

Cross-border implementation of EU Flood Directive

Based on experiences in several European river basins

Proposal for a European network project – version 6 July 2007

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1.1 Urgency of sustainable flood management

In the last decade Europe suffered a number of major floods, causing fatalities, the displacement of people, great economic losses and large impact on nature. Human interventions and activities in river basins appear to reduce the resilience of water systems and their environment while climate change even seems to increase the risk of flooding. Current policy has been to react via technical solutions, e.g. by raising dikes. Recently, the need to develop appropriate new strategies, integrated policies and programmes to adapt to the changing circumstances, reduce negative impacts of flooding and protect the dynamic functioning of ecosystems has widely been recognized.

1.2 European tendencies in water management

The European water policies and legislation (WFD, FRMD) embrace an approach to sustainable integrated water resources management. Guiding principles in the European water policy are the following:

- River basin management: water management should be based on boundaries of the river basin, not on administrative areas or country borders, thus taking into account river systems as a whole, from source to mouth. This is valid for large (inter)national rivers like the Danube, Maas or Elbe, as well as for small regional water systems.
- Principle of solidarity: the river basin approach implies that problems may not be shifted towards neighbouring countries or regions. Negative effects between upstream and downstream areas should be prevented and positive effects need to be stimulated.
- Sustainability principle: integrated water management aims at a combination of economic development, ecological protection and development as well as social justice. River basin management should start from a cohesive approach in which a broad spectrum of interests, disciplines and policy fields are involved. Issues like water quality, water quantity, ground water, space, economy, ecology and environment need to be balanced.
- Public participation: active public involvement in development and implementation of water management strategies and plans.

1.3 Benefits of a river basin approach in flood management

Floods are basin wide phenomena which do not respect borders, neither national nor regional and certainly not institutional. Thus, floods often create common problems between regions and countries, although the effects tend to have locally varying intensity. It is widely recognised that effective prevention of and intervention against floods requires cross-border cooperation. Therefore, the EU flood directive aims at creating one single flood risk management plan for each river basin, thus promoting coordination and collaboration between authorities across borders.

The great advantage of a river basin approach is that knowledge on the flood formation processes can be shared and opportunities may arise to find better and more cost effective solutions. Furthermore,

enlarging the planning space enables the implementation of measures at locations where they create optimum effect. Finally, calamity management is highly depending on early information and requires forecasts and data from the river basin as a whole.

1.4 Challenges of achieving river basin management in practice

Despite above mentioned principles in European policies and regulations and good examples of well functioning international river basin commissions in which Member States cooperate intensively in international river basins, cross border cooperation is still not obvious daily practice on the operational level in most European river systems. Causes can be quite divers, ranging from technical incompatibility of existing models and differences in applied standards on either side of the border to language barriers, cultural differences, absence of political priority or unwillingness to invest in effective flood measures across the border.

So effective river basin management requires specific efforts from regional and local authorities on both sides of the border. Successful cross border cooperation depends on a mutual understanding of the problem and its causes with respect to natural and social processes as well as of the needs of all stakeholders involved. To make progress, common goals, agreed strategies and compensation mechanisms such as cross border financing or other trade offs to balance regional burdens and advantages are needed. This can only be reached if counter parts know and trust each other by working frequently together and exchange of relevant data and available information.

1.5 Proposal for project contents

To prepare water management authorities for the implementation of the EU flood directive, a project is proposed, addressing the following issues:

- Inventory of context and existing frameworks: the EU flood directive allows Member States to use existing flood risk maps and flood risk management plans for the purposes of satisfying the requirements of this Directive to prevent duplication of work. What are the requirements for these maps and plans and which maps, plans, policies and measures already exist in the riparian countries and regions involved in the respective river basin?
- What is additionally needed for the implementation of EU flood directive: What is required to apply the tools prescribed in the EU flood directive and to which extend is present practice already 'flood directive proof'? For example, is it necessary to (further) harmonize standards, models and/or other working methods? Or is it possible to cooperate within the river basin by exchanging relevant data without harmonizing systems? What to do (additionally) in terms of public and stakeholder involvement? And finally, how does this all relate to the implementation of other relevant EU directives, such as the Water Framework and Habitat directives? The Flood Directive has the following three main pillars: assessment of flood risks, development of flood hazard (risk) maps and the development of integrated flood management plan. Some elements of these pillars are quite common, nevertheless the assessment of environmental impacts of floods and of flood mitigation/protection measures as required by the flood directive, have not been addressed by other projects in depth yet.
- Towards a joint implementation strategy of EU-flood directive in pilot basins: Is it possible to create a mutual understanding of the flood problems and its causes with respect to natural and social processes as well as of the needs of all stakeholders involved? Which mutual and common goals, agreed strategies and compensation mechanisms such as cross border financing or other trade offs can be identified?

