



Foreign & Commonwealth Office

Interview with Joanne Vinke-de Kruijf, University of Osnabrück, 27 June 2014

1. A Foreign Office official spoke to Joanne Vinke-de Kruijf on 27 June. The focus of the discussion was how EU enlargement can affect environmental policy, with a particular focus on water management issues in Romania.

Meeting the *acquis*, and making progress in Romania

2. Vinke-de Kruijf began by noting that EU funding provided through the accession process has been instrumental in reforming water management in Romania. As part of the Community and Environmental *acquis*, Romania has been obliged to raise standards in drinking and waste water treatment, as well as flood protection. Particularly in the drinking water and wastewater sector, this involved a considerable change of governance and management systems.
3. Given the significant challenges Romania faced, progress to date is impressive. In 2004, the situation was that only 52% of the population was connected to the drinking water and sewage system and only 29% of the wastewater was sufficiently treated (figures from the national Sectoral Operational Programme for Environment, 2007). As part of implementation of the European directives on Drinking Water (98/83/EC) and Waste Water (91/271/EEC), all people in Romania should be provided wholesome and clean drinking water by the end of 2015 and agglomerations of more than 2000 persons should be connected to a wastewater collection system by the end of 2018. Throughout Romania, projects are currently being implemented – with financial support of the European Union – to achieve these goals. While at the end of 2006 there was still lots of work to be done, it was not judged as sufficiently serious to hold up Romania's accession. No transition period was negotiated for the implementation of other the Water Framework and Flood Management Directives as Romania was already implementing these directives within the context of on-going collaboration in the Danube river basin.

Transition from accession candidate to Member State

4. Progress has, at times, been patchy. Before accession, EU funding was provided directly by European bodies. In addition, support was provided by Member States (such as bilateral support from the Netherlands on Water Framework and Flood Risk Management Directives). Once Romania joined the EU, however, funding was provided direct to the central government, who initially lacked sufficient capacity to make sure the right projects were well-resourced and making the necessary progress.

5. Ensuring compliance has been a top-down process, with central government being prescriptive in order to comply with EU regulations providing little opportunity for lower level authorities to influence the process. The implementation of necessary reforms was anyway challenging due to factors, such as, resistance at the local level, a lack of cooperation across actors and an inadequate legislative framework. For example, establishing effective tariff systems is a necessary precondition for EU funding; if tariffs do not cover costs, funding is withheld. While safe drinking water and efficient waste water systems are desirable for politicians, an increase in water prices was met with resistance at the local level leading to delays in project implementation.
6. Vinke-de Kruijf concluded that, while the overhaul of governance structures required to implement reform has been significant, EU funding and the incentive of accession had been instrumental in driving through impressive improvements to drinking and waste water standards in Romania.