

**CONCLUSIONS OF THE REGIONAL MEETING ON THE IMPLEMENTATION
OF THE EU FLOODS DIRECTIVE IN THE WESTERN BALKANS COUNTRIES
SEPTEMBER 28TH 2015, SARAJEVO**

As agreed at the International Donors' Conference held in July 2014 in Brussels to respond to the consequences of severe weather and devastating floods that hit Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia two months beforehand, the European Commission convened a Regional Conference on Floods Prevention and Management in November that same year.

That Conference emphasised that, since floods are by nature regional, the response should also be regional. To reach the long-term objective of a sound flood risk management that can minimise potential risks to human health and wealth in the region, the countries still were to:

- build sound flood risk management systems on strong pillars by better understanding the risk and reducing it with structural and non-structural measures, by improving preparedness, early warning systems and response capacities and by promoting risk financing strategies
- develop and prioritise the implementation of the Danube and Sava Basin Management Plans
- enhance the civil protection and response capacity.

Other international institutions like the European Union, United Nations, and World Bank and other donors have been providing support and play an important role as partners of the West Balkan Countries

The European Commission also launched a gap analysis. This is intended to be a comprehensive list of the needs and measures for sound flood risk management, focusing on the status of implementation of the EU Floods Directive and covering both investments and policy measures. The gap analysis was presented at the meeting.

The study, entitled 'Flood Prevention and Management: Gap Analysis and Needs Assessment in the context of implementing the EU Floods Directive' confirmed that the following factors were essential to take into consideration when planning flood prevention and management measures.

- As the floods in spring 2014 but also the more recent events in Albania and in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia demonstrate, the Western Balkans countries are at risk, to a varying degree, to flooding. In a region particularly vulnerable to the consequences of climate change, flood events that were previously 'once in a lifetime' have become both more frequent and more violent and the region needs to prepare for these becoming more likely.
- Flood hazard areas often overlapping with highly populated areas concentrating economic activities, but also irresponsible land use, environmental pollution, in particular due to weak sewerage and waste systems, or deficient dam management are significantly amplifying the magnitude of floods impacts and damages.
- Regional and national integrated water resource management should be included. So far administrative borders have been driven flood protection actions.
- Early Warning Systems and Monitoring networks need substantial improvement and development.
- The Western Balkans countries have started to look to the floods problem from a more proactive risk management perspective, however much more needs to be done. At the same time, they are at the early stages of a lengthy and complex process to transpose and implement the EU's Floods Directive.

The study draws the following roadmap and recommendations and the parties agree on the following.

IMMEDIATE AND SHORT-TERM OBJECTIVES

- **Legal and regulatory frameworks have to be put in place** to ensure that policies, strategies, and plans together with the institutional frameworks can be developed and based upon a sound country system. In particular, **Floods Directive implementation plans and programmes** should be developed and adopted.
- Central government and hydro-meteorological bodies should be the subject of **strengthened institutional frameworks and capacities**. This is essential to establish a solid organisational basis as well as improving the co-ordination between the various entities.
- **Flood risk and hazard assessments and mapping** are crucial elements of the Directive. They are also the prerequisites for other policy or investments measures and must therefore be prepared as soon as possible. Data collection and management on the terrain, population, land use or economic activities, vulnerability and exposure assessment, hydraulic modelling, climate and weather modelling and forecasting will constitute some of the preliminary activities towards this objective.
- All countries are strongly encouraged to join the **EU's Civil Protection Mechanism**, which provides notably trainings and financing opportunities for disaster prevention and risk management.
- **Highly mature "no-regret" projects should be implemented**, that is to say investments with the greatest impact and efficiency in hot spot areas, with no impact downstream or upstream, which establish and consolidate the 'first line' defences. The 28 "no regret" measures identified as such in the Gap Analysis and Needs Assessment are a good basis for such implementation.

MEDIUM-TERM OBJECTIVES

- Ensuring the **transposition** of the EU Floods Directive and Water Framework Directive
- Adopting regulatory measures for the **enforcement of legislation**.
- Incorporating flood management issues into all **other sectoral policies**, such as urbanisation, urban and rural housing, agriculture or dam management, promoting sustainable land use practices that improve water retention, particularly in sensitive areas.
- On the basis of the flood risk assessments and flood hazard and risk maps, the countries shall produce **flood management strategies and flood risk management plans**, in coordination with the International Sava River Basin Commission and the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River.
- Further developing **policy measures** and plan **priority infrastructure investments** for national investment strategies on the basis of the flood management strategies and flood risk management plans.
- Develop **early warning and hydro-meteorological monitoring** systems with strong end to end user connections, as well as **response capacities**.
- Implementation of the 15 already identified 'no-regret' **projects of high-to-medium level of maturity**.

LONG-TERM OBJECTIVES

- Ensuring the **full implementation** of the EU Floods Directive and Water Framework Directive.
- Implementing **priority infrastructure investments**. These should be included in the national single project pipelines of projects in order to ensure that they benefit from a national consensus.

Most of these actions are to be taken at national and local levels and should be kept high on the political agenda to ensure their achievements. Flood Risk Management Plans, need to be updated every six years.

While ownership at the national level is essential, strengthening the regional and cross-border cooperation will be crucial to successful flood management planning and design. The countries shall use existing structures to foster more efficient interventions and data sharing. In this context, the **International Sava River Basin Commission** and the **International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River** should take on the role of regional coordination to push for the implementation of non-structural measures, for the countries under their responsibility and in accordance with their mandates.

Follow-up activities will take place at a technical and river-basin level. The countries are invited to submit, to the Sava River Basin Commission and the Commission for the Protection of the Danube River, regular information detailing the measures they have already adopted and those that are planned in the months to come.

The European Commission will continue to support, politically and financially, this exercise and to monitor the implementation of these recommendations.

Considering the recurrence of these events, and the likeliness of their intensification, the European Commission cannot regularly provide relief support for flood recovery and reconstruction. It is therefore essential to prioritise funding to support **prevention and management measures**. To this end, technical assistance instruments are available to prepare flood risk and hazard assessments and mapping, for example with the Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF). The European Commission can also contribute to bridge the funding gap for the most mature 'no-regret' projects identified, up to the maximum rate for co-financing.

International Financial Institutions and other donors are also invited to consider prioritising funding measures to support the implementation of the Floods Directive.