

“Supporting the proposed Trans-boundary Biosphere Reserve of Lake Skadar/Shkodra area through a participatory approach

Kick off Meeting

1 March 2011, Shkodra , ALBANIA

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

In the frame of the project “Supporting the proposed Trans-boundary Biosphere Reserve of Lake Skadar/Shkodra area through a participatory approach”, as part of IPA cross-border Programme Albania –Montenegro (2007-2013) financed by European Community, the Institute for Nature Conservation in Albania (INCA) and the Transboundary Forum of Shodra/Skadar Lake have organized on 1 March 2011, time 09:30 at the premises of Grand Hotel in Shkodra city, the Kick-Off meeting for the project.

The scope of the meeting is to make a presentation regarding the project activities, and expected results. It will be focused on information and comprehensive cooperation with environmental NGOs and other local stakeholders in the Shkodra city.

Place of Meeting: *Grand Hotel Shkodra City*, and participants in the meeting (more than 35 people).

Second the agenda of the meeting were presented:

1. Welcoming Speech by

- Mr. Zamir DEDEJ Project leader -INCA-Representative
- Mr. Mahir HOTI- Chairman of Transboundary Forum of Shkodra/Skadar
- Mr. Silvio ORSINI- Italian Counselle in Shkodra
- Mr. Andi CETAJ- Joint Technical Secretariat

2. Presentation of the project : “Supporting the proposed Trans-boundary Biosphere Reserve of Lake Skadar/Shkodra area through a participatory approach”, Objectives, Scope and Activities- (introduced by Mr. Genti KROMIDHA, Project coordinator, INCAs representative)

3. Biosphere reserve concept from protection to development – introduced by Dr. Zamir Dedej, project leader, INCAs representative

4. Zoning of the Skadar/Shkodra Lake Nature Managed Reserve, a standard management procedure and step toward the Biosfere Reserve concept- (introduced by Prof. Dr. Dhimiter DHORA, APAWA)

About 37 representatives from different NGOs, Regional Environmental Agency in Shkodra, Shkodra Municipality, Shkodra Region, Directory of Forestry services in Shkodra (MoEFWA), Joint Technical Secretariat, Local Media (TV1 Chanel, TV Copliku, TV Rozafa, ATSH Shkoder) European Union Info Center in Shkodra, INCA, Green Home and other institutions, were

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registered at the entrance desk from 09.30 am (see the list of participants). During the meeting an interview was realized with Mr. Dedej informing through the media present about the project launched.

Meeting starts with chairman’s Mr. Zamir Dedej remarks as Project leader -INCA- Representative, who welcomed the invited participants and gave a short overview in the principle for the project, for the scope of the meeting and the expected results in the end of the meeting. He briefed the meeting generally with some information about the scope of EU-IPA programme and its relevant 5 components focusing at the second one IPA cross-border Programme. The meeting continues with the welcome intervention from the main invited organization.

The first intervention was made by Mr. Mahir HOTI- Chairman of Transboundary Forum of Shkodra/Skadar that welcomed the participants in the meeting, stressing the importance of this project, the role that Transboundary Forum of Shkodra/Skadar Lake will play in this project as the main local partner, and the significant role of the Environmental NGO-s in Shkodra region for the sustainability of the project in future.

The floor was given to Mr. Silvio ORSINI, Italian Counsel in Shkodra, who welcomed briefly the participants in the meeting. As an old friend of Albania since 1997 he expressed his appreciation for the developments and drastic changes made recently in Albania. He ensured the participants that the Italian consulate in Shkodra is open and welcomes cooperation initiatives with civil society as well as with local government regarding the development of the Shkodra region and in particular the further development and protection of the Shkodra Lake area.

At the end of this part Mr. Andi Çekaj, Task Manager, Joint Technical Secretariat, IPA Cross-Border Cooperation Programme Albania - Montenegro welcomed the participants stressing the importance of the IPA Cross-Border Cooperation programme, but in the mean time the difficulties to be a good applicant and a winner in the frame of this programme.

