

China Europe Water Platform

Summary

The China Europe Water Platform was launched at the 6th World Water Forum in Marseille, France, where a Joint Statement was signed between the Ministry of Water Resources of the People's Republic of China and the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, represented by the Danish Minister of the Environment.

The China Europe Water Platform is one of the principal outputs of the EU China River Basin Management Programme. It is designed to maintain the dialogue on water resources policy, management, research and commerce between China and the EU, its Member States and like-minded countries in Europe, when the EU China River Basin Management Programme closes in July 2012. The water platform is a component of a restructured EU Water Initiative and is seen as a potentially significant addition that over time could incorporate similar cooperation with other BRIC¹ countries. In China the platform secretariat will be hosted by the Ministry of Water Resources, while Denmark as European lead nation will host the EU secretariat for an initial period of 3 years assisted by Portugal.

For further information see the website <http://cewp.org>, which will be established in April 2012.

Key words: China Europe Water Platform, EU Water Initiative, policy dialogue, research and commerce

1 Introduction

The water sectors in China and in Europe are confronted with similar challenges caused by ongoing socio-economic development and climate change, and both regions have a leading role in the international community and global economy. The China – Europe Water Platform (*CEWP*) is seen as a dialogue mechanism for officials and experts in China and Europe to enhance existing cooperation and exchanges on water governance, policies, management, research, practical know-how and commercial technologies

A sustained cooperation on management of water as a crucial natural resource is of strategic importance to both regions to avert a future global water crisis and its potential impacts on social and economic development and stability, especially achieving water supply security, food security and ecological security including the ability to sustain a sound vegetation cover mitigating climate change.

During the past five years the EU China cooperation in the water sector has been channelled through the EU China River Basin Management Programme (*RBMP*) and supported by other programs such as the EU China Policy Development Support Facility.

¹ Brazil, Russia, India and China

2 History

The China Europe Water Platform builds on preparatory work by the EU China River Basin Management Programme supported by the Ministry of Water Resources (*MWR*) and the EU Delegation to China and Mongolia.

A significant objective of the RBMP was to foster dialogue in the water sector between the EU and China centred on the policies and practices for integrated river basin management expressed in the EU Water Framework Directive (*WFD*).

The dialogue was promoted through a range of activities, including:

- Conferences, especially the Yangtze Forum, the Yellow River Forum and side events during the 5th World Water Forum, the 2011 Stockholm World Water Week and most recently the launch of the Platform at the 6th World Water Forum
- Research studies matching Chinese and EU institutions within a range of topics, for instance institutional arrangements for Integrated River Basin Management, climate change adaptation, post project evaluation, pollution load modelling and application of bio-monitoring for characterisation of the health of rivers and lakes
- Study tours and exchange visits to most EU Member States and to both large and small river basins in Europe.

At the start of the RBMP most of these activities were one-directional with EU officials and experts disseminating information on the history and policies behind the WFD and the best practices developed during its implementation. Gradually, however, it became clear that there was need for a two-way communication to inform EU water managers of the policies and approaches to water management in China, especially on the achievements as well as the challenges for the Chinese water managers under the specific Chinese development and institutional conditions compared with the models adopted in most EU member states and promoted by the WFD.

Subsequent study tours by EU officials and experts to the Yangtze and Yellow River Basins greatly enhanced the dialogue and understanding of the potential benefits of a sustained CEWP and led to a targeted program for its definition, development and establishment, which was presented to MWR Vice-Minister Dr Hu Siyi and EU Ambassador Dr Markus Ederer at the 1st China Europe Water Platform Conference held in April 2011 as part of the 4th Yangtze Forum in Nanjing.

3 Purpose

The purpose of the CEWP is to create mutual understanding of approaches to integrated water resources policy development and implementation in China and Europe. The platform shall benefit China and EU member states, research institutions, private sector stakeholders, and river commissions in China and Europe, by creating a framework for coordinated dialogue and cooperation towards shared goals.

Especially the CEWP shall serve:

- For China and Europe, as leading global regions, to cooperate in achieving good governance of water resources

- To achieve a focused and efficient exchange of experiences and best practices for sustainable, environment-friendly integrated water resources management.
- To optimise synergies of existing and future bi-lateral cooperation, research and private sector involvement.

