

ASEM SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT DIALOGUE

CONCEPT PAPER

of

THE FIRST ASEM SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT SEMINAR ON THE ROLE OF WATER IN SUSTAINABLE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

(Showcase of the Danube Region Strategy and the Greater Mekong Subregion:

Initiative for co-operation and comprehensive interaction among regional development strategies)

Date of the event:	20-22 June, 2012
Location:	Budapest, Hungary
Venue:	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Hungary H-1027 Budapest, Bem rkp. 47.
Contacts:	Szabolcs TAKÁCS and dr. Norbert RÉVAI-BERE, MFA HUNGARY sztakacs@mfa.gov.hu & nrevaibere@mfa.gov.hu
Organizers:	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Hungary, Hungarian Institute of International Affairs, Hungarian Chamber of Engineers
Co-Sponsors:	Romania, Vietnam, Bulgaria, Laos, <i>Asia-Europe Foundation (tbc)</i>

Hungary, upon the consultation with ASEM partners, intends to launch the initiative of an ASEM Sustainable Development Dialogue by hosting the first event of the sequence of seminars in Budapest on 20-22 June, 2012 with the title: ‘Role of Water in Sustainable Regional Development Strategies (Showcase of the Danube Region Strategy and the Greater Mekong Subregion: Initiative for co-operation and comprehensive interaction among regional development strategies)’.

1.Context and purpose

Water is widely regarded as the most essential of natural resources, yet freshwater systems are directly threatened by human activities and stand to be further affected by climate change. Nearly 80% of the world’s population is exposed to high levels of threat to water security declining rapidly. Water systems are transformed through widespread land cover change, urbanization, industrialization and engineering schemes like reservoirs, irrigation and interbasin transfers that maximize human access to water, upstream pollution and over-utilisation of groundwater from artesian basins. The benefits of water provision to economic productivity are often accompanied by impairment to ecosystems and biodiversity, with potentially serious but unquantified costs. While regional impacts will vary, global climate change will potentially alter agricultural productivity, freshwater availability and quality, access to vital minerals, flooding, and more. Among the consequences of these impacts will be challenges to political relationships, realignment of energy markets and regional economies, and threats to security with direct impacts to regions, states and countries. The success of integrated water management strategies depends on striking a balance between human resource use and ecosystem protection, a balance between economic development and environment protection, a balance between renewing and conserving, between innovation and tradition. Water therefore is an overarching issue through several different areas of regional and interregional cooperation from regional connectivity, energy and economic integration through disaster preparedness, climate change and environment, water management and food security including the accessibility of drinking water to even sustainable growth, development and poverty reduction.

Interventions in water systems are necessary to meet the needs of society in the widest sense aimed at the enhancement of the beneficial and sustainable use of water. Good water governance reduces poverty and increases living standards. Technology transfer and sharing best practises has crucial role in efforts of water-related capacity building. Sustainable development will not be achieved without a water secure world integrating water resources management across all sectors – finance, planning, agriculture, energy, tourism, industry, education, research, innovation and health.

Similar regional and sub-regional co-operations in Asia and Europe such as the Mekong or the Danube initiatives have useful experiences and best practises to share in order to facilitate green infrastructure, application of long-term and ecosystem-based solutions for the challenges faced by the regions of the river-basins. Concerned countries face their common challenges and destined to collaborate to make the best of the vast economic and social potential of the river basins. Interlinkages between water and other sectors of development policy should be also recognized, thus, the catalytic role of water with the historic role of rivers in inclusive growth and for sustainable development and consequently water-related capacity building should be reinforced.

Transboundary river basins have great potential for cooperation. Establishing a Danube-Mekong cooperation initiative will be a vibrant opportunity to foster a new sector of Asia-Europe cooperation through enhanced connectivity and interaction among countries having enormous experience and knowledge to share as well as to assist other developing counterparts in terms of capacity building. Collaboration among states in the watershed of transboundary rivers by establishing macro-regions and their development strategies such as the Danube Region Strategy or the Greater Mekong Subregion is an opportunity, opening a new dimension in regional cooperation. The Chair's Statement of the Tenth ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting held on 6-7 June 2011 in Hungary highlighted the enhanced role of sustainable water resources management in international development cooperation in order to broaden the benefits of climate-resilient water management, particularly in flood and drought management. Ministers noted the progress of establishing an ASEM Water Resources Research and Development Center which was approved at the ASEM 8 Summit. Ministers also noted the largest rivers like the Mekong in Asia or the Danube in Europe have common features due to their size, and from coming consequence, the international character. In the threatening shadow of global climate change cooperation is more essential than ever between countries on development and better utilization of water resources, flood control and flood risk mapping, water quantity and quality monitoring, wetland and water related habitat conservation, urban drinking and wastewater supply planning and managing, integrated river basin management planning and other trans-boundary water issues. Similar regional co-operations in Asia and Europe such as the Mekong or the Danube initiatives might have useful experiences and best practises to share. To this end, Ministers noted the proposal to establish a Danube-Mekong Cooperation Initiative. Widening the cooperation between the Danube Region Strategy, the macro-regional development strategy and action plan for the regions and countries located in the catchment area of the Danube river, targeting the sustainable development of the Danube macro-region and the Greater Mekong Subregion, designed to enhance subregional economic cooperation and relations among the countries of the natural economic area bound together by the Mekong River, will provide additional benefits and significantly enrich interregional co-operation while other regions and river-valleys of the ASEM-area could also gain benefits from their experiences.

