

ASEM SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT DIALOGUE

CONCEPT PAPER

of

THE 7TH ASEM SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT DIALOGUE ON “SUSTAINABLE AND INTEGRATED WATER MANAGEMENT IN THE 21ST CENTURY: ADDRESSING IMMINENT CHALLENGES”

Tentative date: 27 – 28 September 2018

(Venue: Budapest, Hungary)

In March 1996, the leaders of 25 European and Asian countries, together with the European Commission, convened in Bangkok, Thailand, for the inaugural Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). Since then environmental aspects have become even more pronounced on the international agenda, and ASEM has developed a genuine discussion on environmental issues. Promoting this process, Hungary launched the initiative of an ASEM Sustainable Development Dialogue by hosting the first event of the sequence of seminars in 2012 in Budapest, focusing on the ‘Role of Water in Sustainable Regional Development Strategies’.

The so-called Budapest Initiative enables ASEM Partners to regularly discuss water management related issues. Participating countries agreed to reinforce collective efforts to promote the sustainable use and management of water resources. The overall objective was to ensure the right to access safe drinking water and sanitation, full policy coherence and well-functioning water-related ecosystems. Sharing experience and best practices between macro-regional development strategies such as the Danube Region Strategy or the Greater Mekong Subregion can provide additional benefits for other subregional initiatives by significantly strengthening interregional co-operation capacities.

At the 13th ASEM Foreign Ministers’ Meeting in Myanmar, held in November 2017, Ministers stated their support for exchanging knowledge and best practices within the ASEM framework on key policy areas and continued engagement in the bi-regional cooperation between the Danube and Mekong regions. The Budapest Initiative transforms shared challenges related to transboundary water management into opportunities for inclusive growth and sustainable development. Ministers expressed concern over the negative impacts of climate change, environmental degradation and natural disasters on the sustainable development of ASEM partners.

In previous years, Hungary played a key role at international level in the implementation of 2030 Agenda to achieve SDG-6. The organization of the Budapest Water Summit (BWS) in 2013 and the final document



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of the BWS2016 identified a comprehensive asset of actions related to challenges of water and recognized the need for an appropriate intergovernmental platform on water and sanitation. Policy recommendations – composed in agreement with more than 2200 participants from 117 countries of the Summit – have been provided for the implementation of SDG-6. Through the Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship program, Hungary has supported the capacity building of 13 ASEM countries in Asia since 2013.

Hungary holds the Chairmanship of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Water Convention until October 2018. The Convention was adopted in Helsinki in 1992 and entered into force in 1996. In 2016, the Convention officially became a global legal framework for transboundary water cooperation available for all Member States. More than 110 countries worldwide have already participated in its meetings and activities. The main role of the Convention is to improve transboundary water cooperation on international basins. It's work program covers also global issues, such as climate change mitigation, water-food-energy-ecosystem nexus which has great importance for ASEM countries as well.

Furthermore, Hungary has cooperated with Laos, Indonesia and Vietnam on projects related to the improvement of sanitation. International Development Assistance projects have been financed in Mongolia regarding integrated river basin management planning and in Myanmar to train experts for increased preparedness against natural disasters. Bilateral water cooperation agreements were signed with many ASEM countries.

Hungary plays active role in the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR). ICPDR works to ensure the sustainable and equitable use of waters and freshwater resources in the Danube River Basin. The work of the ICPDR is based on the Danube River Protection Convention, the major legal instrument for cooperation and trans-boundary water management in the Danube River Basin. Hungary will take over the ICPDR Presidency in 2019.

Finally, Hungary is co-ordinating the 'Water quality' and 'Environmental risks' priority areas of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region since 2011, which involves 14 countries of the most international river basin of the world.

Taking into consideration the results of the previous ASEM Sustainable Development Dialogues, Hungary has decided to organize the subsequent seminar in 2018. We are guided by the ambition to further stimulate the available cooperative mechanisms towards harmonized water resources management.

The 7th ASEM Sustainable Development Dialogue, to be held in Budapest in September 2018, will be structured around the following four thematic axes:

- focus on relevance of accelerated urbanization and sustainable use of water resources



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- water quality management regarding hazardous substances, micro pollutants and plastic waste in water bodies, highlighting state-of-art solutions and application of circular economy;
- water allocation on transboundary basins, including water scarcity and drought management, the quality and quantity of surface and groundwaters;
- increased preparedness and resilience of regions via water-related disaster management as an answer to the negative impacts of climate change; and
- showcase possibilities and identify barriers of modern education in the 21st century to increase capabilities of the water sector.

The two-day event is financed by Hungary and hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The organisers expect approximately 150 participants – high-level representatives and experts from ASEM countries, European External Action Service, the European Commission and the ASEAN Secretariat, including government officials, scholars, researchers, regional and international institutions/organizations, local authorities as well as the non-governmental and business sectors. The working language of the event will be English.

Participants from ASEM partners are kindly asked to cover their travel and accommodation expenses. ASEM partners will be requested to delegate speakers to the Seminar, contributing with comments and suggestions to the provisional agenda of the event as well as the final document.

We are convinced that the suggested topic of the seminar “Sustainable and integrated water management in the 21st century: addressing imminent challenges” offers an opportunity for exchange of information and know-how between ASEM partners on crucial aspects related to sustainable development.