INTRODUCTION TO ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT: POLITICS, POLICY AND MANAGEMENT

CASE STUDY 5 INTEGRATED DRAINAGE BASIN MANAGEMENT FOR THE RIVER MEUSE/MAAS, BELGIUM, FRANCE, GERMANY, LUXEMBOURG AND THE NETHERLANDS.

Introduction

Europe has many of the world's international drainage basins and a long history of efforts to improvement their use and management by international agreements. Europe also has seen a unique development in international cooperation and integration through the European Union and its various predecessors. While the earlier treaties setting in train the processes of European integration were predominantly economic and social in character, since the Maastricht treaty, environmental issues have also explicitly featured in text and the various articles of the treaty.

The European Union is of great interest to political scientists and international relations specialists as it fits none of the existing categories of a state, whether unitary or federal, nor is it a loose association of states but rather a unique institution that is often described as being supranational in character. Unusually for an international body, the European Union has an executive that is able to formulate policy that becomes binding upon its members. Since the late 1970s, quite a lot of European environmental policy has been created by the Commission of the European Union. This has had a major impact on all members of the EU. For the greener member states, this has entailed explaining the basis of national policy and considering how this best practice could be extended to the rest of the EU. For the less green member states, this has lead to a rise in environmental standards and practice but often at considerable expense and frequently also after much confusion and hostility. Negotiation between member governments and the European Commission and its various Directorates (Directorate XI covers the environment) has characterised the development and publication of Directives through which EU policy has been developed and is to be implemented.

The Meuse/Maas basin

The river is called the Meuse in French and the Maas in Flemish and Dutch. For convenience, it will be called just the Meuse in this case study. The main river rises on the Plateau de Langres in eastern France and flows through Lorraine to enter Belgium where the Sambre joins it in Namur. The Meuse then flows on forming the boundary between Belgian Limburg and Dutch Limburg before fully entering Dutch territory and finally reaching the sea as part of the Rhine delta. Tributaries of the Meuse drain parts of Luxembourg and a very small part of Nord-Rhein-

Westfalen in Germany. As European rivers go, it is not especially large nor is it particularly heavily used for navigation. However, this is a particularly heavily populated part of Europe, especially in the reaches lying in Belgium and the Netherlands and the historic industrial heart of Belgium lay in the Sambre-Meuse corridor. So water quality and water use issues are of great significance in the basin.

La Commission International pour la Protection de la Meuse

A new Accord to this agreement was signed in Ghent in Belgium on 3 December 2002. The parties to this agreement were France, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the federal Belgian government, the regional governments of Flanders and Wallonie and the city government of Brussels. The headquarters of the Commission is in Liège in Belgium. The new Accord brought signatures to the original agreement of 1994 from Luxembourg and Germany and from the federal government of Belgium (as in the earlier agreement the three Belgian regions alone had signed). The new agreement was necessary in order to meet the requirements of the EU Water Framework Directive that now demands management plans for integrated water management to be drawn up for all drainage basins. Given that tributaries to the Meuse rise in Luxembourg and in Germany which had not been signatories to the original agreement, their assent was necessary to create a body competent to draw up such a management plan.

Some past history

In 1843 the Campine Canal was dug by Belgium to link Antwerp to eastern Belgium. The water for the canal was taken from the Meuse. The Netherlands was adversely affected by the diversion and so the first agreement on the Meuse was signed between Belgium and the Netherlands in 1863 to allocate specific volumes of water from the river to each state. Further developments on the river took place but the original treaty was not amended. By 1963, a new link between the Scheldt and the Rhine was in operation and a new treaty between Belgium and the Netherlands required Belgium to compensate the Netherlands for water diverted to the Scheldt-Rhine link. This it was agreed would take place somewhere on the Meuse and for the first time water quality as well as water volume was explicitly mentioned. No progress was made on the matter, mainly because to meet its obligations Belgium would have had to

construct reservoirs in the scenically attractive Ardennes and in the face of public hostility.

In 1992 the Helsinki Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes was agreed and provided a framework for countries to work together to manage international watercourses. A cardinal principle was that integrated water management was to be preferred to a water use by sector approach. This offered a new framework for Belgium, France and the Netherlands to work together on the Meuse and the 1994 agreement was the end result of this process.

References:

Bouman, N (1996) A new regime for the Meuse. *Review of European Community and International Environmental Law.* 5(2) 161-168.
International Commission for the Protection of the Meuse
http://www.cipm-icbm.be/

Some questions:

- How does the European Union develop environmental policy?
- How do EU Directives get developed?
- Just what is the EU Water Framework Directive?
- What is integrated drainage basin management?
- In what ways and for what reasons might this be seen as an improvement on water management practice in the first half of the twentieth century?
- How does the ICPM/CIPM improve the management of the Meuse?
- How does the ICPM/CIPM operate?