**STATEMENT OF THE EUROPEAN NGOs**

**working on water related problems in CEE and EECCA countries,**

**to be presented**

**at the Meeting of the Parties to**

**THE CONVENTION ON THE PROTECTION AND USE OF TRANSBOUNDARY WATERCOURSES AND INTERNATIONALLAKES**

**Sixth session, Rome, 28-30 November 2012**

This paper is an outcome of the series of Regional Water meetings, conducted by the NGOs for public awareness raising and strengthening the role of NGOs in promotion and implementation of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (hereinafter, “Water Convention”) and its Protocol on Water and Health (hereinafter, “Protocol) and dedicated to the 20th anniversary of the Water Convention.

During June-October 2012 near 200 NGO representatives and water experts took part in 4 Regional water events: the Seminar for Dniester River Keepers Association in Chisinau, the Dnieper River Public Forum in Kyiv, Central Asia Water meeting in Almaty and Armenian-Georgian NGOs’ Workshop in Yerevan.

Confirming the commitment to be involved in advocacy and implementation of the Water Convention and its Protocol at all levels, the European NGOs working on water problems state the following:

* Since more than 10 years, a number of the **inter-state cooperation of transboundary river basins in EECCA region,** – such as the Dniester, Dnieper, Kura and the rivers in Central Asia – get substantial support from International Organizations (UNDP, GEF, UNECE, OSCE and others) to develop their legal and institutional frameworks and tools to manage their common water resources. First draft versions of transboundary river basin treaties were developed for the Dniester, Dnieper and some other rivers. The NGOs note that the preparation for signing the agreements is taking too much time, – a.o. because of interests of water monopolies which go against the much needed cross-border, multi-stakeholder approach –, and **invite Parties** in accordance with Article 9 of the Water Convention **to sign the prepared treaties** as soon as possible and **start their implementation**, in accordance with the guidance documents elaborated in the framework of the Water Convention and its Protocol.
* We call upon Parties and Signatories of the Water Convention and its Protocol **to take concrete actions towards the implementation** of these international tools. Tools such as **Integrated Water Resources Management** (IWRM) and **Basin Approach** still have no proper legal frameworks and financial mechanisms of implementation in the majority of the EECCA countries. IWRM is a way to achieve the goals of the Convention and the Protocol and helps a.o. to reduce and to control water-related diseases and to ensure the access to safe water and sanitation for everybody in the European Region.
* Wecall upon all Parties and Non-Parties of the Protocol on Water and Health **to complete** theirkey obligations for **targets** setting and **developing the surveillance systems**to control the water related diseases and comprehensive programmes of measures for the implementation of the Protocol on Water and Health. These **targets and measures have to be** incorporated **into River basin management plans**. The Protocol implementation should be a subject of transboundary cooperation. **The Protocol** should become **an efficient instrument to guarantee the implementation of the Right to Water and Sanitation** defined in the UN General Assembly and the UN Human Rights Council Resolutions of 2010, which entitle every human being to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic use.
* NGOs note that in the context of Rio+20 discussions and decisions, the **IWRM** provides **a basis** of the new concept of **Energy-Water-Food Nexus** and **European region can contribute** a lot into developing **the Nexus approach** and providing the **good practices** and exchange of the experience on sustainable water management, ecological sanitation and organic agriculture.
* At the Water Regional events NGOs raised critical issues of the lack of integration between water and energy sectors and **lack of political will to develop sustainable solutions** based on **water–energy and food security** nexus. NGOs expressed serious concern about the outlined tendency to weaken environmental legislation in the EECCA countries, leading to increased anthropogenic pressure on nature, including water resources. The **public** is particularly **concerned about the plans** of the governments of Republic of Belarus, Ukraine, Russian Federation and Kazakhstan to build **new** and expand existing **nuclear power plants** (NPP) and plans of Ukraine to **develop the uranium mining industry** in the Dnieper river basin; the direct using of river water for NPPs cooling and for metallurgic enterprises, lack of management of the **uranium mining wastes** in Ukraine; plans of **massive construction of mini Hydro stations** on small mountain rivers in Ukrainian Carpathians.
