

Review of The Action Taken by The Ministry of the Environment and Waters Following Performance Audit on the Implementation of the Provisions of the Danube River Protection Convention (Bulgaria)

Theme: Protection of Water

REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA

NATIONAL AUDIT OFFICE

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Bulgaria ranks low on the list of European countries rich in water resources. Therefore, the protection, rational use and management of water are vitally important to nationwide sustained development. Water provision per capita/ per annum, accounting for external and internal water resources in Bulgaria is 6 times lower than it is in Albania, 4 times less than former Yugoslavia and twice less than in Greece. Over the last few decades a decrease has been registered in water generated through hydrological cycle. The average annual flow has decreased by 40% over the 1985-1995 period.

Quantitative insufficiency apart, available water resources are not evenly distributed across the country. These facts characterize a situation, which gives rise to concern. A Environmental and Water Survey carried out by the Ministry of the Environment and Waters highlights that the existence of a water deficit is further complicated by unreasonably high water consumption, owing to:

- relatively low technological level of development of industry;
- the structure of the economy, which leads to high level of water consumption in some areas;
- extremely high levels of water loss along the distribution network;
- low environmental awareness of the population.

Some of the factors mentioned above also contribute towards increasing water pollution as well as deterioration in the quality of water generally.

The sector analysis under the “Waters” component of the National Environmental Strategy shows that the condition of water resources (in terms of quality and quantity) has been assessed as “posing risks to the social and economic development of the country”. Even minor changes to rainfall quantities and water balance could lead to major difficulties in the economic development of certain regions and to people’s daily lives.

The problems mentioned so far have contributed to the National Audit Office of the Republic of Bulgaria developing an interest in “the water issues”. Over the period 2000-2001 a performance audit was carried out jointly with four other Danubian countries – Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia and Croatia – in order to examine the implementation of the provisions of the Danube River Protection Convention by the Ministry

of the Environment and Waters and local authorities over the April 1st, 1999 until June 30th, 2001 period. The audit results were published on the web page of the Bulgarian National Audit Office.

Several important measures were taken by the Ministry of the Environment and Waters following the audit.

Work has continued towards the harmonization of Bulgarian legislation in the field of water management. Rules and regulations were enacted with the aim of:

- the establishment of Basin Directorates, their structure and activities;
- the establishment and activities of the Supreme Water Consultation Council;
- the quality of bathing water;
- the issuance of permissions for the wastewater discharge in water reservoirs and determination of individual emission limitations.

Other legislation has been enacted relating to the determination, classification, packaging, transportation and other activities in relation to dangerous and hazardous chemical substances, including the Regulation on the Final Assessment of the Risk of New Chemical Substances to Human Beings and the Environment.

A new Environment Protection Law has been enacted. Compulsory environmental impact assessment of the strategies, plans and programmes is required according to the provisions of the new law. The law makes provisions for the development of a National Environmental Management and Auditing Scheme, which will set criteria for assessing the environmental impact of operating enterprises, facilities and programmes.

ISO 14000 Standards have been selected to serve as main prerequisite and basis for statutory provisions implementation and have further been incorporated as an element of the Bulgarian National Standards.

The new measures taken are aimed at achieving continual improvement of the results of a wide range of organizations in the area of environmental protection and provision of relevant information to the general public and interested third parties in the process of discussing and finding solutions to problems in the area of environmental protection.

The delay of the adoption and/or ratification of a number of statutory acts, regulating important issues in this field, is a concern.

In particular, the Ratification Act of the Use and Protection of Cross-border Water Courses and International Lakes Convention, signed in Helsinki in 1992, has not to date been included in the Parliament's list of acts scheduled for adoption.

Another instance of delay has been observed in the case of the adoption of the Meteorological and Hydrological Activities in the Republic of Bulgaria Act. This prevents the efficient functioning of those elements of the National Water Monitoring System, which measure the quantity of rainfall and surface water.

The Minister of the Environment and Waters has not to date issued a methodology for determining of the minimum admissible levels of water runoff of rivers as prescribed by law. Feasibility studies have been

carried out and a methodology has been developed to be applied at the basins of two Bulgarian rivers. No information is available for the remaining river basins. This makes impossible to estimate the minimum runoff and to develop a general methodology.

There is an inadequate coordination of the actions of the state authorities, responsible for the development of the general and specialized cadastres, required by the Cadastre and Land Registry Act. The Ministry of Environment and Waters has not determined the structure, contents and operation of activities related to the Water Economy Cadastre. The Water Economy Balances and assessment of water condition should be based on information contained in the Cadastre, as required by the Water Act. The absence of this makes the effective water management in Bulgaria impossible.

In December 2001 a financial memorandum was signed between the European Commission and the Republic of Bulgaria for the implementation of an ISPA-funded project for the construction of a regional wastewater treatment plant for the towns of Gorna Oriahovitsa, Dolna Oriahovitsa and Lyaskovets. The intended investment is 16 634 000 Euro, 75% of this amounting to 12 475 000 Euro, is provided by ISPA, and the remainder of 4 158 000 Euro, is to be provided from internal financial resources.

The implementation of the project would not have been possible but for the preliminary efforts of the respective administrations of the three municipalities. A site on which the plant will be constructed has been selected and allocated. An environmental impact assessment has been carried out and the report has been approved by the Supreme Expert Environmental Council. To ensure the normal functioning of the future wastewater treatment plant it was necessary to modify the existing sewerage systems to redirect wastewater from the three settlements to the location selected. The financial resources required for this work, amounting to 700 000 BGN (approx. 350 000 Euro) was supplied from the state budget.

This project will help significantly the improvement of the water quality in the Danube River Basin.

In July 2002 MEW and EIA (Environment Implementing Agency) experts took part in a stocktaking project on potential sources of pollution in the Danube River basin. The updated information will allow the Bulgarian government to identify the environmental projects of most importance for the sustainable development of water management in Bulgaria.