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‘Fostering multi-sector cooperation over conjunctive surface and groundwater management in the Bug and Neman Transboundary River Basins and the underlying Aquifer Systems’

**PPG Validation Meeting
*Main Decisions and Outcomes***

18-19 March 2019, UNESCO HQs, Paris

Opening session

Mr Qu (DDG and ADG a.i. of UNESCO), highlighted the environmental importance of the river basins, the emblematic nature of the project in the context of the challenges of the 2030 Agenda, and the importance of maintaining effective partnerships to ensure the project's success. **Mr Mamaev** (UNDP/GEF Regional Team Leader) highlighted the uniqueness and replication potential of the project, as the first GEF International Waters focal area project to address the conjunctive management and interaction of surface and groundwater in two adjacent basins.

Ms Vaisvilaitė (Ambassador, Permanent Delegate; Permanent Delegation of Lithuania to UNESCO), noted the value of the project in bringing together both EU and non-EU countries, as well as its potential to address environmental, safety, and security challenges in the region. In the face of the challenge of climate change **Mr Fissenko** (Permanent Representative of the Republic of Belarus to UNESCO) underlined the importance of ensuring the stability and understanding the behavior of transboundary freshwater resources. He also proposed that the Project Coordination Unit (PCU) be hosted in Minsk, Belarus. **Ms Karlikowska** (Chargé d'affaires a.i., Permanent Delegation of the Republic of Poland to UNESCO), highlighted the expertise to be brought to the project by the Lodz-based European Regional Centre for Ecohydrology and by the Polish National Geological Institute, as well as noting the active role of several commissions on transboundary waters.

Following welcoming statements by **Ms Donoso** (Director, Division of Water Sciences of UNESCO and Secretary of IHP, a.i.) and by **Mr Mamadzhonov** (Environmental Affairs Officer, UNECE) on behalf of the executing and co-executing agencies respectively, representatives of the four countries offered their remarks to the plenary. **Mr Kuzio** (Deputy Minister for European Integration, GEF PFP; Ukraine) highlighted the importance and timeliness of the project, in particular as an opportunity to support capacity building, RBMP development¹, and the enhancement of transboundary mechanisms, despite challenges at national level (i.e. strained human resources, and funding needs). **Ms Lukina** (Head of International Cooperation, Ministry of Natural Resources; Belarus) welcomed the project, noted that it will serve as a timely opportunity to cooperate with neighboring countries in the continued development of RBMPs for the two basins, and expressed support for the PCU to be established in Belarus. **Ms Kavaliauskaite** (Chief Desk Assistant, Ministry of Environment; Lithuania) noted that the project will provide a valuable opportunity to strengthen transboundary water cooperation and management among the four project countries. **Ms Dyszy-Nowacka** (Senior Specialist, Ministry of Maritime Economy and Inland Navigation; Poland) recalled that Poland joined the project as a partner in July 2017, at the decision of Undersecretary of State Ms Anna Moskwa, and bearing in mind the great potential of the project, including to help to improve the status of water bodies in Poland by 2027.

Ms Aureli (UNESCO-IHP Chief of Section for Groundwater Systems and Settlements) presented an overview of the structure of the Project Document highlighting the similarities between the two basins. She recalled that climate change will be considered as a cross-cutting theme, highlighted the unique opportunity for project EU and non-EU countries to exchange experiences and lessons learned, and noted the potential of the project to address environmental and social challenges in the four countries. recalled that the Project Document was developed on the basis of the PIF (project concept approved by the countries and by the GEF). She also noted the GEF-funded and UNESCO-IHP executed work (SAP implementation, building on the previous preparation of the TDA) that is taking place in the Dinaric Karst Aquifer System, in collaboration with a number of Balkan institutions, and representatives of Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, and Montenegro. The new phase of the project is, in particular, a testament to the challenges that have been successfully overcome, including lacking data and data harmonization. As proof of the success of a project formulation joining EU and non-EU Member States, the Republic of Croatia has confirmed that it will continue to fully participate in the DOKTAS project as a partner and donor country.

