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Turkey : "Water and Health" twinning between France and Turkey

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Date de mise en ligne : mardi 2 décembre 2008

OIEau

(The News N° 16 - December 2008)

This twinning agreement, carried out within the Program for Pre-Accession to the European Union, deals with the "drinking water", "raw waters intended for drinking water supply", "bathing water" and "mineral water" Directives.

For 18 months, four people have continuously worked in close cooperation with the departments of the Turkish Ministry for Health in Ankara and other organizations in charge of the fields covered by these Directives.

About forty French experts participate in this twinning agreement through short-term assignments. They are mainly experts from the French Ministry for Health, or related organizations, and from the Ministry of Ecology and Sustainable Development.

Tenths of Turkish specialists are regularly involved in this twinning and hundreds occasionally participate in its activities. In addition to those from the Ministry for Health, from its provincial directorates and laboratories, they come from the other ministries, in particular those of the Environment and Forestry, Tourism, the Interior, DSI (General Directorate of State Hydraulic Works), of the Bank of Provinces, etc.

Regarding drinking water, the twinning activities have, for one year and half, dealt with all the issues which guarantee public health.

The Turkish Authorities especially examined the legal aspects and responsibilities of the various institutions, the monitoring programs and their optimization, the reliability of the supply from a quantitative and qualitative viewpoint.

The difficulties and shortages encountered in the water supply, which occurred in summer in Ankara, illustrate the interest of having preventive measures to reduce the vulnerability of the supply, alternative measures when water shortage cannot be avoided and provisions to prevent negative impact on health.

The relation between quality of the supplied water and resource protection, the eutrophication phenomena, which appear when water resources decrease, their consequences on the treatment processes, the taking of measures to face them, water saving, etc., were profitably discussed by the Turkish people in charge with their French counterparts from the Ministries for Health and Sustainable Development, the Loire-Brittany and Seine-Normandy Water Agencies, the Office of Geological and Mining Research, analysis laboratories, the French Agency for Health and Food Safety, Paris Water and the International Office for Water.

An important component concerns the dissemination of results on water quality, data bases and public information.

As regards bathing waters, Turkey has a privileged situation, which makes it a very favored tourist destination for its coastal waters. It also has an important potential for fresh water bathing.

From the point of view of health protection, Turkey benefits from many very favorable features :

- ▶ a wide and tested control network : more than 1,400 monitoring points have been controlled regularly by the health services since the 1990s,
- ▶ a long-time "recognition" of the stakes of health and environmental protection from the Ministry of Tourism and the large "metropolitan authorities", such as ISKI in Istanbul) ;
- ▶ a relatively limited extension of animal husbandry in the coastal basins, and thus a limited risk of eutrophication and bacterial contamination in the bathing areas ;
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a very sunny climate (biocide effect of UV radiation) with very few showers and storms in summer, which are one of the main causes of bathing water contamination ;

- ▶ most of the recent tourist resorts are equipped with modern and effective sanitary infrastructures, especially thanks to the investments of the Ministry of Tourism in sanitation ;
- ▶ and very low tides and an absence almost total of long distance pollution transfers, making occasional pollution limited to the close neighborhood.

The twinning priority actions deal with the evolution of organization and the harmonization of control with the European Directives, the new Directive published in March 2006 in particular :

- ▶ definition of bathing areas, coding and classification,
- ▶ laboratory practices : analyses, sampling, conveyance, as well as quality assurance and accreditation,
- ▶ profiles of environmental vulnerability of bathing areas and pollution reduction as well as modulation of monitoring frequencies,
- ▶ knowledge of the pressures of polluting activities on the environment and exchanges with the other ministries, municipalities or urban metropolises, etc.,
- ▶ design of a database that can be used, either locally in the season or before-season for the annual opening, or for classifications at the end of season, or for drafting the national and triennial reports intended for the European Commission,
- ▶ communication tools, exchange of information between the institutional partners and public information.

As regards natural mineral waters, the twinning project, using the characterization of waters and treatment and production plants, carried out an expert's appraisal of the conditions for implementing the Directive 80/777/EEC : definition of mineral waters according to the Directive, field of application, rules concerning the chemical and microbiological characteristics and radioactivity, limit values, acceptable treatments, bottling and labeling conditions and the whole control process by the producers themselves and inspection by Health Authorities.

The conditions applicable to imported waters were also examined, together with the recognition of waters produced by third countries. The latter is of special significance in Turkey, taking into account the importance of natural mineral waters in the country's economy because of internal consumption, but also of Turkish export worldwide.

The extent of the covered issues, the significance of the public health stakes, as well as of the related economic stakes, the interest of achieving the objectives, led the European Commission, upon a joint request from the Turkish and French partners, to continue the twinning agreement beyond 30 November 2007 for a new 6-month period in 2008.