

Sarajevo, 20th June 2018

Minutes of the 7th Meeting of the Regional Working Group on Environment (Skopje, 30th May 2018)

The 7th meeting of the Regional Working Group on Environment was convened by the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) in cooperation with the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning (MEPP) of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in Skopje on 30th May 2018.

The meeting was opened at 09:00 AM by Mr. Sadulla Duraki, Minister of Environment and Physical Planning and by Mr. Gazmend Turdiu, Deputy Secretary General and Head of Programme Department of the Regional Cooperation Council.

Minister Duraki welcomed participants and expressed satisfaction and its honour to co-host the 7th Meeting of the Regional Working Group on Environment (RWG Env). Minister Duraki stressed the importance of regional cooperation in this format which supports sustainable development of the region and the implementation of the SEE 2020 Strategy.

Minister Duraki praised the work of the Biodiversity Task Force as well as efforts of the RCC and RWG Env in preparation of the Study on Climate Change in the Western Balkans Region which was presented during the 2nd Ministerial Meeting in November 2017 in Bonn. While praising the involvement of all ministries from WB and their engagement under the RWG Env, Minister Duraki thanked the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) for providing financial support to the two projects of regional importance (Nexus and ClimaProof). Minister Duraki also announced the upcoming Ministerial Meeting to be co-hosted by the MEPP and RCC in November 2018.

Mr. Turdiu welcomed participants on behalf of the RCC and thanked Minister Duraki and his dedicated team for cooperation and co-hosting the meeting. Mr. Turdiu also thanked the RWG Env participants for their engagement which lead to concrete results achieved in the previous three years. He expressed satisfaction with the progress in the implementation of regional activities (Nexus, ClimaProof, Biodiversity and Rural Development trough Integrated Forest and Water Resources Management) and informed participants of the meeting that progress reports are distributed to them for their information, monitoring and steering purposes, as foreseen by the Bonn Ministerial Declaration.

The Deputy Secretary General reminded participants on the previous Ministerial Meeting held in Bonn and the Study on Climate Change which is expected to be officially published during the next week, containing warning data on expected temperature rise, and calling the entire WB region for immediate and coordinated action on mitigation and adaptation to climate change.

Mr. Turdiu emphasised that air-pollution is a significant threat to human health in the region and informed meeting participants on the intention of the RCC and its partners (UN Environment and the World Health Organization) to put this problem into spotlight during

this year by preparing a study on that matter and present (at least) its preliminary findings at the occasion of the next Ministerial Meeting in November.

Mr. Turdiu drew the attention of the participants to the poor representation and participation of the benefiting WB6 economies to this specific meeting (only three out of six economies were present, two of them cancelling their participation far too late, one of them causing waste of funds – travel and accommodation costs – that could not be recovered). Mr. Turdiu stressed out that this is a recurring difficulty with the WB6 participants to the RWG Env that is not in compliance with the political will expressed repeatedly at the RCC Board and the ministerial declarations.

The first working session was moderated by Mr. Radovan Nikčević, Expert on Connectivity in the RCC and it was dedicated to the Regional Dimension Coordinators and partners which were invited to present their activities and results in the implementation of the SEE 2020 Strategy and to provide information necessary for monitoring and steering of regional projects and initiatives.

Mr. Mihail Dimovski, Executive Director of the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC) presented REC involvement in organization of the previous Ministerial Meeting (the Podgorica initiative) and number of projects with the EC and WB economies in the area of environment and implementation of the Paris Climate Agreement (PCA). He called RWG Env to participate in regional programming, supporting the implementation of the PCA, and for a stronger coordination and steering role for regional projects. Mr. Dimovski informed participants of the meeting on the plans of his organization to engage more in supporting the region in the area of mitigation and adaptation to climate change as well as in renewable energy area.