2. Objectives and outcome

The main purpose of this conference will be to facilitate interested officials, public policy thinkers, advisers, scholars, intellectuals and experts from think tanks, academia, educational and foreign policy institutions, civil society and private consultancies as well as research institutes to contribute their ideas and experiences to the dialogue with particular regard to the impact of water-security and the role of transboundary rivers in sustainable development and regional cooperation providing a format for open and forward-looking discussions. The event is designed to be a platform of prominent European and Asian participants in order to discuss the challenges of integrated regional development strategies of great river basin sub-regions such as the Danube and the Mekong, aiming to strengthen economic and development cooperation as well as sharing experiences and best practices between macro-regional development programmes. Enriched interaction and potential cooperation among different state actors and NGOs, civil organisations or other actors of the private sector could be also on the agenda as a forward looking phenomenon in this regard.

The objective is to elucidate, discuss and where possible identify priorities and positions on important areas of common interest, in order to set scene and provide recommendations, ideas, conclusions and proposals for further cooperation possibilities on development and better utilization of water resources, integrated river basin management planning and other issues as mentioned in the Chairs' Statement of the ASEM FMM10 with a view of a possible outcome in this regard at the ASEM 9 Summit in Vientiane this year.

3. Participants

- Scholars, researchers, advisers, experts, government officials and other intellectuals from various European and Asian educational and foreign policy institutions, civil society and private consultancies as well as research institutes of ASEM partners invited by the organisers following the guidelines set in the Asia-Europe Cooperation Framework (AECF) 2000.
- Number of participants: app. 120
- Media access is limited to opening and closing sessions.

4. Programme structure

- **One day event in four sessions (21 June, 2012)**
(morning from 9 a.m. to 12.30 a.m. and afternoon from 2.00 p.m. to 5.30 p.m.)

PROGRAMME (preliminary draft)

Wednesday Evening on the day before the conference (20 June, 2012):

1930- hrs **Welcome Dinner Reception** (*Venue: tbc*)

Thursday (21 June, 2012)

0800-0845hrs **Registration**

0900-1030hrs **Opening Session: ‘Role of Water in Sustainable Regional Development Strategies’**

Opening by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Hungary;

opening introductory speeches by officials from European and Asian co-organisers

Chair: Asian invitee

Keynote speeches (20 minutes) by leading Asian and European public policy thinkers/experts

1030-1100hrs **Coffee**

1100-1230hrs **Session 2: ‘Subregional development strategies along transboundary river basins: the showcase of the Danube Region Strategy and the Greater Mekong Subregion’**

Chair: European invitee

Speech by an Asian invitee

Speech by a European invitee

Debate, questions and answers (30 minutes)

1300-1400hrs **Luncheon**

1400-1530hrs **Session 3: ‘Role of water management in promoting sustainable development objectives’**

Chair: Asian invitee

Speech by a European invitee

Speech by an Asian invitee

Debate, questions and answers (30 minutes)

1530-1600hrs **Coffee**

1600-1730hrs **Closing Session: Co-operation of Asia and Europe on sustainable development - Presenting conclusions and proposals from the working sessions.**

Chair: European invitee

Closing remarks by the **host of the Conference.**

1730-1900hrs **Danube Flow** – “civil society and the Danube” – outdoor event on the river bank

Friday (22 June, 2012)

0900- hrs **Daytrip by boat to the Danube Bend visiting the scenic cities of Visegrad and Szentendre and visit to the Headquarters of Regional Environmental Center (REC)**

5. Distributions of costs:

- Hosted by MFA, Hungary: conference venue and lunch and an informal welcome dinner for participants on the eve of the conference
- Co-sponsors finance travel and subsistence costs and accommodation for two nights for speaker(s) and/or participant(s) from the respective European and Asian members of ASEM co-sponsors