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EU4Environment
Water and Data in Eastern Partner Countries

EU4Environment in Eastern Partner Countries: Water Resources and Environmental Data

SUMMARY REPORT

SECOND REGIONAL ACTION GROUP MEETING

Date: 28 June 2023	Venue: Talent Garden, Vienna, Austria	Time: 09h00 – 13h00 (Hybrid)
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Background: This meeting aimed to review the progress on the implementation of the EU4Environment Water and Data Programme and guide its future implementation. The meeting was followed by a workshop on mobilising finance for water and environmental resilience in EaP countries, including for Nature-based Solutions, which were the focus of a series of [site visits on 29 June](#).

The meeting was attended by over 60 participants, including high-level officials and representatives of Civil Society Organisations from EaP countries, the European Commission, Austria, France, Finland, Romania, Slovakia, the implementing partners, and IFIs. The meeting was attended by National Focal Points appointed by each partner country.

[Meeting Agenda](#) | [List of Participants](#)

The Summary Record and the meeting documentation were prepared by the Implementing Partners (the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, the Austrian Environment Agency, the Austrian Development Agency and The International Office of Water).

Disclaimer

The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein do not necessarily reflect the official views of the Implementing Partner Organisations, European Commission, the European Union, their member countries and the Eastern Partnership countries. This document, as well as any data and any map included herein, are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area.

MAIN DISCUSSION POINTS

Item 1. Opening Remarks

Mr. Gérald AUDAZ, Team Leader on Economic Development, Connectivity, Digital and Green Transitions at the Directorate General for European Neighbourhood East Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, European Commission (DG NEAR), welcomed participants and opened the meeting. Mr. Audaz highlighted the importance of the EU4Environment Water and Data Programme's work on improving the sustainable use of water resources in the EaP countries and providing reliable data for policy makers and citizens, in the spirit of EU practices and legislation. Mr. Audaz welcomed the impressive commitment to the programmes' implementation from EaP countries, including Ukraine, where work has continued to reform policies and improve water management despite the human, environmental, and economic toll of Russia's war of aggression. Mr. Audaz outlined the meeting agenda and invited His Excellency Mr. Gilles PÉCOUT, Ambassador of France to Austria, to provide his welcome remarks¹.

As a historian, Ambassador Pécout highlighted the long-lasting evolution of practices related to the integrated water management and hydraulic landscape conservation, which gradually gained ground throughout Europe and worldwide since ancient times. Mr. Pécout compared the historical diffusion of this knowledge, and the principles of transboundary cooperation, to what he referred to as the current "geopolitics of solidarity" and enhanced "water diplomacy," which are both reflected in the activities carried out by the EU4Environment Water and Data programme in the Eastern Partnership countries. He further stated that the programme is also aligned with the European ambitions for cooperation, as outlined at the recent Summit of the European Political Community in Moldova. He further stated the continuous support by France through the *Agence Française de Développement* (AFD) within the framework of its green and inclusive growth mandate in countries such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and since 2021 in Moldova, as well as providing technical assistance in River Basin Management. Mr. Pécout concluded by emphasising the importance of continued support for a global integrated approach to water management that responds to environmental, social, cultural, and economic needs while paying due attention to local conditions and stakeholders.

Mr. Alexander ZINKE, EU4Environment Water and Data Action Leader, Environment Agency Austria, further welcomed participants and outlined good cooperation between the implementing partners and the EaP countries. He noted this event as an important milestone to take stock of progress and challenges and confirm the plan for the coming period of implementation.

Mr. AUDAZ opened the floor for interventions from the EaP Country Delegations and Civil Society representatives on their feedback on the programme's implementation to date and priorities in 2024.

Item 2. Feedback from EaP Country Delegations and Civil Society

Ms. Lilit ABRAHAMYAN, Head of the Water Policy Department, Ministry of Environment of Armenia, thanked the EU for its continued support to water resources and environmental data in Armenia. She noted that EU support contributed to approval of the package of amendments to the Water Code of the Republic of Armenia, National Water Policy and National Water Program in July 2022. The