Mr. Boban Ilić, Secretary General of the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (RRD SWG) presented their activities related to the SEE 2020 Strategy implementation, assessment carried out in the agro-environment area, while the first draft report on measures prepared by the Agro-Biodiversity Task Force will be published in August. Mr. Ilić also informed the meeting on the plans for organizing the next Ministerial of Agriculture and called RWG Env participants for cooperation and coordination between the two institutions and possible organization of a joint meeting with ministers of Environment.

Ms. Anna Maria Papaioannou, Project manager in the Global Water Partnership-Mediterranean (GWP-Med) presented activities, achievements and plans for the future of the Nexus projects. Ms. Papaioannou reminded participant on the need to make decision on an economy, besides the two transboundary basins (Drina and Drin rivers), which the Nexus project will focus on. As discussed during the meeting, additional consultations will be needed, and joint agreement on the Drina basin has to be reached, since representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina asked for organizing additional coordination of all relevant stakeholders taking into account a complexity of administration and necessity of cross-sectoral cooperation in this economy. GWP-Med will explore opportunities to organize additional consultations as part of regular UNECE event. A fruitful discussion among participants followed the presentation.

Ms. Ana Vukoje, Climate Change Specialist from UN Environment presented ClimaProof project, its structure, components and most importantly results achieved so far: the prepared gap assessment on the state of climate change, training modules which have been defined as well as progress in the preparation of a Summer School for experts on climate change

projections from national hydro-meteorological institutes which will be organized in July in Vienna. Ms. Vukoje also invited participants of the RWG Env to be more active in the process of coordination of regional projects by expressing their needs and closer interactive cooperation with project implementers. The implementation of the ClimaProof project is expected to be extended for six months without additional costs, as Ms. Vukoje informed.

Mr. Vlatko Trpeski, Head of Department for Nature in the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Ms. Snežana Prokić, Head of Department in the Ministry of Environmental Protection of Serbia, as the present and ex Chair of the Biodiversity Task Force (BD TF), presented activities, regional reports (endorsed by the BD TF), recommendations and agreed regional priorities in the area of Biodiversity. They also informed participants on the progress in preparation of the BD TF Work Plan, as well as on the initiative to participate at the 14th Conference of Parties under the Convention on Biological Diversity in November 2018.

Ms. Irina Lazzerini, Sustainable Energy Expert from the Energy Community (EnC) Secretariat, provided an overview on the roles and responsibilities of the Energy and Climate Committee in preparation of the integrated National Energy and Climate Plans. Emphasising the close cooperation and support of EC line DGs (Clima and Ener), Ms. Lazzerini informed participants on the main legislative acts under the EnC mandate in the area of sustainability as well as the two Recommendations on climate, adopted by Contracting Parties of the Energy Community (Recommendation on Monitoring Mechanism Regulation and Recommendation on integration of National Energy and Climate Plans). An important priority ahead of CPs of the EnC is to establish 2030 targets (energy efficiency, renewable energy and GHG emissions reduction). A technical working group to advance discussions on these topics will convene on 14th June 2018 (EnC Secretariat, Vienna), as Ms. Lazzerini informed. She also invited all participants to join the second edition of the Sustainability Forum, to be held on June 22nd in Vienna, Austria.

Nominated RWG Env participants from line ministries presented the status of legal harmonization and the main achievements during the last six-month period, in the area of environment and climate change in their respective economies.

During the last working session, participants of the meeting were informed on the main regional but also national activities and projects implemented by various partners active in the area of environment and climate change.

Ms. Violeta Philippitsch presented activities of the Environment Agency Austria in the WB, while Ms. Ana Vukoje informed participants on the plans for regional action and development of a Study on Air Pollution as a result of present cooperation with the World Health Organization.

Ms. Kristina Kujundžić, presented activities and results of the present (ORF BD) but also plans of the upcoming Biodiversity project (ORF BDU 08/2018 – 12/2020).

Mr. Boris Erg, informed participants on the IUCN activities and prospects for regional cooperation.