On the basis of **Ms Izydorczyk's** presentation (ERCE; during which the three guiding principles of ecohydrology were presented, in addition to demo-site examples of the effective application and use of ecosystem processes

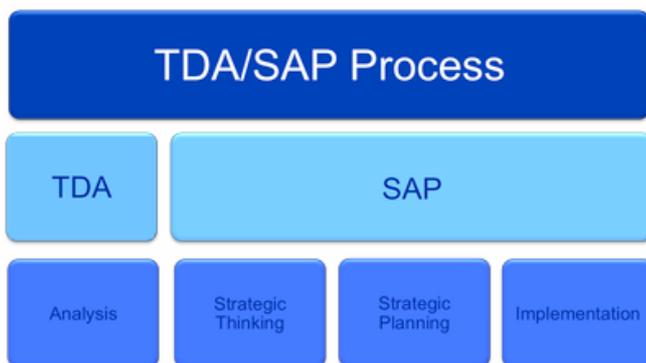
¹ 9 river basin plans to be developed according to EU-Ukraine Association Agreement and national regulation.

and nature-based solutions to achieve sustainable water and ecosystem services²), **UNECE** recalled the recent UNGA declaration (01 March 2019) on the 2021-2030 UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, reconfirming the international support to this global trend and the timeliness of the 'Bug and Neman' project. **National representatives** then presented relevant recent policy, legal, and institutional developments. Highlights include:

- **Ukraine:** (Since Minsk Inception Meeting) Government resolution on surface, GW, and marine State Water Monitoring; Ministerial orders on surface and GWB delineation, and on SWB classification; new State Agency of Water Resources methodology on pressure analysis and impacts.
- **Belarus:** New version of law "On drinking water supply" to enter into force on July 13, 2019. Draft law amending Code of the Republic of Belarus "On Subsoil", including GW, under preparation (deadline for introduction of bill to the Government: October 2019).
- **Poland:** Government of the Republic of Poland and Government of the Republic of Belarus negotiating agreement on cooperation on transboundary waters. Groundwater investigative monitoring network: new observation points planned (Polish borders with Ukraine and Belarus).
- **Lithuania:** Relevant national laws on water, environmental protection, and environmental monitoring. National Strategies on Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development. The Lithuanian Geological Survey is in charge of monitoring and assessing groundwaters, while the National Hydrometeorological Survey collects and provides information on the hydrological regime of SWBs, climate change, and the impacts of CC on the environment and the economy.

Project Document - Technical Components

Component 1 and TDA-SAP process³: The GEF 'tried and tested' Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA) will be the scientific and technical assessment through which transboundary water-related and environmental challenges in each of the two basins (and preventative and remedial actions) will be identified and agreed upon by the four countries. The TDAs will provide the technical basis for the development of the Strategic Action Programmes (SAPs). This process will result in one document for each river basin, containing a TDA-SAP for each basin.



>> The TDAs, or the scientific/technical studies (underpinned by existing data) of main challenges (and root causes) affecting each of the two basins, will be produced by national experts from the four countries, together (joint technical teams). On the basis of the practice and knowledge achieved through this cooperation (resulting in a clear vision of the shared concerns that the four countries would like to address), SAPs for each of the two basins will be prepared.

>> As technical documents, the TDAs will require the endorsement of the PSC. As negotiated policy documents, the SAPs will be endorsed at political

level (normally the GEF requires that SAPs be signed at Ministerial level).

>> Relevant Bilateral Agreements, and national and EU/EU-approximation legislation, will all support and guide the TDA-SAP process.

>> Based on the TDA-SAPs resulting from this four-year process, countries may wish to further pursue the *implementation* of the SAPs with the support of the GEF. The endorsement of the SAPs will be necessary for the GEF to be able to provide follow-up support.