* NGOs call upon **the necessity to environmentalize the water policies** of the Parties towards transboundary watercources by **conservation and sustainable use of wetlands and ecosystems,** creation of jointly managing transboundary wetlands and prevention of substantial impact of human activities (such as e.g. hydrodams) to the functioning of downstream transboundary river ecosystems. The **EECCA region needs knowledge development on ecosystems services payment** combined **with pilot** projects.
* NGOs urge Governments to **take the climate change into account** in water management policies and to **develop timely adaptation measures**. Climate change is a fact in Central Asia, with temperatures rising faster than globally. The over-consumption of water, combined with very low efficiency and fast deterioration of water supply networks leads to inefficient use of scarce resources and a potential transboundary conflict in the region. The Central Asian countries should move to less water-consuming agriculture, and work together on water monitoring and retention dams, and best practices should be promoted.
* The Aral Sea – once among the largest lakes world wide – is mostly dried-out. Estimates say that one-hundred million tons of salt dust from the sea bed is being spread into the environment, into the higher atmosphere. This salt dust is now found on the glaciers of the Central Asian and Himalaya mountains, leading to their increasingly rapid melting, resulting in floods and droughts. Immediate action is needed. NGOs recommend **to re-focus on the Aral Sea and implement emergency measures**, for example, keeping the bottom of the Aral Sea moist to retain the salt dust.
* To **develop transboundary cooperation** on the main **Central Asia river basins**, NGOs recommend to establish the **Interstate Basin Councils** for the Chu-TalasBasin and other basins and to create an **independent Public Council of the Aral SeaBasin**. Furthermore, the **transparency and accountability** of the **existing Interstate Commissions** need to be improved.
* NGOs highlight the role of Lake Sevan as the biggest drinking water reservoir for the whole Caucasus region also for Iran and Turkey. During past 80 years the lake has experienced a number of severe trials (e.g. the level of lake has been decreased about 20m) which brought it to the brink of ecological catastrophe. At present a lot of problems and risks, demanding complex research and science-based solutions, still exist. NGOs stress importance and necessity to develop and implement a Lake Sevan Basin Management plan.
* NGOs highlight the **lack of realistic and updated water statistics in the EECCA** region. NGOs call upon the Governments of the EECCA countries to take appropriate practical measures **to improve the national** Water Resources and to develop Water and Health **monitoring systems**. The latter are responsible to develop the **data** needed **for** the **decision-making** on improvement of the citizen access to safe water. Adequate indicators, **quick tests and mobile test units** should be developed and used for monitoring water quality **in rural areas**, where conventional monitoring systems are not available and/or affordable.
* We call upon the Governments to take appropriate measures to research, develop and promote **good practices** on water management, water supply and sanitation, adaptation extreme weather conditions, water and resources saving, recycling and reusing, wastes and wastewater managenment. Several **NGOs** have established **information and training-centres in EECCA** countries, which bring very valuable capacity in particular for implementation in rural areas. NGOs call on Governments and donors organizations **to support and develop networks** of such resources centres **throughout the region** to promote sustainable Energy-water and food technologies and technologies transfer to the local level.The newly created Central Asian NGO thematic network "Climate-Water–Energy–Health” will strengthen the work of NGOs on climate change adaptation, reforming of policies on water resources, energy, environmental governance and food safety in the region with application of the Nexus Approach, and needs attention and support of the donor organizations.
* The Government should **take into account** that **NGOs, working on water issues**, are the main stakeholders group, that have
* accumulated important and valuable practical knowledge about local-national water and health problems;
* gained experience in the implementation of good practices on water management, including water sources protection, transboundary cooperation;
* developed expertise on planning and implementation of low-cost, sustainable and efficient solutions for small water supply and sanitation, introduction of eco-sanitation technologies and decentralized natural wastewater treatment, etc.), and
* strengthened capacity to mobilize public participation in water management at all levels.
* NGO call on Parties to the Water Convention and the Protocol **to implement** the UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (the Aarhus Convention) and the guidelines regarding **Aarhus norms** implementation **within the Water Convention and its Protocol**.

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