

THE RESPONSE

The establishment of cooperation

Drin Basin-wide coordination efforts begin

Discussions regarding enhanced cooperation among the Riparians for the management of the Drin Basin started during the **International Roundtable on Integrated Management of Shared Lake Basins in South East Europe**, organized under the Petersberg Phase III/Athens Declaration Process⁵ and the Global Environment Facility (GEF) IWLEARN Programme, in Ohrid, on 12-14 October 2006.

The **Consultation Meeting on Integrated Management of the extended Drin River Basin** held on 24 November 2008 in Tirana, under the aforementioned policy framework, was a stepping stone in this process. The Ministries of the Drin Riparians responsible for the management of water resources and/or environment had a central role in its organization and were assisted by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the Global Water Partnership - Mediterranean (GWP-Med) who were requested to facilitate, the **development of a Shared Vision** for the sustainable management of the Basin.

The Drin Dialogue Process

Stakeholders at the forefront of developing a Shared Vision for the Basin

As a response to the request, GWP-Med and UNECE organized and facilitated the **Drin Dialogue**, a structured multi-stakeholder process. This was formally launched during an official meeting on 1 December 2009, in Podgorica, by representatives of the Ministries responsible for the management of water resources and/or environment of all Riparians, apart from Greece and Kosovo, and by the existing formal joint lake basin management commissions/committees⁶.

The meeting established the **Drin Core Group (DCG)** as an instrument to enable communication among the Riparians and to coordinate the implementation of the Drin Dialogue. Later on, in 2011, the DCG received the mandate to coordinate cooperation in the Basin.

The Drin Dialogue:

- Enabled the maximum possible number of stakeholders to discuss management challenges and to formulate the Shared Vision.
A structured process involving a number of consultation meetings at national and transboundary levels was implemented in this regard.
- Supported the preparation of the first Drin Basin-wide analysis to support the discussions among the stakeholders.
The Situation Analysis looked at the main issues faced in the Drin Basin, the drivers behind these issues, the impact they lead to and the responses required.
- Was driven and guided by the Drin Riparians.
The Drin Core Group meetings were used for this purpose.



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The Drin Memorandum of Understanding

The political leadership responds

The Drin Dialogue was concluded with the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding for the Management of the Extended Transboundary Drin Basin (Drin MoU) by the Ministers responsible for the management of water resources and/or environment, and high level representatives of the Riparians⁷, in Tirana, on 25 November 2011.

The Shared Vision developed under the Drin Dialogue forms the **objective of the Drin MoU**:

“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 to promote sustainable development across the Drin Basin”.

The Drin MoU provides the political framework and defines the context of cooperation among the Drin Riparians necessary to achieve the Shared Vision. It identifies the main transboundary issues affecting sustainable development in the entire Drin Basin or in one or more of its sub-basins, as well as the concrete short, medium and long-term actions to address these issues. The long-term objective is the preparation of an Integrated Drin Basin Management Plan.

Transboundary issues affecting sustainable development

- Improving access to comprehensive data and sufficient information in order to fully understand the current state of the environment, the water resources and the hydrological system (including surface, underground and coastal waters), as well as the ecosystems of the Drin Basin;
- Establishing conditions for the sustainable use of water and other natural resources;
- Developing cooperation and measures to minimize flooding, especially in the lower parts of the Drin Basin;
- Improving management and appropriate solid waste disposal;
- Reducing nutrient pollution deriving from untreated or poorly treated wastewater discharges and unsustainable agricultural practices;
- Reducing pollution due to hazardous substances, such as heavy metals and pesticides;
- Minimizing the effects of hydromorphologic interventions that alter the nature of the hydrological system and of the ecosystems it sustains, leading ultimately to their deterioration.



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The implementation of the Drin MoU is supported by UNECE and the GWP-Med. The UNECE Water Convention and the EU Water Framework Directive provide the legislative and policy framework for this work.

