

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WFD – EXPERIENCE OF GREECE

The Water Framework Directive represents a revolutionary approach in the field of water resources management. Immediately, after it came into force, at the end of the year 2000, it became clear that the successful implementation of the Directive in Greece would be challenging and ambitious, considering the binding objectives and the clear deadlines. But, despite its recent adoption, the WFD has in fact already become a key instrument for sustainable water policy in the country.

For the first time, the Directive sets ecological criteria for water quality and provides for an integrated management on the basis of river basins, rather than administrative borders. It radically reorganized the domestic water policy: The policy moves from protection of particular waters of special interest to a national water policy that promote sustainable water use based on a long term protection of available water resources. For the successful implementation of the Directive in the country, it was soon realized the necessity to involve stakeholders, NGOs and the research community in this process and encourage the creative participation of interested parties.

The implementation process of the WFD in Greece is not easy. The main challenge is to achieve the environmental objectives of the Directive, adjusted to the particularities of the Greek region. In order to achieve this, during the implementation process, we had to face (and we still face) specific questions, problems and challenges that can be distinguished into organisational and technical. Some of the organisational challenges involve the coordination of administrative activities within the river basin districts in relation to the distribution of competencies and responsibilities and the fragmentation of roles, the establishment and the effectiveness of coordination mechanism between the competent authorities in the case of transboundary river basins, the limited political and public awareness on water issues, the lack of adequate resources, personnel and funds to enable a timely execution of the required tasks and the lack of essential expertise of the human resources. The technical problems are related to national, regional and/or local situations and conditions and include, among others, the lack of sufficient data in certain fields (biological data, economic data), necessary for the first crucial stages of the implementation process, the lack of appropriate monitoring systems, the severe shortage of capacity to manage water resources, frequent extended droughts causing water shortage problems, the numerous small rivers with no continuous flow, the aquifer salinization in some coastal areas and the increased irrigation with tendency of resulting in environmental problems, such as ground water pollution from nutrients and pesticides.

Current charges for water use are not also generally in line with the provisions of the WFD. In particular the agricultural sector is not paying the real costs of water, considering the amounts consumed and the infrastructures that have been built to manage water for agricultural use. Obviously, in particular for agriculture, the principle of full cost recovery will introduce considerable changes. But it is unreasonable that certain groups of economic actors, like the tourism industry and in particular farmers, whose activities very often have important negative impacts on the aquatic environment, do not pay the real price for waters. However, the modern agriculture has begun to realise its role as a caretaker of the environment and the natural resources. We see more

and more a tendency of targeted efforts to adjust agricultural production methods to a balanced interaction with the environment in order to reduce and improve water consumption.

The new law on water that transposes the WFD into the national legislation and was recently adopted by the Greek Parliament, provides a solution to many of the above mentioned problems. This new legislation provides a fundamental restructuring of the competencies in water management in Greece, deleting existing overlapping of responsibilities. According to this new administrative framework, the Regional Water Directories have the responsibility of organising and coordinating water policy activities and implementing the WFD within each river basin district. They will be supervised by a National Water Service, the governmental authority with the overall responsibility for establishing and coordinating the water policy. Many of the above mentioned technical problems encountered, like the availability and quality of the data, will be solved within this new framework.

The public participation is seen as a key element for the successful implementation of the WFD in the country. The definition of clear criteria to promote public participation in order to improve not only the transparency but also to give people the framework for a pragmatic and fruitful participation through the whole process of WFD implementation is under discussion. This issue is also addressed in the new legislation: the active involvement of the interested parties will be ensured by the representation to the National and Regional Councils for water, parts of the new administrative framework of the country.

It is clear that an adequate implementation of the WFD will not be feasible without additional human and financial resources. Reduced water consumption through the use of certain incentives, changes in crop choices and development of efficient irrigation systems are explored. Capacity building especially within the local communities is a vital element in ensuring that civil society plays an active and efficient role in the WFD implementation process. It is also clear that discussions among the involved parties on implementation tasks and the coordination of activities at river basin level rather than at national or at a level of river basin district are expected to provide solutions to many of the above mentioned problems.

The Pinios Pilot River Basin Project is very essential in order to allocate the organisational and technical problems during the implementation of the WFD and to develop pragmatic solutions. This pilot river basin exercise is really a way to learn, especially for the local and regional authorities, about the implementation of the Water Framework Directive through real cases.

In conclusion, we can say that the WFD should be seen as an incentive for finding solutions which build on a better balance between exploitation of available resources and protection and improvement of the natural resources and natural environment.

The successful implementation of the WFD, presupposes:

- the appropriate infrastructure,
- great effort from all concerned,
- long term planning,
- change of thinking,
- allocation of adequate financial resources,
- political will.