drin River Basin. He focused on the common projects of the concerned countries, Albania and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), to promote cost-effective management of the transboundary water resources and ensure a sustainable economic development. He stressed that the Lake Ohrid project, that started in 1998/99 was the first transboundary water project in South-Eastern Europe. Joint monitoring and assessment studies were important elements for building trust. Mr Panovski gave an overview of the agreements and arrangements that the two countries have made through the years, explaining the role, the functioning and the existing problems in the work of the established structures with special focus on participation mechanisms. Based on this positive experience, the co-operation was scaled up from the lake to the basin level of the Drin River, with the Drin Dialogue initiated in 2009. Given that the two countries share both the benefits and responsibilities for the common water system, the challenging question is whether there are elements that can cause instability, insecurity or potential conflicts between the two countries. Mr Panovski stated that such risks can be mitigated by ensuring the support and involvement of the public and the private sectors of both sides in transboundary management, as well as having a joint action plan, monitoring and early warning system.

Dr. Thomas Uhlendahl, from the local NGO Regiowasser in Freiburg, Germany, presented a best practice example of the implementation of the EU Water Framework Directive for the management of Rhine River in Baden Württemberg. He brought the experience of this specific

region in effectively involving the wider public in the process. Dr. Uhrendahl emphasised that simply informing the public is not enough, but driving it to actively participate in transboundary water management issues should be the objective. Based on his experience, Mr Uhrendahl listed objectives of public participation, including getting a transparent planning process, using experiences and knowledge of the local public, listening to concerned people early in order to get fewer objections once the formal procedure has started, and focusing only on what indeed is possible. In conclusion, he stated that public participation needs to take place close to concerned stakeholders, but that, however, local conflicts over various remaining issues still may continue to exist, and transboundary water management remains a difficult issue.

Dr. Ralf Peveling and **Mr Holger Densky** explained in brief the involvement of GIZ in the area of transboundary water management in Albania through two projects, focusing respectively on Climate Change and Conservation of Biodiversity. The participation component of these projects is currently still at the information level and on developing measures together with the stakeholders. The next step will be focusing on Environmental Monitoring. Mr Densky provided the example of public participation in water management in the German state of Hesse, focusing on the ways of how to involve public effectively. He listed the different steps of public involvement, stressing the importance of a good preparation, which clearly defines the purpose of public involvement, the impact it should have, instruments to be used as well as the legal background of the issue. He also stressed the importance of transparency on the follow-up to comments and other inputs.

Questions and Comments

Ms. *Jukan* asked about ways to activate the broader public and if, in case of requests for information from the public, a written reply is provided. Mr. Densky and Mr. Uhrendahl explained that the involvement of the wider public is a problem also in Germany, but having in focus specific problems directly concerning communities would help in getting broad participation. Regarding the form of reply to the interested public/stakeholder, it is provided in written form through our webpage.

Session 2: Public participation in the context of the Espoo and Helsinki Conventions

Speakers:

- Dr. Mara Tignino, Senior Researcher and Coordinator of the Platform for International Water Law, Faculty of Law, University of Geneva, Switzerland
- Mr. Andriy Andrusevich, Senior Policy Expert and Member of the Governing Board, Resource & Analysis Center "Society and Environment", Lviv, Ukraine

Dr. Tignino gave an introduction into the *Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context* (Espoo Convention) and the *Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes* (Helsinki Convention). She presented the aims of the two conventions, their processes and tools, the challenges in their implementation, and protocols that specify in greater detail the obligations stemming from them, like the *Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Protocol* of the Espoo Convention, and the *Protocol on Water and Health* of the Helsinki Convention. With regards to the Espoo Convention, the precise and thorough application of the EIA process must be undertaken before any project is authorized, and must be communicated to the potentially affected country. Dr Tignino explained the requirements concerning these processes by the Espoo Convention. Moving forward to the Helsinki Convention, Dr. Tignino reminded that it was a framework convention, meaning that the general obligations defined by it were specified further by additional instruments – protocols,

annexes and specific agreements. Among the general obligations, which are applicable to all parties, the obligations related to the EIA represent a link with both Espoo and Aarhus Conventions. Dr Tignino expressed her opinion that the EIA requirements should be applicable not only to the individual projects, but also to programmes and policies. Finally, she concluded that better utilization of the relationship between the two UNECE conventions and other universal agreements should be explored, as all these instruments provide the opportunity for the implementation of human rights through the environmental agreements.