The CEWP is expected to add value to existing cooperation by:

- Obtaining and disseminating political and market related information on the water sector in Europe and China (e.g. policy development, implementation, research, advanced technologies, etc.).
- Maintaining an inventory of on-going bi-lateral cooperation that can help to create synergy and avoid duplication
- Facilitating access for China to EU Member States and vice versa, where no bilateral cooperation exists at present thus enlarging the overall cooperation in the water sector
- Exchange and sharing of experiences and good practices on EU and Chinese water governance
- Cooperation on piloting or testing of new European and Chinese technologies in China and Europe and sharing technology development (e.g. physical and mathematical modeling, sediment management, flood control and risk management)
- Giving opportunities to Chinese and European researchers for joint research, to scale up research and raising the academic standards
- Creating opportunities for Chinese and European private sector for joint business development

An overarching principle is that all aspects of cooperation shall be based on mutual interest, benefit and financing.

4 Organisation

The Platform is organised as a component of the EU Water Initiative (*EUWI*) with Denmark as EU lead country and the Danish Ministry of the Environment hosting the EU secretariat with the Portuguese Ministry for Agriculture, Sea, Environment and Spatial Planning as co-lead on specific topics. In China the Ministry of Water Resources will take the lead and the MWR Department of International Cooperation, Science and Technology will host the secretariat.

It must be stressed, however, that all EU Member States are invited to join the platform and take the lead in specific sectors or topics in which they have a comparative advantage or interest.

The EUWI is primarily a political initiative, using a partnership approach to work with different actors ranging from governments and regional organisations to civil society organisations and the water industry in both Europe and partner countries, thus matching the modus operandi envisaged for the future cooperation between China and EU under the CEWP.

The EUWI operates through working groups, which have either a regional focus or address cross-cutting issues such as research and finance. The European Commission provides the general secretariat for the EUWI, while each working group is chaired by a “lead” country providing management and financial support to coordinate the group, organise meetings, keep contact with partner institutions, and represent the EU at relevant events.

5 Recent Policy Shifts

The establishment of the CEWP comes at an opportune time in both China and the EU.

In China, the No.1 Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council for 2011 concerned “Accelerating the Water Conservancy Reform and Development”. This is the first time in the 60 year history of the People’s Republic of China water has been raised to the highest political agenda.

The No.1 Decision defines a clear implementation calendar to promote long-term economic development, social harmony and stability by initializing water sector reform and development and establishing a framework for development of water infrastructure and reform of water resources management within the next 5 to 10 years. Emphasis is on the status of China as a developing nation, which still is in need to develop its water resources infrastructure, but under a policy of development being accompanied by protection of the water environment. The significance of the No.1 Decision is emphasised by its pledge to mobilise an investment in the water sector of 4000 million Renminbi (~500 million Euro) over the next 10 years.

In Europe the European Council Ministers in 2011 reviewed its water policy instruments and recognised the most important achievements of the past decade as EU Water Framework Directive and the EU Water Initiative. Subsequently the Hungarian Presidency of the EU promoted a strengthening of the role of water as a key element in inclusive growth and sustainable development and invited the EU Commission to draw up a comprehensive policy framework on water as part of EU development co-operation, including the following recommendations:

- To better integrate the role of water in EU development policy
- To strengthen the water sector policy and implementation framework
- To revitalise the EU Water Initiative

Addition of the CEWP is seen as one of the actions to revitalise the EUWI by broadening its geographic focus, connecting two major regions of the world and enhancing policy exchanges.

6 Future action

The Chinese and EU secretariats are setting up a web-site (<http://cewp.org>) where further information on the platform will become available mid April 2012.

The first major event of the Platform is scheduled for the International Yellow River Forum which will be held 25-29 September 2012 in Zhengzhou, China, where the first steering committee meeting will be held and a technical session, probably on groundwater management, is planned.

All EU Member States are encouraged to join the Platform and they have concrete opportunity to participate during the EUWI Multistakeholder Forum, which is held in August each year during the World Water Week in Stockholm, Sweden.