1.6 Aim and scope

Aims of the project are:

- Exchange of knowledge on institutional, instrumental and technical issues on the assessment of flood risks and the development of flood maps and flood management plans;
- Stimulate cross-border cooperation within and between river basins with respect to flood management strategies, targets and measures by using policy recommendations and good practices from the Flapp-network.
- Stimulation of mutual cross-border benefits by application of the solidarity principle.
- Development and exchange of cross-border implementation strategies for the European Flood Directive in pilot river basins
- Recommendations to EU, member states and organizations involved in the implementation process.

Furthermore, a unique networking element is introduced since this project will address the above mentioned questions in representative parallel pilots in distinct international river basins. Normally, experiences are rarely shared between experts of river systems that are not naturally linked. But much can be learned about existing flood management approaches, methods and tools in separate river basins. To join forces and to avoid that responsible authorities in each European river system individually have “to invent the wheel” with respect to the implementation requirements of the EU-Flood Directive, regular contacts between experts in distinct river basins will be coordinated by a shared project secretariat to exchange experiences and findings: what can we learn from each other?

1.7 Expected results

The outcome of the project will be the following:

- Better comprehension of -and shared vision on- requirements of Flood Directive
- Joint implementation strategies within river basins;
- Guidelines and principles for an efficient stakeholder and public participation;
- Practical innovative tools and methods for an efficient data and information exchange/transfer like an extranet, e-learning for staff training as well as interactive planning methods;
- Lessons learnt to achieve integration of various EU-directives;
- Policy recommendations for EU and member states (various organizational levels);
- Public information on Flood Directive and requirements for sustainable flood management.

The results of this project are expected to not only lead to a better understanding between relevant authorities within river basins, but the conclusions will also lead back to the Member States involved as well as to the European Commission to provide recommendations as valuable operational input to assist with drafting future implementation guidelines.

1.8 Proposed activities

The expected project duration is three years. Proposed activities are:

- Start up seminar for all partners jointly about EU flood directive requirements
- Kick off meetings per pilot project to establish working groups (e.g. per segment of flood risk management cycle: Prevention, Protection, Preparedness, Emergency response and Recovery and review) and to agree on action plans, including:
 - o Quick scan of legal flood management requirements and existing policies, measures and tools in each country in the river basin;
 - o Comparison of compatibility of existing risk assessment methods, flood maps and flood risk management plans within the river basin (especially in border areas);
 - o Analysis of compliance of existing tools with EU flood directive requirements;
 - o Recommendations for Member States and for European Commission.
- Yearly seminars for all partners jointly to present and discuss:
 - o 1) legal requirements and existing policies and instruments in each river basin,
 - o 2) problems and solutions for integration of EU directives,
 - o 3) comparison of risk assessment methods, flood maps, flood management plans and
 - o 4) joint implementation strategies within river basins;
 - o 5) compliance of existing tools with EU flood directive and recommendations for Member States and European Commission.

1.9 Project partners

During the final conference of the INTERREG IIC network ‘Flood Awareness and Prevention Policy in border areas’ (FLAPP), several FLAPP partners as well as other organisations have shown a clear interest in undertaking a pilot project to assess the EU flood directive tools on a river basin scale:

- Upper Tisza/other main tributaries in Danube basin: Hungary, Ukraine, Rumania
- Elbe basin: Germany, Czech Republic
- Neckar basin: Germany,
- Meuse basin: The Netherlands, France, Belgium?
- Evros basin: Greece, Bulgaria
- Tagus: Spain, Portugal
- Ebro: Spain
- P.m.