Mr. Genti Kromidha Project coordinator, INCAs representative, takes over to introduce the project in more detail, introducing the relevance of the project activities, objective and target groups of this project. He presented Examples of main problems to be addressed by the project in relation with the participatory and consensus building approaches. He stressed that this approach will be applied in this project though the “learning by doing” exercises and the topic that will be used for the communication exercises will be “Man and Biosphere” program of UNESCO and their delivery. In this context he has presented the measures to mitigate the risks affecting the project implementation. The last part of the presentation was focused on project structures. He explained the preparatory work done by INCA in cooperation with TSLF to establish the Working Group of Biosphere Reserve for Shkodra Lake and the draft composition of the steering committee and its main tasks.

An open roundtable discussions was initiated. Representative from NGOs, Shkodra/Skadar transboundary Lake Forum, each gave their support and remarks on the project, ensuring their needs for capacity building and their collaboration in this regard. The WG members discussed on

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a long term Action Plan for the implementation of transboundary biosphere reserve in the selected area.

Meeting restarts with the presentation of Mr. Zamir Dedej. His presentation was focused on Biosphere reserve concept from protection to development. An extended overview is given to “Man and Biosphere” program of UNESCO. Some information about the main functions and importance of the areas identified as Biosphere reserve are mentioned. Further more a detailed of the structure of the process for Biosphere reserve designation according to the MAB programme where pointed out.

Prof. Dr. Dhimiter Dhora, representative of APAWA, receives the floor as the last headline speaker on the zoning of Skadar/Shkodra Lake Nature Managed Reserve, a standard management procedure and step toward the biosphere Reserve Concept.

At the end, **Ms. Jelena Marojevic from the MNE partner Green Home,** took the floor to speak on behalf of the Green Home Representative as INCA’s main Montenegrin partner in this project,. She briefly informed about the scope and importance of the project in general, the parallel activities performed in Montenegro in the frame of this project.

The floor is then open for input from each member of this meeting. The ideas and suggestions that came up were:

- Nowadays, most environmental NGOs in Skodra area fare focused on environmental issues but very few know how to run advocacy work
- Issues of long-term capacity building were mentioned in accordance to the project’s objectives.
- Many risks and opportunities that arise from the process were pointed out and ways to avoid risks and fruitfully exploit these opportunities were suggested.
- The central and local Governments responsible Institutions for the Protected areas management must be actively involved in this project
- Other similar projects in the terms of Fishery Management capacity building are needed in Shkodra lake area.

Finally, Mr. Kromidha gave his last remarks as a set of conclusive points which he gathered throughout the meeting and discussions take place during the meeting (see the text below).

The meeting was concluded with thanks for all the participants for their active role, to the interpreter and to the future cooperation for the project implementation.

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CONCLUSIONS

- The Working Group for Biosphere Reserve of Lake Shkodra area in Albania is officially established and will be coordinated by the “Institute of Nature Conservation in Albania” (INCA) and the facilitation of the work will be made through the Trans-boundary Shkodra/Skadar Lake Forum (TSLF).
- The list of WG is open to other NGOs/organizations willing to join the WG and fulfill the approved criteria
- The project will not intend to get into confrontation with decision makers, quite the opposite. BR_WG will be in the long term a precious tool for them. In the regard, the action will build and consolidate a constructive dialogue with the most relevant decision makers, such as the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Water Administration which has the overall authority to protect the environment, and all the related regional structure (Protected Areas Administration, REA, Water Basin Agencies, etc).
- Representatives of the Steering Committee were approved by the Working Group members. The Steering Committee will seek for the broader participation of interested stakeholders.
- The scientific advisory role will be played by the existing experts from the national universities and research institutions.
- The WG members agreed on a long term Action Plan for the implementation of transboundary biosphere reserve in the selected area.
- This project will be open and transparent for all target groups, giving them the possibility to be part and to play their role in concrete project activities.
- Other meetings with specific thematic such as Fishery, protected areas management, etc must be organized in order to be informed on the last political documents developed for protected areas management and to exchange ideas on problems faced and the opinions on measures to be taken, and the way how to advocate for a better environmental situation in lake Shkodra area.
- The establishment and good management of representatives protected areas is a political priority in Albania, and this project is an opportunity for that.
- The civil society network established through this project will be a possibility to exchange experience and information between NGOs
- The reorganization and further development of the existing capacities in area is needed.
- The capacities of the WG established will be strengthened to enable it to advocate for the UNESCO Man&Biosphere Program, including their networking.