

Round Table: Transboundary Cooperation

Address by Secretary for Water, Prof. Andreas Andreadakis Hellenic Ministry for the Environment, Energy and Climate Change

Your Excellencies,
Distinguished participants,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me first congratulate and thank the organizers of this round table discussion, namely Zimbabwe, Tajikistan and the U.S of America and express my pleasure for participating in this 6th World Water Forum, representing Greece.

It was mentioned earlier that rivers flow without consideration for state boundaries and this is a fact and the basis that create the need for transborder cooperation. However, the issue is not simply technical (hydraulic, hydrological or even narrow environmental) but much wider, with social, economical and political implications. It involves different levels of education, diverse cultures and perceptions of water, variable economic and social needs and even in some cases different religious beliefs. It is therefore a difficult, sensitive and wide in scope exercise, that has often been underestimated, not excluding in this respect the EU Water Framework Directive. The general guidelines and procedures outlined in the Directive often overlook such sensitive issues which make transboundary cooperation, although feasible at the end of the day, much more difficult and complicated than originally anticipated.

Greece has a deep commitment for supporting cooperation in the water sector at all levels, international, multilateral and bilateral and willing to share the experience gained in this field with others. As a country we have in the past ratified several international conventions and recently in 2010 the UN convention on the International Watercourses. We strongly believe that this is an important convention and we join our voices with those who urge other countries to endorse it.

Greece shares about 25% of its surface waters with neighboring countries, being in most cases the downstream country. There is therefore no need to stress the importance of transboundary cooperation with our neighbors. And in spite of the difficulties involved and even certain shortcomings we continue to work together in good faith, gradually establishing the needed mutual trust. The progress made, especially over the last two years, is substantial and promising for even more positive results in the future. Let me share with you one or two indicative results achieved so far.

On October the 4th, the EU has announced the official approval of the “Agreement on the Protection and the Sustainable Development of the Prespa Park Area” we signed in 2010. We are, thus, now able to officially launch the process for the ratification of the Agreement by our national Governments and Parliaments. Once the Agreement is ratified by our countries, it enters into force, and therefore, we can consequently commence its full implementation.

Furthermore, Greece has signed, in 2010, Joint Ministerial Declarations with Bulgaria and Turkey for transboundary cooperation aiming at the protection and sound management on shared waters. For the implementation of these Declarations, we have already formed Joint Committees and Ad Hoc Expert Groups consisting of representatives, at various levels, from the signatory countries. These Committees and Expert Groups have already been set up and are fully operational with very positive results so far.