In her second presentation, **Dr Tignino** introduced the participants to the role of public participation in the implementation and support of the Espoo and Helsinki Conventions and synergies with the Aarhus Convention. Dr Tignino presented the way in which the public participation principle was embodied in the Espoo and Helsinki Conventions. In the former, the requirements are defined in Articles 2.2, 4.2, 2.6, 3.8, and 6.1. In particular, it states that an effective EIA procedure in the transboundary context must include public information in early stages, as well as enough time for all steps to be taken. With regards to the public participation principle in the Helsinki Convention, Dr. Tignino stressed the information on water quality as regulated by Article 16, then the requirement of the information being provided without discrimination, and finally, established a link to the issue of human right to water as defined by the Protocol on Water and Health. She then proceeded with the account of the Uruguay River pulp mill dispute between Argentina and Uruguay. In 2005, population and environmental groups from Argentina protested against the installation of the pulp mills on the Uruguay bank of the river. Both sides referred to Espoo and Helsinki Conventions, claiming that their actions were in line with the best practice as defined by these two instruments. Dr. Tignino pointed out once more that the importance of this case lied also in the fact that it was the first case of the International Court of Justice to take into consideration EIA procedure and public consultation in the transboundary context. She pointed to the synergies of the Espoo and Aarhus Conventions, as public participation is considered an essential part of transboundary EIA process.

Questions and comments

Ms. Ornela Shosbi of the Albanian Ministry of Environment's EIA/SEA Unit mentioned the Kiev SEA Protocol as another important instrument that must be taken into consideration in this context. Dr. Tignino agreed and stated that her reading of the Kiev Protocol was reflected in her previously mentioned opinion that EIA should not apply only to individual projects, but also to policies.

The next question referred to the definition of “early stage” in the EIA/SEA context, and the participants unanimously agreed that the best definition would be “as early as possible” – e.g. to organize a public consultation concerning a problem and draft the solutions based on the feedback, rather than consult the interested public on already formulated proposals.

Mr. Andriy Andrusevich presented the case of the Danube-Black Sea Shipping Canal, which was submitted to both Aarhus and Espoo Conventions' Compliance Committees. This canal has been constructed in a protected area (Ramsar site) by Ukraine in the border region to Romania. The complaint to the Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee was submitted in 2004. The Committee concluded that Ukraine has not complied with its obligations under several articles of the Convention, and the Aarhus Convention's Meeting of the Parties (MOP) requested Ukraine to bring its legislation and practice into compliance with the provisions of the Convention and to submit a strategy for implementation. Ukraine until now has not delivered this strategy. In parallel, a Romanian NGO filed a complaint to the Espoo compliance procedure, and it resulted

in Espoo MOP Decision IV/2 (2008), which was unique in terms of being strict and specific about the course of action recommended to the non-compliant government. This decision basically ordered Ukrainian government to abandon the project. Mr. Andrusevich continued to explain that there were no mechanisms to coerce the non-compliant governments to act in line with the Committee Decision, but a severe reputation pressure. As one of the tangible results of these efforts, in 2008 a permanent joint monitoring mechanism was established between Ukraine and Romania. While there was no concrete positive reaction to the MOP decisions, they had a long-term political impact on the political authorities as they are now aware of the Conventions and are taking them into account for new projects.

