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Workshop D

**International cooperation for shared lakes in southeastern Europe -
the Prespa, Ohrid and Skadar regions**

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Texts of the presentation slides:

Lakes Prespa

Two lakes at an altitude of 850m shared between Albania, Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Micro Prespa has a surface of 47km² and Macro Prespa a surface of 259km². Both are separated by a strip of sandy land, approx. 200-1000m wide and 4km long. The lakes are mesotrophic to eutrophic.

Lake Shkodra/Skadar

The largest lake in the Balkans, shared between Albania and Montenegro, with a total surface oscillating between 368-542 km². Lake Shkodra is considered as one of 24 transboundary sites of international importance in Central and Eastern Europe, known as "Ecological Bricks". It is an important site for waterfowl.

Ohrid and Prespa region - experiences and lessons learned

Achievement of the Prespa Park activities (about four years of trilateral cooperation)

The creation of the transboundary Prespa Park through the Prime Ministers' declaration on 2 February 2000 lead to the establishment of a trilateral Prespa Park Coordination Committee. The Committee consists of 10 representatives, three of each country (national and local authorities, experts), plus the Ramsar Convention (as an observer). The Committee prepared a Strategic Action Programme as the basic document for the area. This was formally approved by the authorities. It furthermore developed a GEF project proposal and is currently executing the PDF-B phase in view of starting a full-sized project for implementation activities in all three countries. The Committee disseminates information about the Park activities through a special officer and a permanent website, and it prepares meetings between the three Ministers of Environment.

The Skadar lake region - experiences and lessons learned

The Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministries of Environment led to the approval of a GEF project for the integrated management of the lake, with a budget of about 5 million USD. An Italian project is carried out to control the fishing activities. Cooperation between universities and NGOs is promoted by a project coordinated by REC, the Regional Centre for Environmental Cooperation, financially supported by Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation. The German technical cooperation GTZ supports a small grants program for the environment projects. The German development bank KfW supports activities related to sewage water treatment.

Ohrid and Prespa region - what did we learn during this period?

Positive achievements

We know each other at all the levels. Creation of bilateral and trilateral organisms. We identified the main threats in the region and described the way to avoid and mitigate them. We produced a lot of common documents. We identified local governments and NGOs as important actors for achieving our goals. We identified common cultural values in the countries concerned.

Constraints and difficulties

Political problems of the region. Differences in the problems the three countries are facing. Lack of coordination between the people working for the lakes. Lack of capacities at local level.

Biosphere Reserve - viability and ecological integrity of protected areas

Considering the Ohrid-Prespa lake system as one single ecological entity falls in line with current land use planning approaches that are known variously as the “bioregional”, “ecosystem” or “landscape level” planning approach. The biosphere reserve concept addresses biodiversity conservation in an ecosystem context, seeking to conserve integral ecological systems within which species can live and evolve. The focus is very much on the conservation of ecosystems rather than on single species. In the Ohrid-Prespa region both the core sites and the corridors are embedded into a matrix of mixed land uses and ownership patterns. Two main factors need to be taken into account: cultural diversity and environmental education.

New approaches

The recognition of the international and European principles (precautionary principle, ecosystem approach, partnership, etc.) has to include: the integration of environmental issues into economical goals, collaboration between the decision making and the local authorities with emphasis of capacity building, facilitating, providing and sharing information with all stakeholders; trying to involve the donors community with realistic and strong implementing projects; increasing the role of the existing bi- and trilateral structures in order to facilitate collaboration.