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Inception Meeting of the Preparation Phase of the GEF supported project

“Enabling Transboundary Cooperation and Integrated Water Resources Management in the Extended Drin River Basin”

Panel Topic:

Support of the international community for the management of the Drin basin and its sub-basins – potential synergies with the GEF project

- *on-going and planned projects for the management of the Drin Basin*
- *its sub-basins with the aim to identify potential synergies with the GEF Drin project.*

Distinguished Panellist, local authorities, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to participate in this conference, to present the main ongoing initiatives funded by the Italian Cooperation, and to try to shed some lights on possible synergies with the initiatives related with the implementation of the Drin MoU.

The Italian Cooperation is actively engaged in the protection of the environment and the conservation of biodiversity, promoting the development of a green and sustainable economy. In Albania, this policy has been translated into initiatives for sustainable development in the country and the enhancement of the Albanian environment.

With specific regard towards the initiatives related with the Drina Basin, Italy has promoted initiatives in several sectors.

In the area of waste management, Italy has been particularly active through 2 specific projects aiming to reduce environmental and sanitary risk caused by the inadequate management of solid waste collection and disposal, contributing to the improvement of living conditions.

The first of the two projects is the construction of the Sharra landfill in the area of Tirana. Thanks to a soft loan of 6 M Euro , the project has provided a **secured waste management system**.

The second project financed by the Italian Cooperation with a 800.000 Euro grant and implemented through an Italian **NGO named COSPE**, aimed at sustaining a Network of Municipalities in

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the Zadrina region to establish a **sustainable waste management and a recycling process.**

Italy has also been active in the Region of Shkoder in the field of Natural Disaster Risk Management and Conservation of Nature for many years.

Since 2007, a **decentralised cooperation** project implemented by a network of Italian Regions and Local Development Agencies has coordinated the project "**Riva**". The initiative aimed at designing requalification actions in the Shkoder Lake basin, in order to protect the natural resources and foster the local economy through the development of tourism. A follow up initiative will start in the next months to provide technical assistance to the local partner and to facilitate the better use of instruments installed during the first phase.

Italy, along with other International Financial Institutions and Donors, has been working in the area of hydro geological management risk supporting the **World Bank** initiative "**Disaster Risk Mitigation and Adaptation Project (DRMAP)**". In particular, the Italian Civil Protection Department provided technical assistance to the project, with a particular focus on capacity building for the emergency response mechanism, also contributing with the necessary equipment, and strengthening disaster risk mitigation planning.

Finally, before concluding this short overview of the main initiatives funded by Italy, I would like to introduce you to the initiative, which is directly linked to today's event. "**Assistance programme to the Ministry of Environment**" is funded by the Italian Cooperation with a 2.2 Million Euro grant and implemented through **IUCN**. The project aims at strengthening the institutions responsible for biodiversity preservation in protected areas, both at national and local level. One of these areas is the region of the Buna River, a sub basin of the Drin River frequently affected by flooding.

The programme provides up-to-date methodology and operational tools for the management of the protected areas, as well as a comprehensive advocacy and training package, in order to allow the local communities to responsibly lead the process. The approach adopted, specifically designed for the peculiarities and vulnerabilities of the target area, is an appreciated best practise, already promoted by the Italian Cooperation in several other regions of the world.

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Particularly with this last initiative, the connections and the **possible synergies** with the project “Enabling Transboundary Cooperation and Integrated Water Resources Management in the Extended Drin River Basin” as well as, on a higher level, with the Drin MoU Strategy, are of great potential.

I will just mention some concrete activities where “Transboundary Cooperation and Integrated Water Resources Management” and the IUCN Programme can further discuss the possibility of working together.

The first is the “**Monitoring and Information Management System (IMS)**”. **IUCN programme**, already coordinating its activities with other initiatives in the rest of the Country, is developing a specific database for the Buna River Protected Area, where data on fauna, flora, socio-economy and water resources are collected. At the same time the project is also preparing the national database for biodiversity that is conceived from the beginning for being integrated with the European data base BioCase. It is of utmost importance to share the data contained in these databases with the database foreseen for the Drin Basin, possibly by designing them from the very beginning with the aim of facilitating and maximising the potential joint use.

In terms of capacity building, the 2 initiatives aim both at strengthening the capacities of the local authorities providing trainings and capability support. The project run by IUCN is at present investing a lot of resources in training local protected area staff as well as the technical services of the local communes in collecting data. Here again, a shared vision and a more accurate coordination of these kind of activities may enable the better coordination of available funds and, therefore, potentially reach more objectives and results.

Moreover, a constant flow of information must be maintained by the different actors active in the area. Success stories, best practises, difficulties and lesson learnt must be shared among our initiatives, which ultimately rely on each other. The experience in developing a tourism economy in the lower part of the Drin basin has been objective of several consideration, not only by the IUCN programme.

Finally, I want to recall the challenging goals identified in the **Drin Basin Memorandum of Understanding**, the strategic instrument which

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provide the political basis and authority for the initiative that kicks off today, in which the Italian initiative are active.

I am referring to the political will of the Drin Basin Working group to address problems such as:

- the minimisation of flooding in the lower part of the Drin;
- the improvement of the management and disposal of solid waste;
- the reinforcement of the environmental monitoring system design and management;
- the importance of the conservation and protection of the biodiversity.

Conclusions:

The Italian Cooperation is interested in further exploring the possibilities of collaboration with all the actors involved in the initiative and, in the implementation of the Drin MoU more generally. With this in mind, a more coordinated cooperation with the Drin Core Group may be needed in order to share relevant information and jointly contribute to the sustainable development of the region. This project can be an important forum where best practices, lesson learnt and case studies can be identified and replicated elsewhere.

As we have seen over the last couple of days, there is a plethora of actors in the region, often with similar missions and activities. With this in mind, the Drin Core group initiative can play a crucial role for the coordination of the actions of international actors. In this regards, I would like to stress the importance of coordination between competent local authorities who must actively take the role of leading partner.

The task ahead of us is challenging, but as we have seen in these days, we have many good examples upon which we can build successful projects, as the one that kicks off in these days.

Thank you.