Session 3: Discussion of possible activities of Aarhus Centres

Information exchange about activities in the ENVSEC project “Strengthening the capacities of Aarhus Centres in disaster risk reduction to enhance awareness of local communities”

Ms. Jenniver Sehring gave an overview of the project “Strengthening the capacities of Aarhus Centres in disaster risk reduction to enhance awareness of local communities”. The project was launched by the OSCE in May in 2014 with the financial support of the Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation (SDC), Government of Finland and the Austrian Development Agency (ADA): The project is being implemented in the framework of the ENVSEC Initiative in co-operation with UNDP, UNEP and REC. The project aims at increasing the knowledge of Aarhus Centres on community based disaster risk reduction (DRR) and communication and outreach tools. The project will also provide for implementation of priority activities by selected Aarhus Centres to raise disaster awareness and preparedness of local communities. The project is implemented in seven countries including Albania, BiH, and Serbia. Since its launch, the project conducted a needs assessment of DRR education for civilian population in the seven countries where project is implemented. As a follow up of the assessment, national training workshops were organized for targeted stakeholders on community based DRR and communication and outreach methods. As a next step, selected Aarhus Centres will be supported in the development of the awareness-raising action plans and will receive funds for the implementation of pilot activities. In SEE, the selected Aarhus Centres are the AC Shkodra in Albania, AC Sarajevo and AC Banja Luka in BiH, and AC Novi Sad and AC Kragujevac in Serbia.

Ms. Tatjana Djurkovic, OSCE Mission to Serbia, introduced the network of the Aarhus Centres in Serbia that operate in 4 locations – Novi Sad, Kragujevac, Subotica and Nis (Aarhus Centre of South and East Serbia) - and presented the project activities carried out in the country. At national level, the project assessed the public education in DRR, conducted a desk study on the capacities of Aarhus Centres and NGOs in DRR education in Serbia and organized a targeted national training workshop. The national workshop was organized for the representatives of the Aarhus Centres, local authorities from 6 municipalities of Serbia, as well as media representatives. Participants learned about the good outreach and communication practices. The workshop included a study visit to Smederevska Palanka and surrounding locations that were affected by floods in May 2014. The Aarhus Centres had meetings with local authorities and learned about the strengths and shortcomings of disaster response in the affected areas. In Serbia, two Aarhus Centres were selected for implementation of a pilot project activity. The Aarhus Centres of Novi Sad and Kragujevac will receive small grants for DRR awareness

raising in local communities. For this purpose, Aarhus Centre Kragujevac and Aarhus Centre Novi Sad conducted consultations with all interested stakeholders to identify the priority areas for awareness rising. Teachers and media were selected as priority target groups. It has been decided that Aarhus Centres will implement the awareness raising campaign in close collaboration with local government and local NGOs in the period of May – October 2015.

Mr. Sdrjan Matovic, Aarhus Centre Kragujevac, elaborated further on the consultations conducted in Serbia. The findings of the consultative process indicate that civic awareness is one of the main shortcomings for DRR. In this regard, support of media has to be secured and education institutions have to be engaged to have wider outreach. The Aarhus Centre Kragujevac will also engage other Aarhus Centres from Serbia in the process.

Ms. Sabina Jukan presented project activities that have been implemented in Bosnia and Herzegovina. A national training workshop on DRR was held in BiH for the Aarhus Centres and their partners in November 2014. The workshop aimed at defining priority activities for Aarhus Centres with regard to DRR and identifying cooperation modalities between Aarhus Centres, local municipalities and other stakeholders. The workshop included a field visit to Nemila community that suffered from the flood triggered landslide. At the second day, participants learned about the DRR concept and communication systems for early warning. Representatives of six municipalities (Zenica, Doboje, Gračanica, Tuzla, Vogošća and Lukavac) presented consequences of floods, landslides and hail that affected their municipalities during 2014. At the third day, participants had in-depth discussions of the positive and negative experiences of disaster response. It has become apparent that in many municipalities when natural hazards occurred, CSOs (mountaineers, radio-amateurs, fishermen, kayak clubs, sport clubs, etc) took up a crucial role in rescue and recovery efforts. Ms. Jukan mentioned that among priority actions discussed by stakeholders were: broad public campaigns to increase awareness of and educate various groups about DRR; mapping of capacities and resources of NGOs in each municipality to ensure utilization of available resources for disaster response and prevention; effective use of media in informing public and raising awareness; improve civil-military cooperation to ensure effective communication on required assistance.

