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## Summary of the HWCA kick-off meeting

6 and 7 June 2023, Bishkek

The meeting took place at the Academy of the MFA of the Kyrgyz Republic in hybrid format. Partner universities from Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan sent delegations (2 persons per university) to Bishkek. Tajik and Turkmen universities, IHE Delft, University of Bergamo and University of Reims participated online.

The objective of the meeting was information exchange, team building and brainstorming in an informal setting. The substantive part was preceded by a high-level opening session. The Rector of the Diplomatic Academy of the MFA of the Kyrgyz Republic, Professor Chinara Adamkulova, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the KR, Aibek Moldogaziev, Deputy Minister of Science and Education of the KR, Rasul Abazbek, the Head of Delegation of the European Union to the Kyrgyz Republic, Marilyn Josefson and the ambassadors of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan delivered welcoming statements.

The substantive part of the meeting started with a presentation on the objectives, work plan and implementation schedule by the coordinator of the project, visiting professor of the Diplomatic Academy of the MFA of KR, Marton Krasznai (attached). Dr. Jenniver Sehring, Associated professor of management of water resources and diplomacy of IHE Delft Institute for Water Education, the Netherlands, Dr. Filippo Menga, Associated professor of geography of the University of Bergamo, Italy and Dr. Jean-Paul Deroin of the Earth sciences department of the University of Reims, Champagne-Ardenne, France introduced their universities and outlined their role in the implementation of the HWCA project.

Representatives of Central Asian universities presented the curricula of their institutions related to the project, capacities of the teaching staff, the level of the knowledge of the English language of the teaching staff and students and their needs. (The agenda, statements and slides have been uploaded in the dropbox of the project

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/mg8oly3z8qwxvj1ie7gi/h?dl=0&rlkey=ti1sp7yodg63dq3atfnppq9vm>).

The presentations were followed by informal consultations. All participants confirmed

their interest in receiving assistance in all the three areas mentioned in the project document: 1) modernization of existing or development of new curricula on water governance and water diplomacy 2) improving the English language proficiency of teaching staff and students and 3) training courses for teaching staff on water governance and water diplomacy.

The second day of the meeting was devoted to the discussion of concrete tasks, related to project implementation. Mr. Zhorobai Aitbaev of the International Cooperation Department of the Diplomatic Academy presented the quality assurance plan of the project, offered assistance to partner universities in developing their own quality assurance methodology and invited them to provide regular reports on their work to the project coordinator and the project manager.

Ms. Karlygash Rahimova of the International Cooperation Department of the Diplomatic Academy presented the dissemination plan of the project. She called on partner universities to actively participate in this work. Participants presented a number of ideas to facilitate dissemination of information on the project: publishing an on-line bulletin of the HWCA project, publishing articles on the project on the websites of the universities or in journals, making presentations on the project at conferences and workshops, etc.

It was emphasized that the visits of needs assessment missions composed by experts of EU universities (including the Kazakh-German University) to the 11 Central Asian universities offered an excellent opportunity to organize face to face meetings with teaching staff and students. The objective of these meetings is to start a bottom-up process of building a strong, active and permanent constituency for the project (“friends of the HWCA project”, “implementing group of the HWCA project”) at every partner university. Thanks to the excellent skills of students at using social media platforms, these groups would greatly enhance the dissemination of information among students in every Central Asian country.

The project coordinator presented guidelines and recommendations on the purchase of equipment. Since there are huge distances between Central Asian universities and their EU counterparts, face to face meetings will need to be kept to the minimum due to high travel costs, which would overburden the budget. Most of the activities will be conducted online. The equipment (including software) purchased by each university will need to ensure the smooth and efficient conduct of online meetings and provide a reliable e-learning platform. The purchase of equipment is to be coordinated by Bergamo University, since it is in charge of WP4, which is aimed at enhancing the English language proficiency of teaching staff and students. This is the WP which will rely on online meetings, online courses and the use of e-learning platforms in the most intensive way. Participating universities were asked to provide a list of equipment (including the software they use) to Bergamo University for assessment and for the selection of software to be used during project implementation. It should be avoided that each university purchases and uses different software packages, making it impossible to work together in a seamless way. Bergamo University will then issue a list of recommended equipment and software. It will also provide a list of reliable vendors that sell good quality equipment at reasonable prices.

The project coordinator presented the objectives of subcontracting and described the four areas where it would be used to support project implementation. The manager of the project would issue four subcontracts to teams or individual experts who can provide knowledge, expertise, analysis and recommendations in areas where the coordination team lacks such expertise.

The project manager will issue a subcontract to Professor Saghit Ibatullin, who led the team that prepared the 2019 "Review of water-related academic and research capacity in Central Asian countries" financed by CAWEP/the World Bank, the European Union, SDC and UKAid. The professor will update the study, narrowing down its focus to the 11 Central Asian universities that participate in the HWCA project.

The second subcontract will be issued to the Chair of English Language of Seifullin Kazakh Agrotechnical Research University. The team of the University will assess the English teaching capacity of the other 10 Central Asian universities, the potential of teaching staff, the English proficiency of students and the specific needs of each university. Based on this analysis, it will develop recommendations to Bergamo University on implementation of WP4 and continue to work closely with it during the whole implementation period.