1.10 Project organisation

Ideally the project would have one Shared Service Centre (SSC) and various representatives pilots in different European river systems.

Shared Service Centre

The SSC will be a coordination centre and back office. It will function as the turntable of the project. The SSC should consist of a project leader, a financial manager, an information and communication officer and some policy-experts. They will support, coach and monitor the various pilots in representative catchments in the application of their action plans and working methods to allow for comparison between the river basin pilots. They also organise yearly seminars for all project partners and communicate with the funding programme secretariat in matters of reporting.

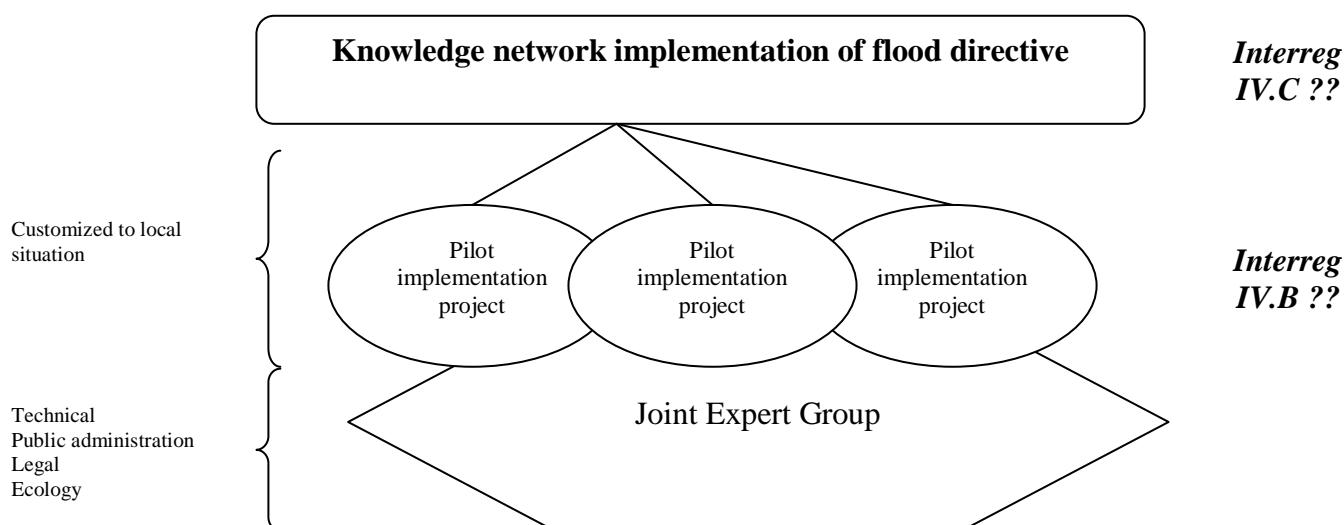
Pilot management

The different pilots will be managed by a pilot manager. Members of these pilots are water authorities, regional and national institutes, communities, etc. Observers are the individual members of the concerned international river commission and Euro regions. The pilot members need to appoint a pilot presidium to make an action plan, monitor progress, give directions and take decisions if necessary. Their overall task is the development of an implementation strategy.

Expert group

Experts on legislation, policy, technical management on water and nature, spatial planning. Their tasks is to give input in the pilots via expert support.

Schematically, the project could be as follows.



Staff costs and external expertise should be available per pilot region in order to find innovative solutions for requirements of the directive which are not yet fulfilled by existing instruments, plans and data.

1.11 Funding possibilities

Different EU funding possibilities should be investigated, amongst which are the 'European Territorial Cooperation Programme' (INTERREG IV), LIFE+ and Research Framework Programme 7. For example, it has to be assessed if it is possible to apply for funding under the INTERREG IV Programme, since the proposed river basin pilots might be trans-national projects (IV-B) whereas the SSC as the coordinating unit should be the interregional umbrella organisation, eligible for funding under IV-C. At this stage it is not clear if a combination of B and C is possible in one application.