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## **WETNET project meeting in Ljubljana, Press release**

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Ljubljana, SLOVENIA – On 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> of June the second project partner meeting of the project WETNET: Coordinated management and networking of Mediterranean wetlands took place in Ljubljana. The fruitful meeting was hosted by the Anton Melik Geographical Institute of the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (ZRC SAZU), and was attended by 18 participants. The project connects partners from 6 Mediterranean countries, Slovenia, Italy, France, Spain, Portugal, and Malta and aims at ensuring higher coordination between different levels of spatial planning and authorities in charge for wetland management, whilst limiting conflicts between preservation issues and economic activities.

The newly launched Interreg Mediterranean project, cofounded by European Regional Development Fund and coordinated by Veneto Region, addresses the issue of wetlands in Europe, which are vulnerable interconnected environments, hugely contributing to biodiversity. Their protection intertwines scientific-environmental aspects and governance concerns. WETNET tackles the issue of implementing a multilevel governance for MED wetlands in order to achieve overall and network effects on wetlands ecosystems as well as on connected local systems. By defining common priorities for MED wetlands conservation, WETNET builds a common territorial strategy for their integrated management. Building on previous EU experiences (River Contracts), WETNET seeks to test and transfer 'Wetlands Contracts', acting through broad participatory processes where users, private and public entities are committed in mainstreaming wetlands preservation into their ordinary activities. To these aims, the project will also increase the knowledge on River Contracts effectiveness and strengthen existing transnational networks for sharing and disseminating information and good practices on wetlands' preservation. The project partnership involves all authorities and typology of stakeholders operating in target field. It will allow WETNET to meet the Wetlands needs at a broad scale, ensuring the transferability of its results to other EU countries.

During the first day of the meeting the representatives from Italian Centre for River Restoration (CIRF) and ZRC SAZU described the idea of capacity building on Wetland Contract implementation. They stressed out that the development of good relationships between relevant organizations and different stakeholders is considered as a pivotal factor for ensuring effective capacity building on „Wetland contract“ implementation. The project partners also played a roll game on the aforementioned theme in order to facilitate the understanding of the issue.

The second day was dedicated to the project Steering Committee meeting and the discussion of the Guidance Manual for Wetland Contract implementation. Representative from CIRF and Veneto Region, presented the situation related to administration and work plan. Representative from Government of Aragon (Sarga) has presented the work done in the project communication. The representatives from ZRC SAZU and CIRF presented the draft of the Manual for Wetland Contract implementation. The step by step draft manual presented clearly leads through the key phases from the first idea of the River Contracts to the final realization of the process.

On Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> of June the Study visit to the Slovenian pilot area was organized to the Ljubljansko Barje Nature Park. Participants were interested to hear about the ways of protecting and managing the protected area in the gateway of the country's capital city – Ljubljana. The exhibition *My Ljubljana River* helped the participants to understand the water processes that occur in the wetland. Mr. Janez Kastelic, director of the Nature Park, presented the work and the challenges of the Park management, especially related to the protection of the wetland and the relations to the seven municipalities within the protected area.

The next meeting will take place in Malta in November 2017 and will be organised by Gozo Regional Committee.

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