¹ <https://at.ambafrance.org/Projet-environnemental-EU4-Environment-Water-Data-a-Vienne-28-juin-2023>

amendments incorporate the main principles and approaches of EU Water Framework Directive, including terminology such as water bodies, status of water bodies, and provisions on equitable access to water and sanitation. In December 2022 the package of amendments to the Republic of Armenia law “On Ambient Air protection” was adopted and is a significant step towards the EU Directive on ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe. December 2022 also saw official adoption of the River Basin Management Plans for the Hrazdan and Sevan River Basin Districts. All this progress was achieved in line with the requirements of the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with the EU, bringing Armenia’s legal framework closer to the EU water and environmental acquis. Successful cooperation with the EU continues under “EU4Environment - Water Resources and Environmental Data”, including critical activities such as reforming water abstraction fees and pollution taxes, assessment of technical and economic performance of Water Users’ Associations, development of a road map for introduction of requirements of the EU Drinking Water Directive, transboundary cooperation and joint monitoring in Khrami-Debed River basin, support to laboratory accreditation, development of quantitative water resources management plan for the Kasakh sub-basin of Armenia, development of Northern River Basin Management Plan, updating the State Water Cadastre Information System and monitoring capacity building through surface and groundwater field surveys. Ms Abrahamyan also noted the re-establishment of the Inter-Sectoral Steering Committee on National Water Policy Dialogue in Armenia in October 2022 the 20th Meeting of the Steering Committee, which was attended by 72 participants to discuss progress and to debate priorities and challenges. She also highlighted the importance of environmental data and statistics for Armenia and that progress has been achieved in this area. She also emphasised that environmental data is continuously applied in the country (e.g. for information on water abstraction, for payments related to environmental pollution, for activities related to potable water, etc.).

Mr. Faig MUTALLIMOV, Head of the Environmental Policy Division, Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Azerbaijan, outlined recent activities carried out by Azerbaijan under the EU4Environment programme, such as the recent workshops on river basin management and technical assistance and, specifically on the data obtained from field surveys which has helped Azerbaijan carry out informed decisions on how to address the challenges in the Kura Delta. Furthermore, Mr. Mutallimov stated that Nature-based Solutions might be applied to mitigate the salinity levels in the Kura Delta and that groundwater monitoring activities will take place in July to assess groundwater quality and the correlation with the surface water ecosystem. He informed that the Water Strategy is now under final consideration and also highlighted the importance of national and international water governance and co-operation, noting that Azerbaijan has strengthened its institutional frameworks, fostered partnerships, and is actively engaged in regional and international water platforms while also carrying out transboundary monitoring activities with Georgia. Furthermore, Mr. Mutallimov stated that Azerbaijan is currently gathering data to assess its air quality monitoring system based on the EU air quality index, and it is currently working on a best practice in waste management. He thanked the EU for the many support activities provided and also emphasised the crucial role of environmental data and data management which forms the foundation for evidence-based decision making and confirmed the commitment of Azerbaijan to strengthen water management, enhancing data collection and strengthening cooperation with international partners.

Ms. Maia JAVAKHISHVILI, Deputy Head of the Environment and Climate Change Department, Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia, thanked the EU and the EU4Environment Water and Data programme partners for their support in the preparation process of the country’s reform of the Water Resources Management legislation which is based on the Integrated Water Resources Principles.

Ms. Javakhishvili stated that the new draft law is in accordance with the international and EU Water Directives and that the Parliament expects to adopt the law in its third and final hearing at the end of June. Ms. Javakhishvili then proceeded to outline the activities carried out to date, which included several monitoring surveys in coastal and transnational areas and sampling of surface and groundwater in several river basins, laboratory training, COVID-19 wastewater monitoring, numerous workshops, including the transboundary working groups with Azerbaijan and Armenia, and regional training on air quality statistics and indicators. Concerning upcoming activities, Ms. Javakhishvili highlighted the continuation of transboundary surface and groundwater monitoring co-operation with both Azerbaijan and Armenia through joint field surveys to be held in August 2023, consultation meetings to be held in September 2023 and in January 2024, with local stakeholders and beneficiaries of the Engury/Rioni district to discuss the draft RBMPs and for the promotion of open and accessible data. In her conclusions, Ms. Javakhishvili noted the importance of adopting and approving related environmental by-laws once the new Water Resources Management law is passed, outlining that further technical expertise in several topics might be needed. She also emphasised that continued implementation and support to SEIS and open data principles and UNECE environmental indicator production (as a common set of indicators in the pan-European region) and international exchange of experience and knowledge are important. She also stated that Georgia would appreciate support in enhancing the structure of the national state of the environment report of Georgia and that the activities implemented under the programme and future actions would also support the implementation of outcomes of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, held in October 2022 in Nicosia.

Post meeting note: Participants were informed that Parliament adopted the draft water law on 28 June 2023.

