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Session III — Inland waterways co-operation

Environmental and transport aspects of transboundary co-operation in Belarus

The territory of Belarus serves as a watershed divide for the Baltic Sea and Black Sea basins. All of the basins of Belarus's major rivers are transboundary. The basins of the Western Dvina River (Russia-Belarus-Latvia), Neman River (Belarus-Lithuania-Russia) and Western Bug River (Ukraine-Belarus-Poland) are located in the Baltic Sea basin.

The Republic of Belarus has acceded to the Helsinki Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)).

The transboundary nature of Belarus's rivers means that active international co-operation with neighbouring countries is essential in the area of protection and use of water resources.

Trilateral agreements between the Government of the Republic of Belarus, the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, the Government of the Republic of Latvia and the Government of the Russian Federation on co-operation in the protection and use of the water resources of the Neman and Daugava (Western Dvina) river basins are currently being drafted.

Preparations are being made for the signing of a bilateral agreement between the Government of the Republic of Belarus and the Government of the Republic of Poland on co-operation in the protection and use of transboundary waters. Similar agreements have already been signed with the Russian Federation and Ukraine.

The most significant problems in the field of water resource management in Belarus are:

1. Lack of basin management in the existing administrative territorial system for managing national water resources;
2. Insufficient use of the water transport potential of Belarus's waterways.

With a view to solving these problems, it would be useful to co-operate with international donors to obtain consulting and financial support for the implementation of the following projects:

- Development of a transboundary river basin management plan, primarily for the Western Dvina, Neman and Western Bug, and ultimately the establishment of basin commissions;
- Adaptation of the administrative territorial system for managing the Republic's water resources to the basin management principle using the experience of European Union countries;
- Elaboration of measures to organize the transit waterway connecting the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea using a unique body of water — the Dnieper-Bug Canal.

In view of the specific nature of this Forum, we shall provide a more detailed description of the unique waterway — the Dnieper-Bug Canal.

The Dnieper-Vistula-Oder waterway connecting the Black Sea and the Baltic Sea was established at the end of the eighteenth century and existed until the Second World War. Following the renovation of the hydraulic structures and construction of a non-overflow dam in Brest, the water transport connection was divided into two parts: the first part on the territory of Belarus and the second part on the territory of Poland.

The waterways on Belarusian territory running from Brest to the border with Ukraine (the Dnieper-Bug Canal and the Pripyat River) are in a satisfactory technical condition and belong to the class IV of inland waterways of international importance. The waterways of the Bug River on Polish territory can be used for transportation purposes with some restrictions. Under the European Agreement on Main Inland Waterways of International Importance, the Dnieper-Vistula-Oder waterway is classified as an E 40 waterway.

In view of the development of trade between East and West, congestion on roads and railways and the rise in fuel prices, there is an urgent need to restore the Dnieper-Vistula-Oder waterway. This system attracts import-export freight from Belarus, Poland, Ukraine and other European countries. Some of the structures along the Dnieper-Bug Canal have deteriorated significantly and do not meet modern environmental safety standards.

Accordingly, the hydraulic structures along the Dnieper-Bug Canal in the Republic of Belarus are being renovated to meet class Va standards. Four sluice dams and two shipping locks have been built so far, which allow the passage of 3 per cent of the maximum probable

flood along with convoys of ships with a length of 110 metres, width of 12 metres and a draught of 2.2 metres. Reconstruction work on the canal is continuing.

The restoration of the Dnieper-Vistula-Oder water transport connection was examined at the 49th session of the UNECE Working Group on Inland Water Transport. A decision was adopted to establish a group of rapporteurs to prepare a feasibility study on this waterway restoration project.

The restoration of the Dnieper-Vistula-Oder water transport connection will make it possible to reduce congestion on the railways and roads of the second and ninth international transport corridors, to cut the costs of transportation in this area and to lessen the negative impact of transport on the environment.

THE DNEIPER-VISTULA-ODER CONNECTION

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The Dnieper-Vistula-Oder waterway connecting the Black Sea and the Baltic Sea, established at the end of the 18th century, has existed until the World War II. Following the renovation of hydraulic structures and the construction of a blind dam in Brest, the Dnieper-Vistula-Oder water transport connection was divided into two sections – the first in Belarus, the second – in Poland.

The waterway in Belarus running from Brest to the Ukrainian border (the Dnieper-Bug canal and the river Pripyat) is in a satisfactory technical condition and is a class IV inland waterway of international importance. In Poland, waterways on the river Bug are of limited suitability for navigation. According to the European Agreement on Main Inland Waterways of International Importance the Dnieper-Vistula-Oder waterway is put in the list of waterways under number E 40.

East-West trade development, automobile and railway transport overloading means that the restoration of the Dnieper-Vistula-Oder waterway connection is becoming increasingly necessary. This system attracts a range of transport flows of export-import goods from the Republic of Belarus, Poland, the Ukraine and other European countries. Some hydraulic structures of the Dnieper-Bug canal have deteriorated significantly and don't meet modern requirements of environmental safety.

In this connection in Belarus the reconstruction of hydraulic structures of the Dnieper-Bug canal is being carried out to meet the standards of a class Va European waterway of international importance. Four sluice dams and two shipping locks have been built, thus withstanding 3 percent of the probable maximum flood and allowing the passage of convoys of vessels 110 m long, 12 m wide and with a draught of 2.2 m. The canal reconstruction is still in progress.

The issue of the restoration of the Dnieper-Vistula-Oder waterway was considered at the forty-ninth session of the Working Party on Inland Water Transport of the UN Economic Commission for Europe. The Working Party decided to set up the Group of Rapporteurs for preparing a feasibility study on the project of the waterway restoration.

The restoration of the Dnieper-Vistula-Oder waterway connection will allow lowering the automobile and railway transport overloading in the direction of the 2-nd and 9-th international transport corridors, reducing transport charges and negative impact of transport on environment.

ЕВРОПЕЙСКИЕ ВНУТРЕННИЕ ВОДНЫЕ ПУТИ