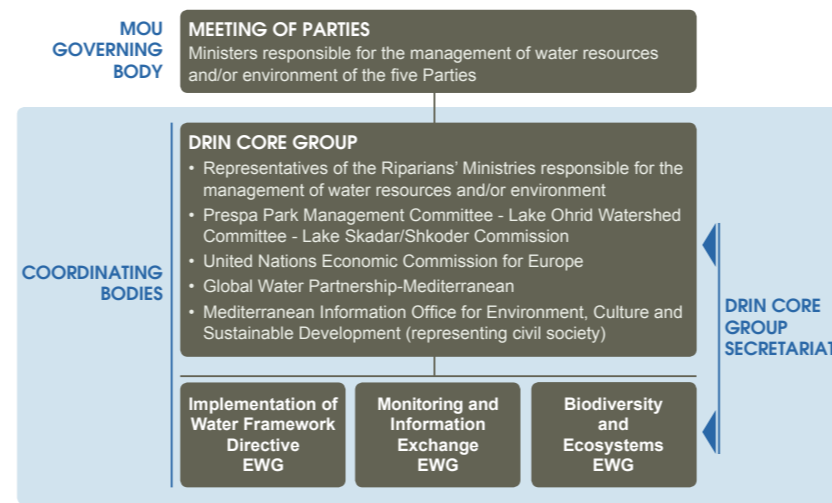
⁷ Albania, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Greece, Kosovo and Montenegro.

The Drin Coordinated Action

First steps for the implementation of the Drin MoU

Succeeding the Drin Dialogue, a process was put into place called the Drin Coordinated Action (Drin CORDA), for the implementation of the Drin MoU.

- ▶ An **institutional structure** established in 2012 by the Drin MoU, guides and steers the Drin CORDA:
 - The **Meeting of the Parties** is comprised of “the Ministers responsible for the management of water resources and/or environment of the five Parties” that “shall meet annually to review progress in the implementation of the present MoU and its provisions” (Article 6, Drin MoU).
 - The **Drin Core Group (DCG)** is given the mandate to coordinate actions for the implementation of the MoU. The decisions of the DCG are taken by the representatives of the Parties to the MoU (i.e. the Drin Riparians) by consensus. There are two regular DCG meetings per year.
 - Three **Expert Working Groups (EWG)** have been established to assist the DCG in its work.
 - The **DCG Secretariat** provides technical and administrative support to the DCG; GWP-Med serves by appointment of the Parties, according to the MoU, as the Secretariat.



- ▶ An **Action Plan** was prepared to support the implementation of the Drin MoU and to set the Drin CORDA into operation. The Drin Action Plan, approved by the 6th DCG Meeting (May 2012) and endorsed by the 1st Meeting of the Parties (May 2013), is structured around six actions:

- Enhancement of coordination mechanisms among the parties;
- Enhancement of the knowledge base concerning the Drin Basin;
- Improvement of information exchange by establishing a system for regular exchange of information among the competent authorities of each party;
- Enhancement of cooperation in the field of flood risk preparedness, management and mutual support;
- Institutional strengthening in the field of integrated water resources management;
- Promotion of public participation and stakeholders' engagement.

The GEF Drin Project

The implementation of the Drin MoU intensifies

The action for the implementation of the Drin MoU, in line with the content, aims and objectives of the Drin Action Plan, led to the involvement of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) facilitating financial support from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) for the next four years.

This synergy was transformed into the Full Size Project “**Enabling Transboundary Cooperation and Integrated Water Resources Management in the extended Drin River Basin**” and the Medium Size Project “**Enabling Transboundary Cooperation and Integrated Water Resources Management in the White Drin and the extended Drin Basin**”⁸.

The objective of the Project is:

“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”.

Officially launched in December 2015, the Project came at a critical point, as the vehicle to financially support and facilitate:

- The operationalization of the institutional structure of the Drin CORDA, rendering it capable of undertaking a coordinating, executive role that aims towards a structured cooperation among the Drin Riparians;
- The enhancement of scientific knowledge in the Basin for informed decision-making concerning transboundary management;
- A set of commonly agreed measures towards the sustainable management and sustainable development of the Basin;
- The systematic involvement of users, civil society and other stakeholders in the implementation of the aforementioned.



⁸ The title “Enabling Transboundary Cooperation and Integrated Water Resources Management in the extended Drin River Basin” (Drin Project) shall refer to both projects hereafter.

Enhancing Transboundary Cooperation for the Management of the Drin Basin

photo © Thomais Vlachogianni

THE DRIN RIVER BASIN

Following the flow

Setting out from the two Prespa Lakes, linked to each other by a small channel, water flows through underground karst¹ cavities to Lake Ohrid, the largest lake in terms of water volume in South East Europe. The only surface outflow of Lake Ohrid, the Black Drin River flows north through The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and enters Albania. The White Drin River rises in Kosovo², flows into Albania, where it meets the Black Drin and forms the Drin River. Flowing westward through Albania, the Drin River meets the Buna/Bojana River³, close after the outflow of the latter from Lake Skadar/Shkoder⁴, the largest lake in terms of surface in South East Europe. The Buna/Bojana River directly discharges into the Adriatic Sea.