Mr. Radu CAZACU, Deputy Director, Agency Apele Moldovei, Republic of Moldova, outlined the country's latest Water River Management Plan implementations and the ongoing challenges of transboundary water resources with Romania and Ukraine. Mr. Cazacu highlighted the support provided by the EU4Environment Water and Data programme in providing River Basin Management Plans for Moldova and in co-ordinating bilateral meetings of experts with Romania and Ukraine. He further highlighted the importance of signing the Declaration between Moldova, Romania, and Ukraine on protecting and managing the Prut River Basin, as proposed by the EU Programme. Mr. Cazacu stated that Moldova requires further support to continue improving its water management plan for large and small rivers, meet the EU Directives, and progress several Sustainable Development Goals. Moldova being an EU candidate alongside Ukraine and sharing a transboundary river basin with EU member Romania, Mr. Cazacu called for a co-ordinated approach to the environmental monitoring, protection, and management of both river basins and a harmonisation of data collection and management systems and cooperation among countries overall. He further acknowledged the value of regional and international co-operation for exchanging knowledge and best practices, primarily through the UNECE Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment and the National Policy Dialogues, which provide an opportunity for national stakeholders, NGOs, donors, and experts to provide national policy makers recommendations on further improvement. He also outlined various future steps and needs including to take into consideration the outcomes of the Environment and Health Ministerial Conference to be held in Budapest in early July 2023, the importance of further assistance to fully develop the legal basis for the environmental monitoring and information systems, the introduction of water accounts, the regular exchange of experience and international sharing of data and the application of citizen science in environmental monitoring.

Mr. Vitalii ZHUK, Head of the Division of Protection and Reproduction of Water Resources and Marine Ecosystems of the Department of Balanced Nature, Ministry of Environment Protection and Nature Resources of Ukraine, thanked the EU for the invitation to attend the meeting. Mr. Zhuk then provided an overview of the work carried out to date despite the current war of aggression against Ukraine by Russia. He stated that through the EU4environment Water and Data, Ukraine has identified tools to ensure sustainable water management. It has supported the country with its water strategy and plans towards development of a roadmap to create an enabling environment in the water sector.

He further stated that as an EU candidate country, Ukraine must work to harmonise Ukrainian legislation with the European acquis. To this end, a self-screening of the Ukrainian legislation has been launched, resulting in 10 identified water-related directives, including the water framework directive, the maritime directive and the nitrates directive. Mr. Zhuk further noted that Ukraine's water strategy for 2050 and its implementation plan were approved in December 2022 and that the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Nature of Ukraine established a working group to implement the water strategy plan. The working group comprises representatives from the water and infrastructure ministries and related Ukrainian agencies. He also stated that nine RBMPs are being drafted and should be finalised by the end of the year, as per their schedule, despite monitoring exercises being affected in several river basins, including the Crimea Basin, due to the ongoing war of aggression. Concerning the maritime strategy approved in 2021, Mr. Zhuk highlighted that as the coastal waters have been mined, monitoring the area has not been possible and will have to be postponed until the end of the war. Mr. Zhuk called for assistance in drafting the remaining chapters of the RBMPs. In his conclusion, Mr. Zhuk also noted that the Kakhovka dam catastrophe on Dnipro River has diverted practically all the available resources and caused irreparable damage, but that action plans have been deployed to ensure water supply to the population in the nearby regions, as they have been deprived of drinking water as a result of the damage. Mr. Zhuk then passed the floor to Ms. Maria Shpanchyk, Head of the Department of Water Resources Management, State Agency of Water Resources of Ukraine.

Ms. SHPANCHYK thanked the meeting attendants, organizers, members, and the European Commission for their unwavering support of Ukraine. Ms. Shpanchyk further stated that the outcomes of Russia's war of aggression are not only dire for Ukraine but also for the region, given the related environmental impacts, but that the EU4Environment Water and Data programme has been instrumental in overcoming these challenges. Ms. Shpanchyk further stated that this programme is the only functional programme in Ukraine at the moment, and the drafting of the River Basin Management Plan for the Dnipro River, which is the largest river basin in Ukraine and equally affected by the war, has been only possible due to this EU programme. She further noted that Ukraine has eight other river basins that require RBMPs, and the plans must be drafted and submitted for debate by the end of the year. The remaining eight plans must be co-ordinated and integrated, and, as it has been done with the Dnipro RBMP, they must also be aligned with the EU standards. Ms. Shpanchyk called for assistance in the co-ordination and drafting the remaining eight RBMPs to maintain the results already achieved in the water sector in Ukraine, which is a high priority for the country.

