

# *Drin Dialogue: from Drin Dreams to Deeds*

*A Shared Vision for the Management of the Drin River Basin and its Implementation*



## The Drin Basin

Throughout history the Drin Basin has been the meeting point of different civilizations which have left their traces in the area. The Drin Basin hosts a complex shared water system which extends over a large geographical area that includes parts of Albania, Greece, FYR Macedonia, Kosovo (under UNSCR 1244) and Montenegro. The Drin River is the “connecting body” of this water system, interlinking in various ways the lakes, rivers and other aquatic habitats into a major ecosystem of cardinal importance. The region has a wealth of different landscapes, is exceptional in terms of biodiversity, very rich in endemic species, while supporting a multitude of economic activities.



**Fishing boats, Lake Shkoder/Skadar**

*Photo credit: Thomais Vlachogianni*

**Sunset, Lake Shkoder/Skadar**

*Photo credit: Thomais Vlachogianni*



Diverse and often conflicting uses and unsustainable management approaches applied in the Drin Basin under various circumstances, have led to the degradation of ecosystems and pollution of the Adriatic Sea, as well as to a bottleneck for the sustainable economic growth of the region.

Considerable efforts have already been made for transboundary cooperation and legally binding agreements have been signed by the Riparians for some of its sub-systems (e.g. the Prespa lakes, Ohrid lake and Shkoder/Skadar lake). However, the much needed coordinated and multi-sectoral collaboration among all the Riparians at basin level is still missing, despite having been recognized as key for ensuring a sustainable management of the entire system.

## *The aim*

The aim of the Drin Dialogue is to further enhance transboundary cooperation based on the development of a Shared Vision for the sustainable management of the “extended” Drin Basin, in compliance with the provisions of the UNECE Water Convention and other related multilateral agreements, including the EU Water Framework Directive.

## *The Drin Dialogue*

The Drin Dialogue is a consultation process that was initiated within the framework of the Petersberg Phase II / Athens Declaration Process and formally launched by the Riparians on 1 December 2009. Since then, three national consultation meetings (Ohrid, November 2010; Tirana, April 2011; Podgorica, September 2011) have been organized to discuss and identify the main challenges and responses in the Drin Basin. A defining moment in the process towards the sustainable management of the basin, is the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) by the Ministers of the Drin Riparians at a regional consultation meeting in Tirana, 25 November 2011.



**National consultation meeting, Tirana**

*Photo credit: Milan Vogrin*

***Microcarbo pygmaeus, Lake Ohrid***

*Photo credit: Milan Vogrin*



## *The Drin Core Group*

The Drin Core Group is the informal structure that was formed to facilitate the communication and cooperation amongst the Riparians and the key stakeholders; the smooth running of the Drin Dialogue; and the implementation of the provisions of the MoU. Its decisions are taken on a consensus base. The members of the Core Group are representatives of:

- Competent Ministries of the Riparians:  
Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Water Administration, Albania;  
Ministry for the Environment, Energy and Climatic Change, Greece;  
Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning, FYR Macedonia;  
Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism, Montenegro;  
Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management, Montenegro;  
Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning, Kosovo (under UNSCR 1244);
- Joint Commissions/Committees in place in the sub-basins of the Drin Basin, namely:  
the Prespa Park Management Committee; the Lake Ohrid Watershed Committee; the Lake Shkoder/Skadar Commission;
- the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE);
- the Mediterranean Information Office for Environment Culture and Sustainable Development (MIO-ECSDE), the main regional Federation of NGOs;
- the Global Water Partnership – Mediterranean (GWP-Med), as the Secretariat of the Petersberg Phase II / Athens Declaration Process, serving also as the Secretariat of the Core Group and providing technical and administrative support.

The European Commission, the Swedish EPA, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) / Global Environment Facility (GEF) participate as observers.

## Special features of the Drin Basin

The watersheds of the Prespa, Ohrid and Shkoder/Skadar Lakes and the Black Drin, White Drin, Drin and Buna/Bojana Rivers make up the “extended” Drin Basin.

This transboundary system illustrates the interdependencies created between different uses (agriculture, hydropower generation, industry, fisheries, urban development, tourism, etc.) in four major interconnected inland water bodies and a receiving sea (the Adriatic), and a number of countries and cities/towns with various, often differentiated, priorities and interests.



**Fisherman, Lake Shkoder/Skadar**

*Photo credit: Thomais Vlachogianni*

### **Lake Ohrid**

*Photo credit: Milan Vogrin*



### **Drin River**

*Photo credit: Thomais Vlachogianni*



***Pelecanus crispus*, Lake Prespa**

*Photo credit: Vassilis Psallidas*

## *Its unique biodiversity and the story of Anguilla Anguilla*

The extended Drin River Basin is characterized by an exceptional wealth of biodiversity, providing important habitats for many species of fauna and flora. Several of these species are endemic like *Salmo ohridanus*, *Salmo letnica*, *Chondrostoma prespense*, *Scardinius knezevici*, etc., while many others like *Pelecanus crispus*, *Pelecanus onocrotalus*, *Microcarbo pygmaeus*, etc., breed in the basin in exceptionally high numbers in comparison to other parts of Europe.

This is likely the result of geographical “fragmentation” and “isolation” of parts of the systems into lakes, valleys, underground carstic caves and rivers, etc., the vast pristine mountainous areas and the overall relatively low population density. However, this is changing. Habitat (marine, freshwater and terrestrial) destruction and degradation, caused by relatively recent human activities, threaten this biodiversity.

A characteristic example is the case of *Anguilla Anguilla* (European eel), which historically used the Drin River to migrate between the Ohrid and Shkoder/Skadar lakes and the Adriatic Sea. Changes to water flows (largely due to dams), as well as the quantity and quality of water throughout the watershed, have caused severe damage to the fish passages, thus critically endangering various species such as *Anguilla Anguilla* (IUCN Red list) and other species, which face a high risk of extinction in the basin in the immediate future.



***Orthetrum cancellatum*, Lake Shkoder**

Photo credit: Thomais Vlachogianni

***Chroicocephalus ridibundus*, Lake Ohrid**

Photo credit: Milan Vogrin





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