

**Pristina Drin Stakeholders Conference: a great momentum for the process towards enhanced transboundary cooperation for the Basin's management**

The 4<sup>th</sup> Stakeholders Conference in the framework of the **Drin Coordinated Action (CORDA)**<sup>1</sup> for the implementation of the **Drin Memorandum of Understanding for the management of the Drin Basin**<sup>2</sup> (Drin MoU) and the Global Environment Facility (GEF) supported project **“Enabling Transboundary Cooperation and Integrated Water Resources Management in the extended Drin River Basin”**<sup>3</sup> (GEF Drin Project) took place on 14-15 December 2016, in Pristina.

Five years from the signing of the Drin MoU (25 November 2011) and one year from the launch of the GEF Drin Project, **more than 120 Drin stakeholders** gathered in Pristina, in an indication of the great momentum the Drin MoU process and the Drin CORDA have gained over the last years. Their operationalisation via the GEF Drin Project - with **an implementation horizon of four years and a budget of \$5.5 million** for the beneficiary Drin Riparians<sup>4</sup> - allows for a critical progress towards enhanced transboundary cooperation for the Drin Basin's management.

It is in this spirit that **Mr. Stevo Temelkovski**, Deputy Minister of Environment and Physical Planning, highlighted in his opening remarks: *“We are committed to raise the level of water and natural resources management in the Drin Basin to benefit future generations. This project is a significant political, scientific and managerial driving force with the potential to deliver significant results towards this objective. The present event is a reflection of the strengthened capacities in all Drin Riparians with regards to the coordinated management of the Basin. We have to take advantage of this key milestone to build the ground for improvements. The exchange of views today will facilitate a deeper understanding of the stakeholders' perceptions, priorities and aspirations related to that.”*

Representing the Drin Riparians' institutions, stakeholders, as well as intergovernmental, international and regional organizations supporting activities in the Drin River Basin, the participants to the Conference reviewed developments over the last year, as well as planned actions, with regards to the management priorities in the Drin Basin. Moreover, they discussed ongoing and planned activities for the preparation of management plans in the Drin Basin, as well as possibilities for coordinated action for the management of protected areas at the Drin sub-basin level.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Stakeholders Conference was organized back-to-back with the **12<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Drin Core Group**<sup>5</sup> (DCG) / **3<sup>rd</sup> Meeting of the Steering Committee of the GEF Drin Project**<sup>6</sup> on 15 December and the **3<sup>rd</sup> Meeting of the Expert Working Groups (EWGs) of the Drin Core Group** on 13 December. Stakeholders have been central in the

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<sup>1</sup> The Drin CORDA is the process put into place for the implementation of the Drin MoU, establishing an institutional structure and preparing the Drin Action Plan to set the process into operation.

<sup>2</sup> The Drin MoU provides the political framework for, and defines the context of cooperation among the Drin Riparians necessary to achieve the Shared Vision to “promote joint action for the coordinated, integrated management of the shared water resources in the Drin Basin, as a means to safeguard and restore, to the extent possible, the ecosystems and the services they provide, and promote sustainable development across the Drin Basin”.

<sup>3</sup> The GEF Drin Project is implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and executed by the Global Water Partnership (GWP) through Global Water Partnership - Mediterranean (GWP-Med), in cooperation with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).

<sup>4</sup> Albania, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo\*, Montenegro [\*References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999)].

<sup>5</sup> The DCG and its three EWGs are part of the institutional structure that was established in 2012 for the implementation of the Drin MoU. The DCG is given the mandate to coordinate actions for the implementation of the MoU and comprises representatives of the Riparians' competent Ministries, existing formal joint lake basin management commissions/committees, UNECE, GWP-Med, and MIO-ECSDE representing civil society. The decisions are taken on the basis of consensus of the Riparians' representatives. The EWGs were established to assist the DCG in its work.

<sup>6</sup> With the DCG acting as the Steering Committee of the GEF Drin Project, they facilitate both the political decisions that need to be met under the Drin Coordinated Action, as well as the management decisions that need to be met for the guidance of the GEF Drin project.

establishment of coordinated action in the Drin Basin<sup>7</sup>. In this context, the 4<sup>th</sup> Stakeholders Conference follows up to three similar multi-stakeholder events at regional level in 2011, 2013 and 2015<sup>8</sup>, while further stakeholder conferences are to be held once per year throughout the GEF Drin Project implementation period.

The ultimate goal of the work under the Drin CORDA and the GEF Drin Project is to see the management surpassing the sub-basin level of single water bodies towards the hydrological interconnected system of the Drin Basin. This will eventually lead from the sharing of waters among Riparians and conflicting uses, to the sharing of benefits among stakeholders in an area physically, culturally and historically interconnected. Unlocking the potential for coordinated management could lead to minimizing risks in basin and flood management, and have a profound positive effect on ecosystems and a number of economic sectors<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> The Shared Vision for the management of the Drin Basin has been itself the outcome of a multi-stakeholder process<sup>7</sup>. Provisions for stakeholders' involvement in the process for the management of the Drin Basin through the enhancement of public support and participation are key to both the Drin MoU and the GEF Drin Project.

<sup>8</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Multi-stakeholders Consultation Meeting (Tirana, 25 November 2011) that marked the signing of the Drin Memorandum of Understanding; 2<sup>nd</sup> Drin Basin Multi-Stakeholders Conference (Tirana, 10 - 11 December 2013); 3<sup>rd</sup> Drin Basin Multi-Stakeholders Conference (Tirana, 16 December 2015) that marked the launch of the GEF Drin Project.

<sup>9</sup> The extended Drin River Basin hosts about 1.5 million people who rely on the water resources of the basin for drinking water, agriculture, fisheries, industry, hydropower and for supporting the provision of tourism services, while it hosts ecosystems of major importance with unique biotopes and many indigenous species, as well as sustains and affects coastal and marine ecosystems in the Adriatic, through its freshwater flow.