Ms Slizh (Belarus) noted the possibility of conducting an inventory of inactive boreholes as part of the TDA. The concern expressed by the **representatives of Poland** regarding the scope and timing of Component 1 vis a vis compliance with the EU WFD was well noted. It was also noted that the delineation of GW bodies (which has not

² I.e.: Buffer zones to improve groundwater quality; ecohydrological biotechnologies; denitrification walls; enhanced buffer zones to reduce pollution from phosphorous and nitrogen; application of denitrifying bacteria; sequential sedimentary/biofiltration system for improved efficiency in small waste water treatment plants and to reduce the presence of petroleum-based pollutants; ecohydrologic rehabilitation of recreational reservoirs.

³ For detailed and user-friendly information on the TDA-SAP process please visit: <https://iwlearn.net/manuals/tda-sap-methodology/introduction/the-tda-sap>

yet taken place in Poland) could be considered as part of the TDA. Regarding Component 1 Outcome 3 (exploration of ecohydrology as a means to address water-related and environmental imbalances) **Ms Aureli** recalled that the study of groundwater-dependent ecosystems, nature-based solutions, and ecohydrology are all essentially share the same foundations, and that the project will support the study of these approaches.

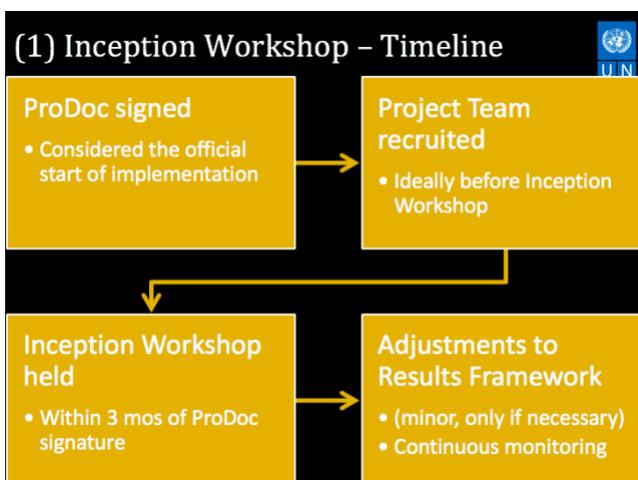
Component 2: Strengthening cooperation mechanisms among the countries sharing the basins will lead to the improved and more sustainable management of shared water resources. *Transboundary River Basin Commissions / permanent national mechanisms:* the project will assist the countries in defining how such mechanisms may work (i.e. agreement on terms of reference). The level of cooperation will depend on what the countries feel is feasible (i.e. on a spectrum ranging from consultation mechanisms to joint management commissions, which could be part of the SAP) and will also be capped by the component’s budget. Potential trilateral cooperation could also be explored, on the basis of existing bilateral agreements (i.e. between Belarus and Ukraine, or between Ukraine and Poland). **Mr Mamaev** noted that in order to achieve the endorsement and implementation of the SAPs, the establishment of certain functioning institutional frameworks will be necessary.

Component 3: *Testing conjunctive surface and groundwater management, through the application of the principles of ecohydrology.* **Mr Korneev** (Belarus) noted the possibility of leveraging this component to address sources of diffuse pollution affecting groundwater and the loss and degradation of small rivers in Belarus due to climate change, and highlighted that pilot projects should be useful and feasible. The broad application of nature-based solutions and ecohydrology to give direction to the pilots was restated (also in connection to conjunctive management). As an example (of many), a pilot project could aim to, for instance, address the impacts of over-abstraction on groundwater through nature-based-solutions applicable to recharge ponds.

Component 4: *Facilitating countries' commitment to joint priority actions.* This component will be key in establishing the basis for future political cooperation. It will aim to build capacity in order to reach political commitments on priority/targeted legal, institutional, and policy reforms. The pioneering aspect of the project lies in the fact that surface and GW will be simultaneously and systematically addressed. This Component aims to encompass the drafting and approval of the SAPs. **Component 5:** *Communication, Dissemination and Replication Activities.* **IW-LEARN** tools and services and potential assistance from communications personnel at the Belarus and Ukraine UNDP Country Offices will be key to the enhanced implementation of this component.

