



# 15 years of Skat in Kosovo's water sector – and many more to come

We are committed to SDG6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all. Skat is a leading centre of excellence in Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH). Skat is also advising governmental partners and supporting civil society in implementing Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) at all levels.

## The early days of short-term consultancies

When a Skat employee set foot in Kosovo for the first time in 2007, the country was still recovering from the devastation of the 1998-99 war and the preceding decade of isolationism and systematic discrimination. This was one year prior to Kosovo declaring its independence on February 17, 2008, and becoming the youngest country in Europe. At that time, the country had the lowest gross domestic product and the slowest growing economy in South-East Europe. Likewise, it was estimated that little more than half of

its population was connected to a public water supply system; and this figure dropped considerably in rural areas, where a large proportion of the people relied on water from private wells or on local independent supply systems.

Against this backdrop, the first services Skat provided in Kosovo dealt with the appraisal, design, support and quality control of village-level water supply, sanitation and hygiene projects. Through several consecutive mandates over 2007-2011, Skat provided thematic support to the Caritas Switzerland office in Prizren and

## Support to River Basin Management Planning and Implementation

Kosovo's River Basin District Authority is responsible for the development and implementation of River Basin Management Plans (RBMP), and the management of the Water Information System (WIS), water permitting, etc. The IWRM-K Program provides technical support to the development and implementation of the RBMPs following the principles of the EU Water Framework Directive, assisting the development of the WIS, implementing pilot measures (to e.g. reduce the pollution pressures), along with capacity building activities. Skat has started the process with a water balance study, as a precondition for the further planning activities. A holistic stakeholder involvement mechanism is currently being developed and rolled out to ensure close coordination with the representatives of all relevant sectors and water users at an early stage of the planning process.

Batllava artificial lake supplying the region of Pristina (capital city) and surrounding areas with drinking water. (photo: Skat Kosovo)





*"I decided to build my career in the water sector after attending an international master course in water management: an inspiration for my colleagues and me to improve water management in our own countries. My contribution to the water sector was then strongly supported by the donor community, with Switzerland being the most generous one. By working as a local Skat backstopping team member of the RWSSP, for more than six years, I continuously expanded my knowledge in the water services area, which altogether with the Swiss-enshrined values were transferred to the local partners. This expert advice and partnership gave the water regulator and water utilities in Kosovo a unique opportunity to improve and enforce regulation, enhance their professional/operational capacities, and set water prices based on the cost-recovery and polluter pays principles. This success story of Skat and myself is now extended for 'replication' into the water resources sector under the IWRM-K Program."*

Vera Muhaxhiri

Former local expert in the Skat Backstopping Mandate for the RWSSP, today Deputy Team Leader and Senior Advisor for Capacity Development, IWRM-K Program Facilitation Unit, Skat Consulting Kosovo

the Kosovo desk at the agency's head office through advisory services from the desk and regular review, coaching and training missions to the field. This led to further short-term consultancies in this period, including the evaluation of the (then) GTZ Water Project in Kosovo and the organisation of a Study Tour for Water Companies from Eastern Kosovo to Switzerland.

#### **Long-term backstopper of Swiss Cooperation's water portfolio**

From 2000 onwards, Kosovo launched a far-reaching water services sector reform, resulting in the

transformation of 30 municipal water companies into seven regional water companies (RWC). This consolidation was motivated by the creation of larger entities that can benefit from economies of scale and larger customer databases, ensuring a fairer tariff policy in the broader service areas. By 2009, the reform, supported by Switzerland among others, included the strengthening of the legal framework, establishing sector regulators, setting management oversight, integrating rural water systems, clarifying the role of municipalities, introducing corporate governance and establishing coordination platforms.



Thematic workshop at the WSRA office (photo: Skat Kosovo 2019)

#### **Institutional Capacity Building in the Water Services Sector of Kosovo**

Skat's Backstopping Services for SDC's Rural Water and Sanitation Support Project included direct assistances to the water sector's regulation and its bodies. Over six years, Skat has supported the Water Services Regulatory Authority (WSRA). The support enabled the WSRA evolving its functions to include setting and monitoring of tariffs and standards, issuing and monitoring of licenses, monitoring of general performance of water services providers and handling of consumer complaints. Skat's support to the water quality regulator, the National Institute of Public Health (NIPHK), helped improving its data management and introducing reporting on drinking water quality to the public and the European Commission.



*"Coordination' is the most apt word to explain my role into the current Skat activity, i.e. the implementation of Phase 1 of the IWRM-K Program in Kosovo. To me, water and environment are the best ways to help understand both the natural and social world. These two are of crucial importance to, and are being affected by many sectors, such as energy, agriculture, infrastructure, urbanisation, etc. Therefore, an integrated and well-coordinated management approach is vital to meeting the needs of multiple water use sectors and the natural ecosystems. The challenge becomes more difficult in significantly water-stressed and almost water-scarce countries like Kosovo. This challenge influenced my preference to study and work in the field of nature and environment. On top of my professional experience dealing with environment and water, including the experience on IWRM in a transboundary river basin, the IWRM-K Program provides a perfect opportunity to help improving water resources management planning and implementation in Kosovo."*

Rizah Hajdari

Senior Advisor for Water Resources Management, IWRM-K Program Facilitation Unit, Skat Consulting Kosovo

During this process, Skat succeeded in acquiring long-term mandates to support national entities, donors and implementers in Kosovo's water services sector. Since 2010, we are providing backstopping services for the design and performance of SDC's Rural Water and Sanitation Support Programme (RWSSP): an endeavour that has provided improved water services to 600,000 people and boosted the performance of the RWCs and sector regulatory bodies. Skat also provided SECO-funded backstopping support (2009-2020) to the Swiss Cooperation Office in Kosovo and the Inter-Ministerial Water Council (IMWC) advisors on sector coordination, reform and policy work at the highest political levels.

### Towards becoming an implementing organisation with a local Skat office

Kosovo is one of the most water-stressed countries in Southeast Europe; growing demand for water and the impact of climate change amplify the challenge, while the transboundary character of its river basins further complicates water management. Under the sector reform initiated in 2000, Kosovo has achieved a well-developed legal framework and an adequate institutional set-up for water management. However, in practice, these institutions have weak technical and institutional capacities and the political commitment for the sector is still low. Consequently, the actual operationalisation and implementation of water management policy and legal frameworks and the development of infrastructure are lagging behind.

In this context, the SDC decided to support the establishment of a contemporary water resources management framework backed by properly capacitated institutions in the country over the next decade. Skat won the related competitive tender process in consortium with the Environment Agency Austria, and was awarded in early 2019 the mandate to design and implement the Integrated Water Resources Management in Kosovo (IWRM-K) Program in its inception and subsequent first phase. As a result, Skat has evolved successfully towards an implementing organisation in Kosovo and currently deploys a team

of ten professionals out of its locally registered office. Hence, our journey in the country continues for at least another decade.

By Roger Schmid, Vera Muhamxiri and Rizah Hajdari

Springs of White Drin River, Radac, Kosovo (photo: Skat Kosovo)

