



## Drin Day 2016

### **Raising awareness among local communities on the importance of sustainable management for the Drin River Basin**

Following its successful organization in 2014 and 2015, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Drin Day was celebrated on 5 May 2016 to sensitize a wide range of local stakeholders on the critical value of the Drin River Basin and its ecosystem services in the local communities' everyday quality of life and economic activity. About 1.5 million people rely on the basin's freshwater resources for drinking water. They also rely on economic activities that use Drin's water such as agriculture, fisheries, industry, hydropower generation and tourism. The Drin Day aims also to mobilize decision makers and users towards action that will secure that water will be available for all uses in adequate quality and quantity.

Wide-ranging celebrations dedicated to the Drin Basin were held in all Drin riparian countries, in cooperation with partner NGOs in numerous locations, from Great Lake Prespa and Lake Ohrid in the South up to Lake Skadar/Shkoder and Ulcinj close to the outlet of the Buna/Bojana River to the Adriatic Sea in the North: in Shkodra by "EDEN"; in Fierza Lake in Kukes by "Protection of the Environment"; in Great Prespa Lake by "Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment"; in the National Park of Galichica by "Grashnica"; in Bitola and the Ohrid Lake by "BIOSFERA"; in Peja by "Environmentally Responsible Action Group"; in Ulcinj by "GREENHOME". Apart from the main events of 5 May, complementary activities ran throughout the week of 1-7 May 2016.

In specific, in the Great Prespa Lake, the activity **"Celebrating the biodiversity of Prespa Lake through a boat trip"** was organized, in collaboration with the Regional Agency for Protected Areas of Korça. It included a field expedition in the Park and by the lake organized for a group of 20 students from the Biochemistry Faculty of the University of Korça. The Prespa lake is among the oldest in Europe and one of the most outstanding endemic biodiversity hotspots on the continent, with a great variety of flora and fauna species. A booklet was produced on the lake's natural wealth and it was distributed to the students, who had the opportunity, led by experts, to practice bird watching and have a close look to the species described in the booklet.

In Kukes, the Drin Day activity was held under the motto **"Together we can protect Drin River"**. A meeting was organized for local civil society at the Kukes Tourist Center, entitled "Drin River valleys, a natural corridor of cooperation between local communities in the Drin River Basin". Mr. Zamir Dedej, Director of the National Agency of Protected Areas, greeted the event. Moreover, an awareness meeting focused on hydro-biological corridors in the Drin Basin, as well as economic cooperation among communities living near the Drin River valleys. Moreover, an exhibition was organized with photographs and drawings prepared by school students on the Drin River, its natural wealth and the everyday life of local population. A boat trip brought participants to the Black Drin River and the swampland "Straw" to visit the Local Center of Life in the River.

In the National Park of Galichica, the activity **"In the heart of Drin – river of living water"** was held for the Drin Day, on the location of the Drin River's springs at St. Naum. It started with a cleaning action on the lake shore with over 30 volunteers taking part. The collected waste was put on a special place to be transported by the authorities. Moreover, there was a working meeting with the participation of various stakeholders, citizens and local administration representatives. Experts from the hydro-biological Institute elaborated on the status of the monitoring of water resources and biodiversity around the Lake Ohrid and the entire Drin Basin. The participants highlighted the



importance of transboundary cooperation for the protection of the Drin Basin. A boat trip followed with local guides around the Drin River springs, including bird watching, accompanied by presentation of the local water flora and fauna.

In Peja, the activity **“Our Drin (Drini ynë) – Youth led environmental education towards shared stewardship of the Drin River Basin”** was held for the Drin Day. More than 100 primary school students photographed biodiversity and pollution spots along the Drin River and created their piece of a puzzle. They also created artworks made from trash collected in the neighborhood of their schools. During an event at the center of the city, with the participation of representatives from national (Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning, Kosovo Environment Protection Agency) and local administration (Peja, Gjakova, and Klina Municipalities), local NGO stakeholders, as well as experts from the Hydro-Meteorological Institute, the students put together their pieces to create a macro-puzzle map and displayed their artworks made from trash. *“Today, the Drin River is polluted, but there is a hope, that you the young students, can do better than we are doing”*, stated Mr. Gazmend Muhaxheri, the Mayor of Peja, while addressing the participants. A walking excursion to Drini i Bardhe was organized for environmental education purposes, including a visit to Radavc Cave.

This year, the activities were jointly supported by (i) the Global Environment Facility (GEF) project **'Enabling transboundary cooperation and integrated water resources management in the extended Drin River Basin' (Drin Project)** implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and executed by the Global Water Partnership - Mediterranean and (ii) the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) **Act4Drin Project** executed by the Mediterranean Information Office for Environment Culture and Sustainable Development.

The activities are implemented under the auspices of the **Drin Coordinated Action**, the process established for the **implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding for the Management of the Drin Basin (Drin MoU;** signed in Tirana, 25 November 2011), to enhance transboundary cooperation aimed at the protection and sustainable management of the Drin Basin’s shared water resources. There is a interconnection between Prespa, Ohrid and Skadar/Shkoder Lakes, and the Drin and Buna/Bojana Rivers, while the environmental challenges faced throughout the Basin are of clearly transboundary nature. Therefore, there is a strong interdependence between all local and regional stakeholders involved, which makes cross-sectoral understanding among actors with very different backgrounds, crucial.

The **Drin Project** was officially launched in December 2015 in Tirana, Albania. Aligned in content, aims and objectives with the Drin MoU, comes at a critical point, as the vehicle to financially support and facilitate the implementation of the latter, in line with the existing agreements at national and transboundary level. With a budget of \$5.5 million for activities to be implemented in Albania, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo<sup>1</sup> and Montenegro, over the next four years, it has already become the pivotal action in the Drin River Basin, with the aim to **“promote joint management of the shared water resources of the transboundary Drin River Basin, including coordination mechanisms among the various sub-basin joint commissions and committees”**.

<sup>1</sup> References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

<sup>2</sup> Prespa Park Coordination Committee, Lake Ohrid Watershed Committee, Skadar/Shkoder Lake Management Commission.



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For additional information visit [www.drincorda.org](http://www.drincorda.org) or contact Ms. Georgia Angelopoulou, Communication Officer, Drin Project Coordination Unit, at [georgia@gwpmed.org](mailto:georgia@gwpmed.org).