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Flood prevention in Serbia

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Serbia suffered major flood events in May 2014, which affected 1.6 million people. The Government declared a state of emergency for the territory of the whole country. The total value of disaster was 1.7 billion Euros. After that the focus was on recovery through several programs, special Law on Post-Flood rehabilitation, projects, international aid and loans. What was done in the meantime in order to prevent similar events? Is the focus still on traditional flood protection or there has been some changes? What problems occur in practice, especial regarding implementation of certain instruments and measures?

Water law in Serbia is mostly harmonized with EU directives, but the process of implementation is still ongoing. Flood hazard maps and risk maps, as a precondition for flood risk management plans, were separately made as a part of specific projects for certain rivers. This year the process of preparation of maps for the whole country has started, aiming to be finished by 2020. Thereafter the boundaries of flood risk areas should be included into spatial and urban plans improving the current planning system based on a document issued by public water management company.

Obtaining the land for flood risk management could be a way to approach this issue from a different perspective. One of the potential instruments, although not yet implemented, but legally regulated, is a pre-emption right of waterfront land. That could enable control over waterfront land and its use for flood risk management. Projects for designation of potential retention zones are another possibility to make space for water and reduce the risk, which require new legal regulations in order to be applied in practice. Mostly used instrument for obtaining the land for flood protection is expropriation. According to recent cases that land is still mainly used for river regulation, dikes, and other traditional flood protection measures. All those instruments are affecting property rights making the way of regulating of these issues very delicate. The research is based on analysis of legal regulations, relevant literature, analysis of the practice of the state authorities at the national and local level and interviews with the relevant stakeholders in order to perceive this issue from different aspects, to identify problems and recommendations for improvements.