Mr. Elton Qendro, OSCE Presence in Albania, presented the national workshop in Albania that was organized in February 2015. The workshop also included a study visit to the flood affected areas in the northern part of Albania. Erosion and sea level rise are among the main concerns in this part of the country. Experts spoke about the mitigation and risk reduction measures. Local authorities from the South of Albania were also invited to the meeting and had the opportunity to exchange the experiences with their counterparts from the northern municipalities. The needs assessment on DRR in Albania confirmed the need to strengthen the capacity of civil society in disaster risk reduction. Mr. Qendro mentioned that the inclusion of DRR elements in the curricula of the education institutions is one of the priority measures that were identified by participants. Importance of social media in informing public was also highlighted, such as developing a mobile application that can be used for informing public on natural hazards, which would also allow reaching out to vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. As a follow up of discussions in Albania, the OSCE Presence and Aarhus Centre are considering to adopt the DRR family guide produced by OSCE Mission in Serbia.

Group exercise on the development of recommendations for AC activities related to public participation in transboundary water management and in EIA in transboundary contexts

The objective of the group discussion, moderated by **Mr. Thomas Uhlendahl**, was to develop a set of recommendations for Aarhus Centres of the SEE region on how to promote public engagement in transboundary water management and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) in transboundary context. The group exercise was divided into 2 phases. In the first phase, participants were tasked to come up with a list of priority issues, challenges and opportunities based on the following 3 questions:

- *What are main issues in transboundary water management in SEE that would require more public participation?*
- *What are the main challenges of public participation in transboundary water management and in participation in transboundary EIA processes?*
- *What are promising approaches for public participation?*

Eight groups composed of 3-4 participants discussed these issues, challenges and opportunities. After that, the results were clustered into sub-themes. Each participant could give points to the topics considered most important in order to identify priorities. Below is presented a summary of the results:

The main issues:

- Lack of knowledge of transboundary procedures; lack of cross-border exchange of information and communication; *rating - 20 points*
- Insufficient communication between authorities and the public, and authorities and media, including a lack of media capacities for reporting on environmental issues; *rating - 12 points*
- Insufficient co-operation between countries; *rating- 5 points*
- Insufficient institutional cooperation; *rating - 3 points*

The main challenges:

- Lack of transparency in the work of authorities; *rating - 21 points*
- Low public interest; *rating - 8 points*
- Poor communication with authorities at all level; *rating- 5 points*
- Lack of resources (financial); *rating- 2 points*
- Regional networking of Aarhus Centres and responsible institutions; *rating - 2points*
- Inclusion of public in early phase, insufficient participation; *rating- 2 points*
- Improve co-operation with the NGO sector and media to better inform public; *rating- 1 point*
- Way of thinking of decision-makers in terms of seeing the society as partner; *rating- 1 point*

The main opportunities:

- Building network of Aarhus Centres in neighboring countries/ regional network of Aarhus Centres; *rating - 17 points*
- Application of the Information Technologies for better dissemination of information to public; *rating - 9 points*
- Organized local stakeholders/citizens should have more active role – representation in transboundary water management processes; *rating– 6 points*
- Key is to make information very relevant for the public; *rating – 3 points*
- Use of CSO networks and Social networks (NGOs); *rating – 2 points*
- Make more use of international treaties (Espoo, Aarhus and Helsinki Conventions), EU regulations; *rating – 1 point*
- Involvement of local NGOs in public participation process; *rating – 1 point*

A detailed list of all issues, challenges and opportunities listed by participants is presented in the Annex 1.

In the second phase of the group exercise, participants were divided into 3 groups and were tasked to identify how Aarhus Centres could foster public participation in transboundary water management and engagement of public in the transboundary EIA processes. Participants were advised to come up with a list of concrete, realistic and implementable activities given the capacities of Aarhus Centres. The group identified also timeframe for proposed measures (short-term and mid-/long-term). Proposed measures were prioritized by participants. Based on ratings following top priority measures have been identified:

- Cooperation agreement in a form of a memorandum of understanding shall be signed between the Aarhus Centres of the South Eastern Europe region to establish a regional network with the purpose to facilitate systematic exchange of information and conduct joint activities at transboundary level;
Rating – 22 points, short-term activity.
- Capacity development of Aarhus Centres in the area of transboundary water management, Espoo, Helsinki and Basel Convention; including creating an online transboundary communication platform between the Aarhus Centres and the establishment of a mechanism of communication between Aarhus Centres and authorities
Rating– 22 points, mid/long term activity
- Memorandum of Understanding between the respective ministry in charge of environmental issues and the Aarhus Centres on information exchange about transboundary water projects
Rating 12 points, mid/long term activity
- Aarhus Centres conducting awareness rising campaigns on existing river basin agreements, transboundary EIA process and public participation rights;
Rating - 4 points, long term activity
- Exchanging the good practices with the EU member countries;
Rating – 4 points, long term activity

Elaboration of recommendations for ENVSEC programming

Ms. Gordana Kozhuharova. REC, presented the ENVSEC priorities in the South Eastern European Region under the current work programme that is supported by the ADA until the end of 2015. REC, serving the ENVSEC Regional Desk function for the SEE region, started negotiations with donors on possible funding of the next phase of the ENVSEC work-programme for the SEE region. The programme will be based on the outcomes of the national and regional consultations on this subject, and Ms Kozhuharova invited the participants to contribute to these consultations. In the autumn of 2015, a draft ENVSEC work-programme will be presented to the stakeholders at the ENVSEC SEE regional meeting. Ms. Kozhuharova also mentioned the possibility to involve Aarhus Centres in the *South-East Europe 2020 Strategy*, which needs to be explored further.

Closing session

Mr. Mladen Rudez called participants to make sure that the follow up actions are built on the outcomes of the roundtable. He also encouraged Aarhus Centres and NGOs to refer to positive examples and practices in their assessments and presentations, which would be very interesting for experience sharing.

Mr. Andriy Andrusevich called on the OSCE to include the implementation of the Espoo Convention in its priority activities. Mr. Andrusevich also highlight the importance of maintaining the status of a neutral platform of Aarhus Centres and suggested Aarhus Centres to engage more actively in public participation consultancies. Aarhus Centres can also follow up the decisions of the Meeting of Parties of Conventions and assist countries in the implementation of these decisions. Mr. Andrusevich also called on the OSCE to consider monitoring the impacts on waters in the context of the conflict in and around Ukraine.

Ms. Alexandra Drobac, Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection, Serbia, stressed the role of Aarhus Centres in conveying message of the public to the authorities. Aarhus Centres can bring to the government the issues of public concern. She also expressed the wish that the idea of establishing a regional network of the Aarhus Centres will come to life.

Ms. Jenniver Sehring concluded the meeting by summarizing the roundtable discussions and outlining the main outcomes and recommendations of the roundtable.

Annex 1: Detailed report of the Group Discussions:

Part I of the group exercise:

Participants were tasked to come up with the list of priority issues, challenges and opportunities in regards to following 3 questions:

- *What are the main issues in transboundary water management in SEE that would require more public participation?*
- *What are the main challenges of public participation in transboundary water management and in participation in transboundary EIA processes?*
- *What are promising approaches for public participation?*

Eight groups composed of 3-4 participants listed following issues, challenges and opportunities:

Issues:

- Good communication only between public authorities, lack of good communication between public and authorities
- Lack of transparency in cross-border context
- Absence of regional action plan for public information
- Insufficient co-operation between countries
- Insufficient cooperation between countries and between institutions
- Insufficient exchange of information between authorities and authorities & public
- Violation of Aarhus and Espoo Conventions – public participation is not taking place
- Lack of knowledge about transboundary procedures, lack of exchange of information
- Ineffective public participation in regards to transboundary impacts of planned projects
- Not updated water agreements that do not consider public participation
- Lack of agreement on water economy between Albania and Montenegro
- Lack of communication between authorities and media
- Capacity of media in reporting on environmental issues
- Public is not given chance to speak
- Pollution and waste

Challenges:

- How to improve the cooperation between media and NGOs
- Use of social media to share information
- Lack of resources (financial)
- Low public interest
- Insufficient civic participation in decision-making
- Regional cooperation between Aarhus Centres
- Transparency of government
- Poor cooperation at all level of governance
- Inclusion of public at early stage of decision-making
- Collecting and information public on the work of institutions
- Public notification about the project

