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**Adapting research and politics through applied IWRM, the WssTP as a tool for an integrated European water research sector**

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**Soumission d'article pour présentation orale. Young Water Professionals, Regional workshop for Benelux, Eindhoven, the Netherlands, September 2009: "Adapting research and politics through applied IWRM, the WssTP as a tool for an integrated European water research sector?"**

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**Summary**

In 2004, the European Union (EU) created European Technology Platforms (ETPs) to develop a strategic agenda for leading technologies. The Water supply and sanitation Technology Platform (the WssTP) is the ETP focusing on water global future challenges at a European level. The WssTP aims to develop an effective collaboration between the different communities working in the water sector. The WssTP provides strategic answers for the water research future challenges.

The objectives of this paper are to determine how to WssTP contributes to step to more concrete practices, attitudes and cooperation between the different user groups achieving the principles of the Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) at the European level. This study will also question the relationships between research challenges and innovation needs with political and economic agenda. It will also examine key concepts as governance, water management and strategic vision in the water sector but also in research, economy and society. The main results should draw the attention on the difficulty of applying basic principles for integrated policy-making and to develop European integrated water resources for research. It aims at elaborating functioning scheme of collaboration between stakeholders of the water sector.

**Outline paper**

In 2004, the European Union (EU) created European Technology Platforms (ETPs) that aim at "bringing together technological know-how, industry, regulators, and financial institutions to develop a strategic agenda for leading technologies"<sup>1</sup>. A primary objective of European Technology Platforms is to influence industrial and research policy at the European, national and regional level, and to encourage public and private investments in R&D and innovation in key technological areas. After four years of existence, ETPs had a real impact on other community policies, such as industry, sustainable development, health, transport and education. They played an important role in overcoming regulatory and administrative barriers to research and innovation in Europe as well as to influence broader societal issues. ETPs are one of the different tools launched to concretely apply the Lisbon Agenda.

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<sup>1</sup> Third Status Report on European Technology Platforms, At the Launch of FP7, Report compiled by a Commission Inter-Service Group on European Technology Platforms, March 2007 Directorate-General for Research EUR 22706 EN.

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The main idea and concept of the Lisbon Agenda is to extend an economy based on knowledge and innovation; it wants to build up a more competitive and dynamic European market, more specifically in research and technology development. The EU created 31 ETPs on key challenges; the Water supply and sanitation Technology Platform (the WssTP) is the ETP focusing on water global future challenges at the European level.

The WssTP was initiated to stimulate the development of a long term Research and Technology Development strategy for the European water sector. The WssTP aims to develop an effective collaboration between the different communities working in the water sector. The WssTP provides strategic answers for the water research future challenges.

The WssTP regroups major industries, research centres, universities, water utilities and water users in order to deliver a vision for the European water sector targeting research challenges. The organisation already developed a Strategic Research Agenda (SRA), a Vision Document and an Implementation plan along with reports on ongoing and future research topics related to key challenges as alternative resources water, managing flood, sludge, etc. Addressing stakeholders of each European country, the WssTP aims at representing both Europe and the water sector interests for the specific domain of water research.

In the current context of economic crisis, calls for “greening the economy” and the raising need of more technology; the tasks and goals of the WssTP are to identify the main global challenges for the water sector in Europe by providing a vision for the next 30 years. It also included developing integrated research solutions and project from fundamental research to implementation cases and technological applications for the market. Its activities contribute to build a competitive European water sector, to foresee and point out potential technological breakthroughs and to concretely apply the principles of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM).

The objectives of this research are to question how the strategic research agenda and the research activities of the WssTP contribute to step to more concrete practices, attitudes and cooperation between the different user groups. As integrated management means that all the different uses of water resources are considered together, the WssTP aims at developing integrated solutions taking into account the different vision of each actor based on a participatory decision making.

The main goal of this presentation is to question the concrete possibility to apply the IWRM at the level of the European water sector, **to question the relationships between research challenges and innovation needs with political and economic agenda. This enquiry will examine key concepts as governance, water management and strategic vision in the water sector but also in research, economy and society.**

This research twins communication studies and political sciences in order to combine an interesting approach to search 1/ how the WssTP contributes to foresee technological advancements for European programs but also, to implement key research projects at the European scale 2/ to investigate if the WssTP could be considered as a tool to apply the IWRM at the European level and 3/ to examine how the WssTP influences the political agenda of decision makers particularly at the European level. This last area questions the principles of governance, private-public partnership and lobby in the context of the European Commission and the water sector.

This study is based on discourse analysis; it will explore key official international texts and literature of documents on the IWRM. It will compare the principles and discourses conveyed by different organisations on IWRM with key documents and official text produced by the European Commission and the WssTP since 2004. This analysis was also completed while working for the WssTP as a Liaison officer and as young water professional.

The main results and findings of this research underlined the difficulty of applying basic principles for integrated policy-making but also to further develop a European integrated water resource for

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research projects. The diversity of present actors in the water sector points out the various existing to implement “a process which promotes the co-ordinated development and management of water, land and related resources, in order to maximize the resultant economic and social welfare in an equitable manner without compromising the sustainability of vital ecosystems”<sup>2</sup>. These limits are political, economic, cultural, etc. Differences between research methodologies and priorities of a country or type of organisations also complicate collaboration and building of common research projects.

From this analysis, many aspects of governance are investigated; it highlights the issue of managing influences between industries, research entities and decision makers in the context of the European program and policy. Despite each one interest, the WssTP seems to be an interesting scheme to push the water actors to build the European competitive market targeted by the Lisbon Agenda. Based on the results of this study, we should also contribute to further discuss and elaborate a functioning scheme of collaboration between stakeholders of the water sector.

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<sup>2</sup> Global Water Partnership. Integrated Water Resources Management. TAC Background Papers, no 4, 2000, p. 22.