Mr Libert (International Consultant), suggested that, should the countries see this as an opportunity and with the support of funds raised in addition to the GEF Project Grant, activities to address nutrient pollution in the Baltic could be added to the TDA-SAPs. **Mr Mamaev** noted that decisions on the approval of new activities are to be made by the PSC. **Mr Hamid** (IW-LEARN) presented the avenues by which IW-LEARN tools and services may help to address the project’s knowledge management needs, with a particular focus on conjunctive surface and groundwater management, including: Twinning with other GEF IW focal area projects, the possibility to establish a project website entirely hosted by IW-LEARN, partnership opportunities at global events such as the GEF Biennial International Waters Conferences, and guidance manuals and toolkits.

Next steps for ProDoc submission to GEF: **Mr Mamaev** recalled that the project will be executed by UNESCO-IHP in partnership with UNECE, and will be implemented by UNDP. Once the Project Document is submitted to the GEF Secretariat (by end April 2019)⁴ and approved, the budget will be prepared in ‘Atlas’, and the Delegation of Authority will be given to UNESCO. In the following 3 months, the Inception Meeting of the project (where the roles and responsibilities of all project partners will be agreed), will take place. The PCU will then be established. An independent project evaluation will take place at the project mid-term, and a (GEF mandatory) terminal evaluation will take place at its



⁴ 10-day period for technical review from the GEF Secretariat, followed by 30-day period to receive comments from the members of the GEF Council.

closing. The project team will also submit annual project implementation reports. The mandatory GEF tracking tool will be filled in three times during the cycle of the project. Steering Committee (PSC) meetings will also help to guide project implementation.

ProDoc signature: It was noted that for the GEF regional projects, such as the Bug and Neman project, national representatives are not required to sign the Project Document. The cover of the ProDoc will be signed by UNESCO and the lead UNDP Country Office (located in Belarus).

Inception Meeting: It was tentatively suggested that the Inception Meeting of the project could take place in mid-September 2019. **Mr Kuzio** (Ukraine) restated Ukraine's offer, which was supported by the plenary, to host the meeting in Lviv, Ukraine.

In-kind co-financing: This includes in-kind co-financing from projects at national/local level that will directly contribute to the objectives of the Bug and Neman project. Only once during the project cycle (Project Implementation Review, PIR) will countries be asked to internally evaluate and report on the percentage of estimated in-kind co-financing provided to the project, to date. It will also be possible to inform UNDP about additional in-kind co-financing (i.e. if new projects are approved).

PCU: The offer by Belarusian representatives to host the PCU in Minsk was recorded. The Executing Agency agreed to circulate an information note to all countries listing PCU criteria and minimum requirements. The Project Manager will be based at the PCU and will provide general project management services and technical support. The PCU will operate as a 'supra-parties' organism, with balanced and equal participation from all four project countries. **Mrs Aureli** informed the plenary that activities will be executed at national level by 3 or 4 theme-focused **joint technical teams** composed of experts from the four countries (they will act as the 'operative arms' of the PCU, support national authorities and institutions, and produce some of the main outputs of the project). The efficient functioning and coordination of the joint technical teams will be crucial to the success of the project. The composition of the joint technical teams should be outlined before the Inception Meeting.

Internal national procedures for ProDoc registration. Belarus: The Ministry of Economy will play a key role. The ProDoc will be ultimately approved by the Council of Ministers. UNECE and UNESCO-IHP will assist Belarus in facilitating this process (i.e. preparatory work, documents to be submitted). **Ukraine:** The Ministry of Economic development will first be duly informed of the project, before proceeding with registration. UNESCO-IHP and UNECE will be informed of the documents required at each stage.

The representatives of Belarus, Ukraine, Poland, and Lithuania agreed to proceed with Submission of the GEF CEO endorsement package to the GEF Secretariat, following the finalization of the Project Document based on the comments and suggestions received during the meeting. The executing and co-executing agencies encouraged the plenary to work together in order to effectively leverage the high-level of scientific and technical expertise available in the four project countries, and to cooperate in order to establish a results-focused and robust basis for science-based policy-making.