

UN-Water interviews Dejan Komatina



*Dejan Komatina, Secretary
of the International Sava
River Basin Commission*

What are your wishes and expectations for the meeting?

My wishes include the adoption of the new programme of work (for the period 2013-2015), and thus a commitment of the countries to being active in the new areas of work, especially those focused on the quantifying the benefits of transboundary cooperation, and the elaboration of the “water-energy-food-ecosystems” nexus.

This would additionally contribute to the further work of the International Sava River Basin Commission (ISRBC), as the only European international water commission dealing with the whole of water resources management, including the issues of both water and ecosystem protection and economic development.

What are your hopes and ambitions in relation to water cooperation in your basin and what are the challenges?

At the beginning, it is very important to note that the ISRBC has been mandated with the broadest scope of work among all international water (river and lake) commissions in Europe. The scope of work of the ISRBC is as broad as to address all aspects of water resources management, including the water and ecosystem protection, the protection against the harmful effects of water (due to floods, droughts, ice and accidental water pollution), as well as the development issues associated with the water use, such as navigation and river tourism. So, the main principles of the UNECE Water Convention do fully correspond to the process of implementation of the Framework Agreement on the Sava River Basin (FASRB) and thus the challenges of the FASRB implementation fully correspond to the challenges of the future implementation of the UNECE Water Convention.

From the viewpoint of further implementation of the FASRB, the challenges include a lack of human and financial resources of the Parties, ensuring funds for implementation of the priority projects, limited access to basic data needed for preparation of studies of common interest under the umbrella of the ISRBC, as well as lack of appropriate institutional arrangements and, in some countries, lack of harmonization of the legislation with the EU acquis. Additionally, it seems that the progress in the field of water management, where requirements toward the Parties are based on recommendations and conclusions of the ISRBC (unlike the ISRBC decisions in the field of navigation), is partly affected by a different perception of the requirements by the competent authorities of the Parties.

How important the water convention has been for your basin?

There have been several contributions to the implementation of the FASRB:

- On a general level, there has certainly been the benefit of using the Convention as a model for the integrated approach to transboundary water management. Given the fact

that the ISRBC is tasked with a broad scope of work, covering practically all aspects of water management, including the issues of both water and ecosystem protection and economic development, the approach of the Convention (based on using the basin as the main unit, the cooperation on both surface- and groundwater, the involvement of all basin countries, and the understanding of the transboundary impact), is exactly what the Sava ISRBC is trying to apply in its work.

- Another benefit relates to the preparation of the first Sava River Basin Management Plan in accordance with the EU WFD, under the coordinating role of the ISRBC. In addition to a concrete project that was implemented in the framework of the Convention, that is the hydromorphology analysis for preparation of the Sava basin characterization report, this benefit relates mainly to the assessments of transboundary waters, done under the Convention. The two assessments provided valuable information on the state of waters, contributed to identifying pressures and impacts, and also to indicating the measures, and thus supported our activities on the preparation of the Plan.
- There are benefits of the Convention's work on adaptation of water management to climate change, which enabled the implementation of a pilot project in the Sava River Basin, which aims to link the flood risk management planning and the climate change assessment in the basin, and which also provided the opportunities to share the experiences among the pilot basins, which is an important issue, as well.

How do you see the water convention evolving? How would you like it to evolve?

In addition to the activities already included into the proposed Program of Work for 2013-2015, I would like to mention two more potentially interesting topics:

- The issue of sediment, which is a very important issue for transboundary water cooperation (this should especially include the improvement of knowledge on sediment, and cooperation on sediment management on the basin scale, etc.), and
- Further improvement of the science-policy interaction – the interaction between the scientific community and policy makers – which is always a challenging issue.