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MINISTRY OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENTAL  
PROTECTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS, AT PART II  
OF THE 16th MEETING OF THE OSCE ECONOMIC AND  
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Prague, 19 to 21 May 2008

**Development and strengthening of co-operation in river basin  
management in Belarus**

More than 20,000 rivers with a total length of about 90,000 km flow through the territory of Belarus. The river basins belong to the catchment area of the Black Sea (57% of Belarusian territory) and the Baltic Sea (43%) and the nine biggest rivers exceed 500 km in length.

Practically all the basins of the five biggest rivers of Belarus are transboundary. Surface and underground waters are the key component of the natural environment of our Republic, they form the basis of all natural systems and also serve as the most valuable resource for supporting human life and economic activity.

These water resources provide drinking water and serve technical purposes, more than 800 million m<sup>3</sup> of water being drawn from surface water sources, and are used for commercial fisheries, recreation, irrigation and watering purposes. Hydropower potential is estimated at 900,000 kW and navigable waterways extend to a total length of 4,000 km.

Despite the fact that about 1.2 million m<sup>3</sup> of sewage is discharged into the rivers of Belarus, the ecological situation is turning out to be most fortuitous and stable. Practically all cities in the Republic have sewage treatment systems and we are continuing to step up our efforts to build new sewage treatment works and renovate old ones.

The number of severely polluted rivers can be counted in single figures, with those stretches of large rivers having an increased pollutant content coinciding as a rule with areas where major industrial centres are located.

The legislation of the Republic of Belarus is being improved in the sphere of water resource management at the basin level.

Responsibility in our country for issues of State regulation and elaboration of policies in the area of water resource management lies with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection. The basic provisions of the Environmental Protection Act, the Water Code and various normative instruments make effective control over the use and protection of water resources possible, and a special permits system restricts the amount of fresh water that can be withdrawn and regulates the quality of the sewage being discharged both from industrial plants and public utilities.

The laws establish a payment procedure for water use and also provide for a system of fiscal measures to counter the pollution of water bodies.

State plans and programmes provide for the implementation of measures to bring norms and standards into line with European Union (EU) directives, to devise new technology standards for water consumption and drainage, to build modern sewage treatment plants, and to improve plans for drainage and water recycling in agricultural regions and in farming. Metering of water consumption and discharge and automatic control equipment will be developed further.

At the present time, the Republic of Belarus is actively developing co-operation with neighbouring countries to protect and jointly use natural resources of transboundary rivers within the framework of the Helsinki Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes.

Bilateral intergovernmental agreements on the protection and joint use of transboundary rivers have been signed with Ukraine (2001) and Russia (2002), and work continues to co-ordinate projects under trilateral agreements on the river Neman (Belarus, Lithuania and Russia), on the Western Dvina river (Russia, Belarus and Latvia) and on the river Dnieper (Russia, Belarus and Ukraine).

Belarus is ready to hold consultations and work on the text of an agreement on the protection of transboundary waters with Poland, attaching great significance, first and foremost, to the protection of the transboundary basin of the Western Bug river.

An analysis of the development of bilateral co-operation will testify that intensive work is under way to develop joint systems for monitoring, processing and transferring incoming data on the pollution of transboundary rivers, to agree on water quality targets and to conduct joint scientific research on river ecosystems.

A number of joint projects have been implemented in the Republic of Belarus with the financial and technical assistance of international organizations, such as the Global Environment Facility, the EU Technical Assistance for the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS) programme, the OSCE as well as donor countries, which were aimed at improving the management of rivers with transboundary basins and which have also helped to develop and strengthen international co-operation.

Included in the National Programme of Belarus on international technical co-operation for the years 2006–2010 is a series of new projects aimed at promoting elaboration of plans for the management of river basins, and we urge donor countries and international organizations to participate in their implementation.

Along with their high ecological status, the transboundary rivers of Belarus are of important strategic significance for the development of national and international navigation.

At present, ten working river ports exist in the country within the river transport system, and four watercourse companies have been set up to serve transport routes on eight rivers in Belarus. About 6 million US dollars will be spent on carrying out dredging work and fortifying river banks alone in 2008.

Vessels are being designed, built and restored in the Republic, technical conditions are being monitored, the certification of wares ensured, and the safety of navigation conditions maintained at the required level.

All this makes the Republic of Belarus attractive for the development of international watercourses with a view to expanding commercial transport, increasing the number of passengers as well as developing ecotourism.

Over the past few years the Belarusian section of the Augustów Canal, which is part of the common European waterway system, has been restored and a border control point opened, and we are looking forward to a significant growth in the flow of Polish and Belarusian tourists on this waterway.

The Dnieper-Bug Canal, one of the most important sections of the Dnieper-Vistula-Oder waterway, is currently being renovated. Here work on the reconstruction of lock facilities (totalling 3 million US dollars) should be completed in 2008. Earlier work was completed on the construction of four sluice dams and two navigable locks which allow the passage of vessels 110 metres long and 12 metres wide with a draught of 2.2 metres.

The question of restoring the Dnieper-Vistula-Oder water transport connection was examined at the 49th session of the Working Group on Inland Water Transport of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. A decision was taken to establish a group of rapporteurs to prepare a feasibility study on this waterway restoration project.

We invite participating States and international organizations to join Belarus in its efforts to restore this most important inland waterway, which is classified as an E-40 European waterway.