Activities of the UNDP in Serbia and The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia are presented by Ms. Milena Kozomara and Ms. Anita Kodžoman, focusing on the environmental protection, mitigation of climate change, energy efficiency and disaster risk management.

CONCLUSIONS:

- The meeting served as a very efficient platform for information exchange and coordination of regional efforts of all participating economies and international partners.
- Participants took note of the activities performed by REC and initiative to intensify activities in the area of climate change and energy. REC is committed to support further regional efforts and facilitate implementation of Bonn Ministerial Declaration.
- Participants are informed on activities of SWG RRD and the expected first draft reports on agro-environmental and agro-biodiversity policy, to be published in August 2018.
- Participants are informed on the progress in the implementation of Nexus project, progress in development of the Nexus assessment mapping study, reached agreement to select Drin river basin as one of the transboundary basins to which the project will be focused and asked for agreement on the second one (Drina basin). Participants highlighted the need to select one economy in which Nexus will be piloted and agreed that the selection will be done through a written invitation following the “first-come-first-served” principle. The procedure will be launched by RCC in consultation with GWP-Med and upon receiving of necessary documents.
- Responding to the suggestion of the representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina and in order to get final agreement on Drina basin, GWP-Med will explore opportunities for organizing a consultation meeting, in cooperation with UNECE.

The draft Regional Nexus Assessment Study will be circulated to the RWG Env participants for comments, prior to its finalization.

- Participants took note of the progress of ClimaProof project and welcomed outputs and the upcoming Summer School on high resolution climate change projections.
- Participants took note of the activities of the Biodiversity Task Force including regional reports and recommendations on ecosystem services in the future course of action (ESAV) and data and information management (BIMR) by the BD TF, drafting of the Work Plan, and welcomed the initiative for joint regional presentation on biodiversity concerns agreed by the BD TF at the 14th Conference of Parties under the Convention on Biological Diversity to be organized in Egypt in November this year. Participants have also agreed that ensuring sustainability of the BD TF is of utmost priority.
- The Energy Community Secretariat highlighted the importance of streamlining and avoiding replication of activities on climate and energy among institutions. One of the key objectives of the Energy and Climate Committee is to prepare the successful development of integrated National Energy and Climate Plans. This was recognized by Article 2 of Recommendation 2018/01/MC-EnC, proposed by the European Commission and adopted by the all Contracting Parties.

- Participants were informed on the progress achieved in the previous period in the area of Environment and Climate Change in those WB economies which were represented at the meeting.
- Participants highlighted the need to ensure sustainability and predictability of funds for regional initiatives in environment and climate change area. They recognized RCC's programming process and donor coordination activities as very important to this aim.
- Participants took note of the activities of the Environment Agency Austria and possibility to cooperate and be involved and timely informed on the Programme for Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union.
- Participants took note of the initiative of WHO and UN Environment to jointly address the issue of air pollution in the WB region and welcomed this joint proposal.
- GIZ ORF informed participants on the second phase of the ORF Biodiversity project (GIZ ORF BDU 2018-2020) which is in process of approval as well as achievements under its first phase which ends in July 2018.
- Participants took note of activities of IUCN related to nature based solutions in the region, but also related to nexus project implemented in Central Asia.
- UNDP informed the participants on the activities implemented in the area of energy and environment in Serbia and The Former Yugoslav Republic Macedonia.
- Participants were informed on the initiative for organizing a joint meeting of ministers of environment and ministers of agriculture in order to strengthen cross-sectoral cooperation and integration of environment and climate change into other policies. Agreement should be reached between the two line ministries and announcement should be sent in June.
- Referring to the missing participation from three economies to the present meeting and noting that this is a recurring phenomenon, the participants expressed serious concerns on the functioning of the RWG Env. On one side the RWG Env is considered to be an efficient tool in coordinating, steering and monitoring regional activities related to environment and climate change, while on the other side the political commitment expressed at the level of ministers is not matched by participation and engagement at technical level.

The meeting was adjourned at 16:30 PM

RWG Env Secretariat