

## **Case study of transboundary Lake Peipsi /Chudskoe (Estonia-Russian Federation) Water management planning,**

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### **Introduction**

Estonia is rich in ground- and surface water resources. The country has some 1,500 lakes, the largest being **Lake Peipsi/Chudskoe**, which is also 4<sup>th</sup> largest lake in Europe. Lake Peipsi is also biggest transboundary lake in Europe, shared between the Estonian Republic and the Russian Federation. The Lake's surface area is 3555 km<sup>2</sup>, within the basin itself are found appr. 1 million. The lake faces a number of challenges, including: how to reduce the overabundance of nutrients that causes excessive algae growth and hurts water quality; how to control the amount of fishing so as to prevent the extinction of fish; and how to share the sizeable underground aquifers in order to ensure a stable source of fresh water.

### Implementation of EU WFD on the external border

At the beginning of 1990s, after the breakup of the Soviet Union, the lake basin found itself divided between re-independent Estonian Republic and Russian Federation, which is now forming also an external European Union border. After Estonia joined the EU in 2004, Estonian Water Act was revised to harmonize with the EU Water Framework Directive. Among other EU WFD principles, it is also emphasizing the importance of member states to form cooperative management institutions which take into account the entire river basin, including transboundary ones.

The other half of Lake Peipsi/Chudskoe is located in the Russian Federation. The Water Framework Directive of the European Union does not have mandatory character for Russia. In the Russian Federation waters are managed according to the Water Code, which entered into force in 2007. Russian authorities, responsible for the water management, have accepted that principles of the EU Water Framework Directive would be applied also on the Russian side of the Lake Peipsi/Chudskoe basin.

### **Lake Peipsi/Chudskoe Basin Management Programme**

In order to complete with the requirement of creating an international management plan for Lake Peipsi, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Global Environment Facility (GEF) funded the project "Development and Implementation of the Lake Peipsi/Chudskoe Basin Management Programme", which was implemented 2004-2006.

The goal of that UNDP/GEF funded project was to "develop and start implementation of a Lake Peipsi/Chudskoe Basin Management Programme including practical recommendations for the Lake nutrient load reduction and prevention and the sustainable conservation of habitats and eco-systems in the cross-border region". The project substituted for uncoordinated small-scale projects that otherwise were implemented separately on the Estonian and Russian sides without sufficient coordination, education and public information components and without taking into account interests of local stakeholder groups and wider public. The project had been designed to meet the needs of the Estonian and Russian Governments, Joint Estonian-Russian Transboundary Water Commission, local governments in the Lake Peipsi/Chudskoe area, regional and local NGO, schools and the general public. The project partners were Russian Ministry of Natural Resources and Estonian Ministry of the Environment; the project implementation unit was NGO - Peipsi Center for Transboundary Cooperation. There were three targeted outputs for the project, which concentrated not only on formulating a program for the management of Lake Peipsi, but also

took into consideration other support mechanisms, incl. public participation and capacity building,:

- **A joint management program** in which the governments have taken the lead in creating, but which consulted stakeholder groups on both sides of the border at all levels.
- **Capacity program.** Throughout the course of the project, local and national institutions capacity was strengthened to carry out the management program.
- **Environmental education and awareness program** was also initiated; diverse communication channels were used to inform the public as to the issues surrounding the lake.

Lake Peipsi/Chudskoe Water management Programme was officially approved by the Estonian – Russian Joint Transboundary Water Commission in 2006. It was disseminated in Estonian and Russian languages through various stakeholder groups.

However, as the analysis of implementation of the Management Programme showed last year, that little transboundary cooperation is done today in implementing the programme. Both countries rather concentrate to their national Water management programmes as there are several obstacles in implementing the joint programme.

### **Obstacles to implementation of the transboundary water management programme**

Implementation of the UNDP/GEF project demonstrated the following obstacles that were impeding the way for a successful implementation of the program:

Due to the history, Estonia and Russia have fundamentally different foreign policy discourses in relation to each other and their relations remain tense.

Opposing Agendas. The Estonians and Russians are coming to the table with two different, sometimes opposing, agendas. For instance, while the Estonians are more concerned about the entire lake as a resource (quality), the Russians concentrate more on point-source issues.

Communication. Even though Estonians and Russians have been working alongside one another for decades in some instances, there are still issues with communication. Language is proving to be a significant barrier to effective cooperation between the two sides.

Monitoring The principal problem is that the Estonian and Russian systems of monitoring are different. They use different measurements, measure different samples, technologies etc.

### **Conclusion**

Although Lake Peipsi/Chudskoe WMP was developed in tight cooperation with various stakeholders and adopted by Estonian-Russian Transboundary Water Commission already four years ago, its implementation is not taking place today as expected. Main reasons here are connected with opposing agendas and political reasons. Both countries rather concentrate to implementation of their national Water management programmes as there are several obstacles in implementing the joint programme.

However, the Lake Peipsi region is an example of good cooperation over shared waters in the given political and economic context and given the limitations as discussed above; there is a network of experts across the lake that are involved in the cooperation and as it is hoped will sustain the cooperation also in the future. Analysis showed that water management cooperation is taking place effectively at the specialist level, who conduct joint studies, and information exchange. Good example of cross border cooperation is also Estonian-Russian Transboundary Water Commission.

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