Important facts

The extended Drin Basin:

- Comprises the sub-basins of five water bodies, each one of them shared by two or three Riparians:
 - Two rivers: the Drin and its two major tributaries, the Black Drin and the White Drin, as well as the Buna/Bojana river;
 - Three lakes: Prespa, Ohrid and Skadar/Shkoder;
- Covers a geographical area of about 19,000 km²;
- Extends to Albania, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Greece, Kosovo and Montenegro (Drin Riparians);
- 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;
- Encompasses complex ecosystems of major importance that host unique biotopes with many indigenous species, important both from a European and an international conservation perspective;
- Sustains and affects coastal and marine ecosystems in the Adriatic, through its freshwater flow.



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1 A landscape formed by the dissolution of soluble rocks, including limestone and dolomite.
2 References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).
3 The river is called Buna in Albania and Bojana in Montenegro.
4 The lake is called Skadar in Montenegro and Shkoder in Albania.

THE CHALLENGES

- ▶ A number of activities in the basin - many of which are related to the economy (local or otherwise) - entail various uses of natural resources, including water, which are often conflicting.
- ▶ Furthermore, there is a record of unsustainable management approaches in the Basin that have contributed to the degradation of the Basin's ecosystems and to compromising the sustainable economic development in the region.

Management challenges in the Drin Basin

- Unsustainable use of water and other natural resources;
- Hydromorphologic interventions altering the nature of the hydrological system and the supported ecosystems, as well as exacerbating flood incidents;
- Untreated or poorly treated wastewater and unsustainable agricultural practices;
- Unsustainable solid waste management;
- Unsustainable forestry management and deforestation, as well as fishing practices and hunting;
- Unsustainable tourism;
- Non-integrated policies, management schemes and cooperation efforts at national and transboundary level.

- ▶ Action towards integrated basin management is ongoing by all Riparians sharing the Basin, but there is still a long way to go, as the Riparians are at different stages of transposition and implementation of the EU Water Framework Directive.
- ▶ There are international agreements among the Riparians forming the basis for water resources and ecosystem management-related cooperation in each of the Basin's three lakes. However, so far there has been mostly a unilateral perspective in the management of the shared water resources. There is space for improvement in cooperation when it comes to the preparation of River Basin Management Plans.
- ▶ Overall, there is an absence of an overarching basin-wide policy formulation and decision-making framework grounded on scientific data and knowledge. This hinders the design of coherent strategies, legislation and regulations, and prevents the identification of investments which are aligned with the sustainable utilization of the Basin's water resources and their integrated management.

Coordinated action at the Drin Basin level was absent until the development of a Shared Vision for the Sustainable Management of the Drin Basin by the stakeholders and the signing of the related Memorandum of Understanding (Drin MoU) on 25 November 2011, in Tirana.



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PROJECT IDENTITY

IMPLEMENTING PARTNER: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

EXECUTING PARTNERS: Global Water Partnership (GWP) through the Global Water Partnership - Mediterranean (GWP-Med), in cooperation with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)

BENEFICIARIES: Albania, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro*

PROJECT STEERING COMMITTEE: Drin Core Group**

PROJECT COORDINATION UNIT: A Project Coordinator, a Project Manager and four Project Officers throughout Tirana, Podgorica, Ohrid, Pristina and Athens

DURATION: 4 years

BUDGET: 5,5 million USD

* Greece is not eligible for financing, and uses its own resources for financing activities in its part of the "extended" Drin Basin i.e. the Prespa sub-basin.

** The DCG meetings 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.

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

- ▶ The implementation of the **GEF Drin Project** will unfold along the following lines of action:
 - The development of a **Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA)** to identify key management issues and their underlying causes;
 - The preparation of a **Strategic Action Plan (SAP)** that will include a set of agreed responses by the Riparians addressing the identified issues and their causes.
- ▶ A set of complementary activities will be developed in order to facilitate the beneficiary Riparians and the Drin Core Group in the implementation of the agreed actions under the SAP. These activities will include among others the development of tools, such as the Information Management System, the enhancement of capacities of institutions and stakeholders in several critical fields etc.
- ▶ The project will strive to facilitate the capitalization of management innovations through five demonstration activities, each one tested in different areas and at different scales:
 - Integrated Basin Management Planning in the Lake Ohrid sub-basin;
 - Wastewater treatment options in the Shkodra city area;
 - Nutrients management in the Montenegrin part of Lake Skadar;
 - Flood management across the Drin Basin;
 - Operation of a transboundary monitoring system in the Skadar/Shkoder and Buna/Bojana areas in Albania and Montenegro.

PROJECT INTENT

PROMOTING COOPERATION AMONG ACTORS FOR THE SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF THE DRIN UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF THE RIPARIANS...

