



Meeting and workshop about Central and Eastern European Countries

Workshop held on the occasion of the Council meeting of the European Water Association (EWA) on 22 May 2003 in Lucerne, Switzerland

Introduction

The President of the EWA, Raymond Pinoit, welcomed the attendants to this meeting and workshop. He recapitulated the aim of this meeting which was to create an EWA working group which should focus on questions related to the accession of the Central and Eastern European Countries to the European Union and its water legislation. To adapt this group to the needs of EWA's CEEC members all Council members from Central and Eastern European countries and EWA's Management Committee were invited to this workshop.

Raymond Pinoit explained the two aspects of the workshop:

1. To gather the technical and economical problems in the different countries related to waste water and drinking water, implementation of the different EU directives and other aspects.
2. To find out the needs for the CEEC national associations (technical and economic aspects), what their problems are and what information they expect from the EWA.

Karoly Kovacs then took the chair of the meeting as chairman of the to-be working group. On his invitation all CEEC attendants gave an overview of their country's situation.

Presentations from the countries

Karoly Kovacs presented the situation of **Hungary**, which decided to join the EU and thus took over EU regulations. The Hungarian Wastewater Association (MaSzeSz) now discusses how the regulations could be implemented in detail in Hungary and how guidelines for their implementation could be elaborated. As an example of how existing Hungarian legislation differs from European legislation he mentions the effluent standards which are stricter in Hungary than in the European legislation. This situation caused a discussion between the professional and nature protection associations whether the stricter values should be kept.

The situation in **Slovenia** was then presented by Jana Zagorc-Koncan. She reported that Slovenia has adopted all legislation in the wastewater sector in accordance with the European standards. The problem is the implementation, as there is only a short time for the building of the necessary wastewater treatment plants. Due to this the projects are carried out in a hurry from outside with old technology from the West. In her view the professionals are not able to influence this process.

Ain Lääne described the situation for **Estonia**. He reported that in his country there are no problems with the implementation of standards, as Estonia has traditionally good contacts to Finland and Helcom, from which standards were taken over. The main problem is the financing of related projects, especially for small villages as they are not able to take out loans. There are some problems with ground water quality. The most important topic for his association is in his views the Water Framework Directive and how to interpret it. He estimated that the situation is similar for Latvia and Lithuania.

The situation in the **Czech Republic** was presented by Jiri Wanner. He recapitulated the Czech referendum to the accession to the European Union which went 50-50. The biggest problem is to get funds for projects, especially as a large part of the infrastructure has been privatised which makes it impossible for the municipalities to receive European funds.

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For **Croatia** and all other Central and Eastern European Countries Bojan Zmaic pointed out to the necessity of educational activities for the implementation of European legislation.

Discussion

The discussion centred around the questions of financing and capacity building, which are considerably linked. Several participants agree that there are indeed funds for the implementation of the European Directives and related projects, but that there is not enough knowledge how to successfully get access to these funds. The EWA could try to help here, e.g. through workshops. It would be interesting to show case stories of successful examples, and maybe to involve experts from the banking sector. Another idea mentioned was to ask the European Commission for training opportunities for members from EWA's National Member Associations.

Sigurd van Riesen pointed out in this context that the EWA had planned a conference about EU water legislation and Central and Eastern European Countries which was planned to take place in Warsaw in February 2003 but which had unfortunately to be cancelled because the related trade fair was cancelled. It is still planned to have the conference in one of the CEEC, and this conference could involve some of the proposals from the workshop.

The Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe, which has a head office in Hungary and regional offices in all CEEC was mentioned as another interesting point to be contacted by the working group or its chairman. This office makes tenders where the national associations can take part.

Conclusions

The participants agreed that a similar CEEC meeting and workshop should be organised annually in combination with EWA's Council meeting. It was proposed that a virtual meeting by email should take place in six months' time, for which the email contacts of all current and potential members of this working group should be exchanged. In this context it was also proposed to establish a chat room or forum for the group to discuss related questions; an adequate location for this could be the European Water Pollution and Control Network (EWPCN).

Attendants:

Peter Cook (UK)
Claus Hagebro (DK)
Karoly Kovacs (H)
Helmut Kroiss (A)
Ain Lääne (EE)
Raymond Pinoit (F)
Jiri Wanner (CZ)
Jana Zagorc-Koncan (SLO)
Peter Matthews (UK)
Kirsten Overmann (EWA Secretariat)
Sigurd van Riesen (EWA Secretariat)
Bojan Zmaic (HR)

Report: Kirsten Overmann, EWA