The third subcontract will be issued to Dr. Dinara Ziganshina of TIAME, a leading expert on international water law. Dr. Ziganshina would prepare an analytical paper on the legal basis of regional cooperation on water, the application of international water law under the specific circumstances of Central Asia and the potential for the development of modern (regional) legal norms and documents based on recent progress in theory and practice of the management of transboundary water resources.

The fourth contract will be issued to the Diplomatic Academy of the MFA of the Kyrgyz Republic. The team of the Academy would prepare a SWOT analysis of water diplomacy in Central Asia and the lessons learned and best practices of Central Asian water diplomacy in international fora and global conferences. It would develop recommendations on the modernization of existing and development of new curricula on water diplomacy of partner universities and the planned training course for teaching staff.

The project manager, Professor Chinara Adamkulova announced that the Diplomatic Academy of the MFA of the Kyrgyz Republic had successfully concluded negotiations on partnership agreements with all Central Asian partner universities and PA-s were being signed during the meeting.

The project coordinator briefed participants on the governing structure of the project, describing the composition and tasks of the governing bodies:

- The Supervisory Board of the project is composed of three outstanding experts on water: Professor Danilo Turk, former President of Slovenia, former UN Assistant Secretary General for Political affairs and the Director of Global Observatory on Water and Peace, Dr. Mark Zeitoun, the Director of the Geneva Water Hub, and Professor Christine Bichsel of Fribourg University. The Supervisory Board oversees project implementation, provides guidance and ensures quality control.
- The Steering Committee is composed of one representative of each university participating in the project. It is co-chaired by the coordinator and the manager of the project. The Steering Committee meets (online) every quarter, discusses project implementation, adopts recommendations on substantive, operational and management issues and exercises quality control.
- The Project Management Team is composed of representatives of EU universities and co-chaired by the coordinator and the manager of the project. It meets (online) once a month or as necessary. It serves as a forum for information exchange, planning and coordination. It coordinates work on different work packages, plans activities and evaluates on-going work.
- Each partner university was asked to establish a project management team, composed of senior management and teaching staff. Universities were also encouraged to actively involve students in project implementation, e.g. by establishing a “friends of the HWCA” project group of students. The groups would receive regular information on project implementation, project documents and would be invited to discussions, summer courses, simulation exercises and essay writing competitions.
- The project coordinator would explore possibilities for cooperation with the incoming Kazakh Chairmanship of the Executive Committee of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea. EC IFAS would be invited to provide a list of good practices, examples of successful cooperation on the management of shared water resources as well as lessons learned. Senior staff of the Fund would be invited to make presentations during training courses for teaching staff.

#### Proposals by participants

Following presentations, participants were asked to go into a “brainstorming mood” and to come up with proposals on how to improve the effectiveness of project implementation.

Several participants raised the idea of organizing summer courses for students of participating universities. Students from all five Central Asian countries could be invited to summer courses on specific aspects of water governance or selected

areas of water diplomacy. The coordinator and manager of the project promised to look into the possibility of raising additional funds for such courses.

Several participants proposed to coordinate activities in the framework of the HWCA project with relevant projects and programmes of development partners. It was mentioned that France was implementing a project on water diplomacy: the two projects could complement each other, allowing for synergies and more efficient use of resources. It was decided to explore possibilities for coordination between the HWCA and the French project.

It was mentioned that the World Bank was preparing to implement several regional projects, including on water. Participants suggested contacting local representatives of the World Bank to explore possibilities for cooperation.

#### Informal consultations

The coordinator and manager of the project conducted a series of informal consultations with participants during social events and coffee breaks. These meetings allowed them to identify partners who could provide particularly active support to project implementation.

Saltanat A. Meiramova, Director of the Department of International Relations (earlier Head of the Chair of English Language), Erasmus+ Coordinator of the Seifullin Kazakh Agrotechnical Research University could provide highly effective assistance to the implementation of WP4. It is recommended that the team of Bergamo University invites her to work closely on implementation of the WP. Email address: [saltanat.m@mail.ru](mailto:saltanat.m@mail.ru)

Margarita Kadyrova, Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs of the Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Ms. Kadyrova volunteered to explore possibilities for coordination of the HWCA project with the water diplomacy project of France and offered active support to project implementation, including the organization of summer courses. Email address: [Margarita.kadyrova@apa.kz](mailto:Margarita.kadyrova@apa.kz)

Other partners who offered to provide active support to project in implementation:

Gulnur Issabekova, Head of the Center for International Cooperation of Dulaty Taraz Regional University, Mirzoumid Khamdamov, Dean of the Faculty of International Economics and Management of UWED and Abdulhakim Salokhiddinov, Vice-Rector for International Cooperation of TIAME.

The team of the Diplomatic Academy of the MFA of the Kyrgyz Republic organized the meeting in a highly professional manner. Social events provided ample

opportunity for informal consultations and brainstorming. The pleasant and friendly atmosphere that characterized formal sessions and social events alike turned the meeting into an excellent team building exercise. The organizers made an exceptional effort to offer every opportunity to online participants to follow the discussion and make presentations. A considerable part of the budget of the event was used to hire equipment, simultaneous interpretation and technical support to allow online participants take full advantage of the meeting.