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The European Water Initiative

(EECCA component)

Pierre Hecq
European Commission
Directorate general for Water, Chemicals, Cohesion

The EU Water Initiative (EUWI) was launched by all EU Member States and the European Commission at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 2002. It is a partnership designed to contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and WSSD targets for drinking water and sanitation, within the context of an integrated approach to water resources management.

Thus, the EUWI is designed to address one of the most urgent challenges as of today to environment, health and economic growth in the world – and fully in line with international commitments made at the WSSD.

The water related MDGs and WSSD targets are to:

- Halve by the year 2015 the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water.
- Halve by the year 2015 the proportion of people who do not have access to basic sanitation.
- Develop integrated water resources management and efficiency plans by 2005.

The EUWI is worldwide. Presently, the EUWI consists of four regional components – Africa, EECCA, Mediterranean and Latin America – with slightly differing focus areas.

The EECCA Component

The EECCA Component targets the 12 EECCA countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan). It is being implemented by, especially, the EECCA countries, EU Member States and European Commission in close cooperation with the EBRD, OECD/EAP Task Force, UNECE and other international organisations active in the region within the water sector.

It has two focus areas, namely water supply and sanitation (WSS), including financing of water infrastructure, and integrated water resources management (IWRM), including transboundary river basin management and regional seas issues. Financing constitute a most important link between these two focus areas.

Work programme

The programme document of the EECCA Component was endorsed at the 5th Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe” held in Kiev, Ukraine, in 2003. The work programme, which lays down the 8 objectives of the EECCA Component, was approved at the 5th meeting of the EECCA Component Working Group in Chisinau, Moldova, in March 2005.

The 8 objectives of the EECCA Component are:

- Improve institutional and regulatory framework.
- Ensure financial viability of utilities.
- Investment in water supply, sanitation and rehabilitation.
- Ensure access of the poor to water services as a basic human right.
- Safeguard public health.
- Protect the environment.
- Establish and implement national policies for IWRM.
- Develop the inter-state cooperative structures for river/lake basin management

Working Group

The EUWI Component Working Group, which meets twice a year, plays a crucial role within the EECCA Component. A separate task of the EECCA Component Working Group is to promote cooperation with all potential partners active in the region, including UNEP, UNDP, WHO and OSCE.

It consists of representatives of the EECCA countries, EU Member States, international organisations, NGOs and European Commission. The members of the EECCA Component Working Group appoint a Chair and possibly Co-Chair of the EECCA Component from among themselves. Till the end of 2007, the European Commission acts as Chair.

National Policy Dialogues

National Policy Dialogues are the main operational instrument within the EUWI, including the EECCA Component. It is through the successful implementation of National Policy Dialogues that the vision of the EUWI will come through.

The objective of the National Policy Dialogues is to initiate - through a dialogue that involves public authorities and representatives of the civil society - country-specific activities regarding WSS and IWRM to improve regulatory and administrative frameworks, priority setting and development and implementation capacity in the EECCA region. Thereby, they contribute to the development of road maps for achieving the water-related MDGs and WSSD targets.

The output of a National Policy Dialogue is a so-called “policy package“ addressing one or more issues. This “policy package” is to be implemented by the public authorities.

A "Policy package" is:

A coherent mix of policy tools, developed together so as to exploit synergies in order to achieve environmental policy objectives in a cost-effective manner and avoiding policy conflicts. A “policy tool” is a new law, regulation, work procedure, water quality standard, charge, monitoring system, financing mechanism, etc.

Joint activities

Joint activities to be carried out within a National Policy Dialogue include, among others, assistance in developing and implementing new so-called “policy tools”, experience sharing and capacity building.

A National Policy Dialogue is demand-driven. That is, it is launched following a request from an EECCA country.

It has a strategic partner, who will take the lead in initiating the dialogue, monitoring progress made in the course of the dialogue and providing required assistance. The strategic partner may be an EU Member State, non-EU Member State or international organisation.

In 2006, two National Policy Dialogues were launched – one in Armenia and one in Moldova. Further National Policy Dialogues are to be launched in other EECCA countries.

Build upon existing institutions and mechanisms.

It has proven a solid strategy to build upon institutions and mechanisms already in operation in the EECCA countries. In particular, the further involvement the UNECE and OECD/EAP Task Force - and their web of contacts - in the EUWI-EECCA Component has proven a success. Among others, it creates a lot of synergy effects to the benefit of the EECCA countries and their attempts to reach the water-related MDGs and WSSD targets. It should be noted that the UNECE and OECD/EAP Task Force are not the only institutions already active in the EECCA countries. For instance, the UNDP, UNEP and GWP are three other international organisations active within the water sector in the EECCA region. In future, it may be considered to build upon these organisations, as well.

OECD and UNECE

As of today, the OECD/EAP Task Force acts as strategic partner of specially designed joint activities facilitating the National Policy Dialogues regarding WSS, whereas the UNECE acts as strategic partner of specially designed joint activities regarding IWRM.

However, it is envisaged that others may act as strategic partners for certain National Policy Dialogues in future – along with the OECD/EAP Task Force and the UNECE.

What's in it for the EECCA countries?

The EECCA Component, like the global EUWI, is not a funding mechanism. So what's in it for the EECCA countries?

The answer is:

- Access to practitioners in the EU, including the new EU Member States.
- Access to best practices from the EECCA region.
- Access to useful tools - for environmental financing, quality standard setting, tariff policies, monitoring, etc.

What's in it for the EU Member States?

The EU Member States – and also international organisations – may gain from the EECCA Component in different ways.

Most important is that the EECCA Component facilitates:

- Access to key stakeholders in the EECCA region.
- Increased understanding of the needs and priorities of the EECCA countries
- Improved IFI and donor coordination in the EECCA region within the water sector.