- Lack of info about planned activities
- Lack of respect to obligations
- Low public interest
- Different interests for participation
- Government does not see civil society as partner
- Responsibility of citizens to take action
- Interest of general public to participate
- Missing procedure for public participation

Opportunities:

- Build a network of Aarhus Centres between countries
- Continued communication between countries on big projects
- Use of IT and social media
- Involve more local NGOs
- Using NGO networks
- Better use of social media
- Using international agreements (Aarhus, Espoo and Helsinki Conventions)
- Social media
- Inclusion of regional network of Aarhus Centres at early stage in decision making on transboundary projects
- EU regulations
- Organizing local stakeholders
- Establishing sustainable communication
- Increasing transboundary communication
- Make information adequate and relevant for the public
- Citizens can be represented in transboundary processes
- Avoiding nationalistic attitudes
- Establishing communication across border
- Building the capacity of Aarhus Centres

Part II of the group exercise:

Participants were divided into 3 groups and were tasked to identify how the Aarhus Centres can foster public participation in transboundary water management and engagement of public in the transboundary EIA process. At the end, participants could give points to rate the results of exercise 1 and 2 and identify the most pressing issues as well as most appropriate activities for Aarhus Centres.

Question: *How can Aarhus Centres promote the implementation of provisions of the existing national legislation / river basin agreements / Espoo and Helsinki Conventions on public participation?*

Group 1:

Measures	Internal/External activity	Short-term/Long-term	Points
Cooperation between Aarhus Centres on both sides of the border in terms of informing the	internal	Long-term	5

public and supporting public participation			
Strengthen the capacity of the human resources of the Aarhus Centres, financial and infrastructure support	internal	Short-term	4
Higher attention from the local and central government towards Aarhus Centres	external	long-term	1
Aarhus Centres should turn into information hub – to have preferential access to information by the line ministries	external	long-term	
Aarhus Centres – as organizers of Public Hearings	external	long-term	1
Co-operation agreements among Aarhus Centres	internal	short-term	0

Group 2:

Measures	Internal/External activity	Short-term/ Long-term	Points
Use environmental councils for dissemination of information	external	long-term	1
Inform the public at the local level	internal	long-term	0
Sign a memorandum of understanding between the Ministry in charge of environmental issues and Aarhus Centres on the basis of which the Ministry will inform the Aarhus Centres about transboundary water projects)	external	long-term	12
The Ministry of Environment should conduct capacity building training for Aarhus Centres on relevant national legislation and international conventions (training of trainers) existing river basin agreements	Internal/external	short-term	5
Establishment of a Regional Aarhus Centres Network, which would enable exchange of information	internal	long-term	8
Aarhus Centres should conduct awareness rising campaign in the course of which they would inform the public about existing river basin agreements, transboundary EIA process and public participation rights	external	short-term	4
Aarhus Centre should continue to effectively disseminate information on public hearings, EIA plans and reports	internal	short-term	2
Conducting cross border activities	internal	long-term	2
Leaflets on guidelines and recommendations for public participation in transboundary water management and EIA procedures	internal	short-term	1

Group 3:

Measures	Internal/External activity	Short-term/Long-term	Points
Establishment of as Regional Aarhus Centres Network through a memorandum of understanding	internal	short-term	9
Development of a strategy, action plan for 5 years	internal	short term	3
Capacity building of the Aarhus Centres Network on cross-border activities related to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Transboundary water management - Transboundary communication/development of an on-line platform - Espoo, Helsinki, Basel Convention - Involvement and cooperation of Chambers of Commerce - Establishment of a mechanism of communication between Aarhus Centres and authorities of all levels (also cross-sectorial) 	internal	long-run	13
Pilot project on a transboundary outreach between Aarhus Centre and relevant ministry	external	short-term	1
Organize exchange of good practices by inviting representatives of ministries from EU countries	external	short-term	4
Study visit for ministry and Aarhus Centres network to learn about best practice examples	external	short-term	3