Concerning monitoring, Ms. Shpanchyk mentioned that Ukraine has been engaged in EU Water Framework Directive-compliant monitoring over the past five years, despite that not the entire territory was covered by the monitoring last year, and that even now, only 80% of the monitoring plan approved by the ministry is operational due to the war. She added that laboratories operate despite some modifications to the logistics to carry out measurements and are fully equipped due to the previous EUWI+ project. Ms. Shpanchyk also highlighted the importance of environmental monitoring overall and

that assistance would be appreciated in developing and applying specific methodologies to assess the environmental status which is very important for Ukraine. Within the framework of the EU4Environment Water and Data programme, Ms. Shpanchyk also called for continued assistance in training, as some staff has left Ukraine due to the war, and a new team needs to be trained. She highlighted that the introduction of e-monitoring has been instrumental and is expected to be open and integrated with other monitoring tools, adding that strengthening transboundary co-operation and communication continues to be essential for their work.

Ms. Shpanchyk also mentioned that through the support provided by international organisations, Ukrainian national experts were involved in several activities and meetings, such as the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River and the Dniester Commission. Ms. Shpanchyk concluded by emphasising the importance of the EU4Environment Water and Data programme in Ukraine and that completing as many of the components as feasible is a priority for the country. She further called for support in financing the remaining RBMPs and ensuring the laboratories' sustainable operation, which involves a sustainable energy supply, as the laboratory equipment is susceptible to power supply disruptions, noting that problems with laboratories close to Kyiv have already been affected, leading to the suspension of operations for four months.

Mr. Dumitru DRUMEA, Representative EaP Civil Society Forum, presented the activities carried out under the EaP Civil Society Forum, which includes River Management Plans for smaller rivers and communities in Eastern Partnership countries. He highlighted the proximity to local authorities on the approval process of these RBMPs, which is acquired through National Dialogues on Water Management in each country with the participation of government representatives and civil society institutions. He further stated that Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia currently have “candidate status,” which should improve the transfer of knowledge to create their respective RBMPs. Mr. Drumea further noted that reliable data for small rivers remains a primary challenge in the assessment process to grant full membership status. He also stressed that obtaining reliable data on small rivers would be beneficial for monitoring larger rivers, affecting RBMPs in general. Mr. Drumea also stated that as the EaP CSF is very active in ICPDR projects, and through their experiences and extensive awareness-raising activities at the local level on water quality, the EaP CSF can contribute to obtaining the financial, human, and technical resources needed to obtain the missing data. Mr. Drumea concluded by stating the importance of civil society institutions in the success of the RBMPs at the local level.

Item 3. Highlights of implementation and plans for the last year of implementation by Implementing Partners

The Implementing Partners presented the focus areas, the outcomes and outputs to date, and the planned activities of the programme, including on communication and visibility. The presentation delivered by the partners [can be found here](#). Progress in implementation was reported as being generally on track and plans for the next year of implementation are clear. EaP countries and the European Commission acknowledged the good progress to date and the plans for the coming implementation period.

Item 4. Synergies on implementation with EU funded Projects from IfIs

Mr. Krzysztof MICHALAK, Acting Head of Division, Finance, Investment and Global Relations Division, OECD, expressed his appreciation for the collaboration between the two EU4Environment programmes, specifically the joint efforts in communication and visibility outputs. He announced that under the EU4Environment Green Economy programme, [a conference on Green Finance in EaP and Central Asian countries will take place from 19 and 20 September in Brussels](#) in collaboration with DG NEAR. Mr. Michalak concluded by stating that the OECD is currently working on collecting and presenting Green Growth and Water-related Indicators in an upcoming e-book publication. He also noted that as a partner to the EU4Environment Green Economy programme, the World Bank is currently working on Nature-based Solutions projects, which could align both programmes in future work areas.

Mr. Marco BEROŠ, Lead Engineer, Water Management Division, European Investment Bank (EIB), highlighted the EIB's New Policy Documents for Climate, Environment, and the Water Sector Activity in Eastern Partner Countries (presentation available [here](#)). He shared details of EIB-funded water projects and their support to the EU's Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, and linkages to the EU Green Deal, which includes the protection of at least 30 % of land and sea areas, the reduction of chemical pesticides by 50% and reduction of microplastics released into the environment by 30%. Mr. Beroš further stated that engagement in EaP countries remains strong, as they are covered by "EIB Global," a specialised arm dedicated to increasing the impact of international partnerships and development finance, especially within the Team Europe Initiative. He also noted the EU guarantee for Ukraine for EUR 100 million of new EIB loans under the EU for Ukraine (EU4U) programme.