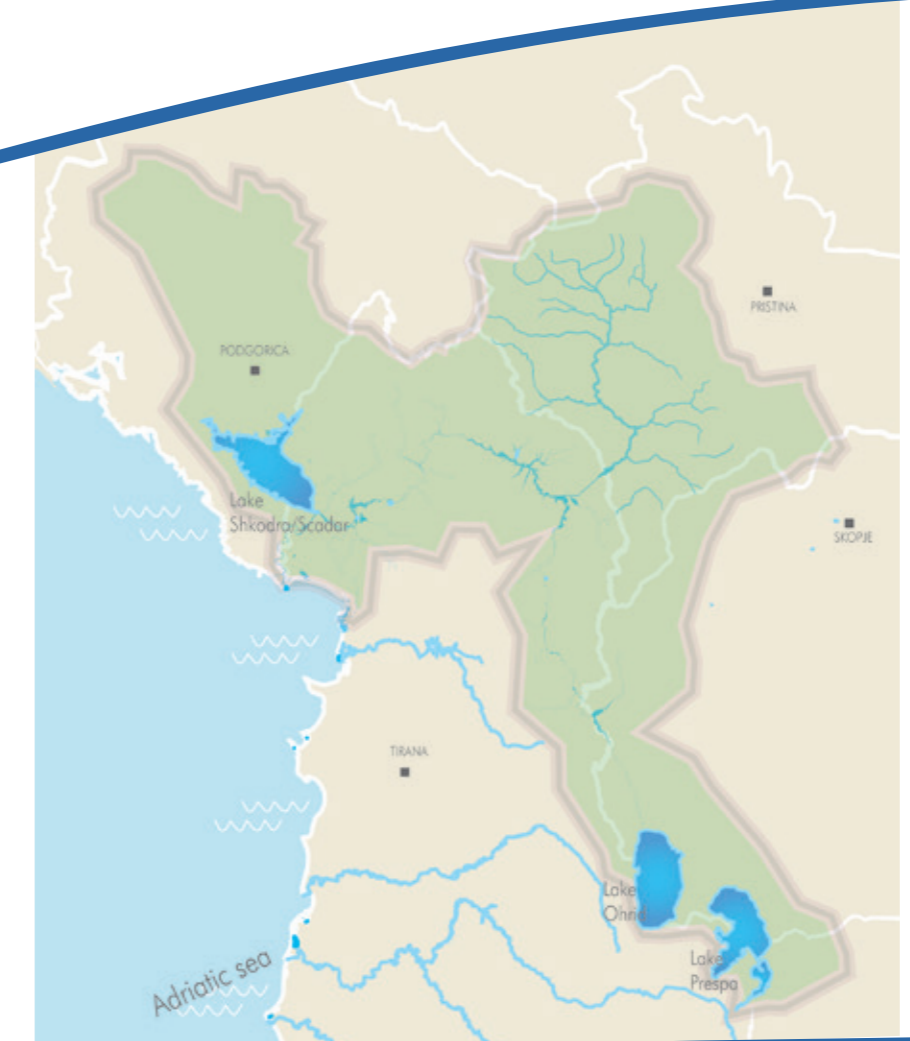
Cultivating a culture of cooperation and working relationships among and across actors and sectors directly linked to basin and water management, for a common goal - the sustainable management of the Drin Basin, under the leadership of the Drin Core Group, is one of the project's aims.

...BASED ON SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE DEVELOPED WITHIN THE BASIN...

Bringing together the scientific institutes that support policy making, such as Hydrometeorological institutes, Environmental Protection Agencies, universities etc., to work collectively to establish a common understanding with regard to the state of the Drin Basin, facilitates the building of trust. These also assist the Drin Core Group in making informed decisions.

...FACILITATES BENEFIT SHARING AMONG STAKEHOLDERS.

Bringing together key users and identifying the benefits that could be shared, unlocks the potential for coordinated management. The water and energy sectors have a particular role in this regard. Engaging energy actors from the Riparians in discussions and also involving other major water users, could lead to identifying benefit sharing mechanisms and minimizing risks in the areas of energy production, and basin and flood management. This, in turn, could have a profound positive effect on the ecosystems and a number of economic sectors.



The **ultimate goal** of the work in the Drin Basin is to reach a point in the future where the scale of management will surpass single water bodies to the hydrological interconnected system of the Drin Basin, eventually leading from the sharing of waters among Riparians and conflicting uses, to the sharing of benefits in an area physically, culturally and historically interconnected.

www.drincorda.org

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