

## **Joint Statement by the Participants of the Timok River Forum**

Representatives of regional and local authorities, and non-governmental organisations met on February 26, 2009 in Vidin, Bulgaria, to discuss and agree on cooperation on the Timok River basin under the framework of the Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC). The meeting was organised by the Regional Environmental Center.

The medium and long-term objectives of the Timok River project are to ensure the joint management of the river basin; to guarantee the sustainable development of the area in question; and to improve the quality of water, the environment in general and the livelihoods of the population, independent of gender, living on both sides of the border.

The participants acknowledge and underline that:

- Addressing environmental problems that threaten the future well being of the citizens on both sides of the river is of utmost importance.
- The transboundary character of the Timok River requires transboundary cooperation between Serbia and Bulgaria for the management of its basin.
- The integrated river basin management approach shall guide the actions undertaken by authorities from both Serbia and Bulgaria.
- The existing legal framework, including provisions of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention), the Convention on Cooperation for the Protection and Sustainable Use of the River Danube (Danube River Protection Convention), as well as EU instruments, in particular the Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC) and the Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control Directive (96/61/EC and 2008/1/EC), should be applied and implemented at national level.
- The agreement concerning transboundary water management issues adopted in 1958 between the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia and the People's Republic of Bulgaria should be revised in line with the EU Water Framework Directive and Water Convention requirements.
- A new bilateral agreement concerning transboundary water management issues should be harmonised with the Water Framework Directive and the Water Convention. This bilateral agreement would contribute to the achievement of joint and sustainable river basin management and to improving the water status of the Timok River and other common rivers, such as the Nisava and its tributaries and the Dragovistica.
- There is a need to upgrade and connect existing centres for monitoring environmental media (air, water, soil) at local level to the network of European centres.
- There is a need to create a database on existing projects, strategic documents, relevant institutions and contact persons in local municipalities in the Timok River basin as a basis for exchanging experience, planning new projects and connecting municipalities to other municipalities and to institutions.
- There is a need to establish contact and intensify cooperation and information exchange with representatives of the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities in Serbia as a national association of local authorities, and with the corresponding body in Bulgaria.

The participants approve the Environmental and Risk Assessment of the Timok River Basin, prepared by Serbian and Bulgarian experts.

The participants agree that the results of the efforts so far provide only an initial step towards the joint management of the river basin and they invite national authorities from both countries to pursue the cooperation process initiated in the Timok River basin and to work together towards the joint management of all shared rivers. The participants invite the donor community to further support those efforts and to mobilise the necessary resources for the continuation of the long-term project as submitted to ENVSEC and the extension of their activities.

The participants express their appreciation to the REC and UNECE for facilitating the process and organising the first meetings under the project. They convey their gratitude to the Canadian International Development Agency and the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency for their kind support.

The participants thank the regional governor of Vidin for hosting the meeting and creating a constructive atmosphere for fruitful discussions.

Date: February 26, 2009