Ms. Annukka LIPPONEN, Chief Specialist on Water Resources Management, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Finland, stated that the Government of Finland, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is currently carrying out a regional analysis in the South Caucasus on water diplomacy based on mapping missions on water-related questions, led by the Ambassador of Finland to the South Caucasus, Ms. Kirsti Narinen. Ms. Lipponen also pointed out that these missions were carried out with experts from the Finnish Water Diplomacy Network in Baku, Yerevan, and Tbilisi, which could lead to a potential knowledge-sharing collaboration between the two projects. Ms. Lipponen further noted that on the technical front, the Ministry of Environment and the Finnish Environment Institute have been developing a project with Ukraine on environmental monitoring, where Finland has strongly supported Ukraine by providing water monitoring material. She also stated that the Finnish Meteorological Institute (FMI) collaborates with the EU4Environment Water and Data in Azerbaijan and Ukraine and an FMI project in Azerbaijan with the EU. She concluded by recalling transboundary co-operation within the EU4Environment Water and Data programme, which is also stated under the Guidance and Assessment of Transboundary Water developed under the UN the Water Convention, is a key strategic element to the sharing of data and further noted that as Finland is a co-chair to the UN Water Convention Working Group on Water Monitoring Assessment, Finland can share its experience on transboundary cooperation issues, as well as technical assistance on water monitoring.

Ms. Marcela FABIANOVA, Water Programme Analyst, Danube Regional Project, UNDP, provided an update on the project on environmental monitoring in the Black Sea (EU4EMBLAS), which is in its 4th phase. She noted the importance of upgrading analytical and technical capacity for monitoring in the countries, pointing out that technical assistance is needed in Georgia and Ukraine, and concluded by welcoming the continuation of the collaboration with the EU4Environment Water and Data programme and invited participants to visit the [project's website](#).

Ms. Tatiana CHERNYAVSKAYA, Industrial Development Expert, at UNIDO, as a representative from the “sister programme,” EU4Environment Green Economy, noted that water is often considered an indicator for assessing the sustainable use of resources by industries. She then pointed out that the incentives for private sector industries to reduce water consumption are not in place. Ms. Chernyavskaya highlighted a recent engagement with the government of Armenia to introduce a circular economy element on water use in fisheries. She also called for the need to improve data availability to prepare comprehensive examples for companies for the reduction of water use in their production/pollution.

Mr. Martiros NALBANDYAN, Water Committee of the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure, Armenia, highlighted that two new framework documents, one on the drinking water strategy and the second on the concept framework document for the irrigation sector, are both currently in draft but being revised by the government. He also noted the latest updates on legislative steps concerning the National Water Programme, initiated by the Ministry of Environment. He concluded by asking if it would be possible to include monitoring of the implementation of RBMPs as there is a need to assess if they are being carried out correctly.

Mr. Arvo NERMAN, Project Manager, Finnish Water Forum, stated that as a first-time participant in the EU4Environment Water and Data meeting, he identified several topics of future collaboration, namely, knowledge sharing on water safety plans implemented in Finland, which cover water security from source to waste. Mr. Nerman highlighted that this plan has already been exported to Viet Nam and Kenya, making its implementation accessible. Concerning data and water quality, he also pointed out the importance of modelling the data in 2 and 3 dimensions to assess groundwater availability. Mr. Nerman concluded that Finland could also contribute to knowledge-sharing activities, including possible field trips.

Item 4 – Concluding remarks

Mr. Alexander ZINKE, EU4Environment Water and Data Action Leader, Environment Agency Austria, provided the concluding remarks, noting the effort and accomplishments to date under the programme, and thanked the partners with a joint team of 40 experts and member countries for contributing to the programme. Mr. Zinke concluded by outlining the upcoming events in July, presentation available [here](#).

Mr. Audaz welcomed progress made since the start of EU4Environment Water and Data, including the strengthening of legal and regulatory frameworks and alignment with the EU acquis and good international practice. The development and adoption of River Basin Management Plans is one of the strongest evidence of progress, including progress in the Dnipro Basin – Europe's largest national River Basin District. Mr. Audaz noted that EU candidacy status in Moldova and Ukraine and Georgia’s EU perspective have a strong potential to accelerate action on water and environmental reforms. He thanked the participants for welcoming the plans for the coming period of implementation as there are many activities to be completed until the end of implementation in June 2024. The communication and visibility of results was stated as being key to supporting successful implementation. As other EU funded programmes, EU Member States and IFIs highlighted good cooperation and the opportunities for synergies with the EU4Environment Water and Data Programme, Implementing Partners were encouraged to further develop these relationships.