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**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

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**Decision on the implementation of the Convention on the Protection and Use of  
Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes at the global level**

## **Background and proposed action by the UNECE Executive Committee (EXCOM)**

Transboundary water cooperation is key for sustainable development and the prevention of conflicts. This is recognized in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which includes a target promoting transboundary water cooperation (target 6.5) and by the adoption of a global Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicator measuring progress in this area (indicator 6.5.2). The Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) offers the only operational global intergovernmental framework in the United Nations system supporting transboundary water cooperation. The Water Convention and its secretariat have a key role to support the achievement of the SDGs. Work under the Convention has therefore been aligned to the 2030 Agenda and expanded in scope to this end (e.g. including activities related to financing transboundary basin development). The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) has been designated as co-custodian agency, together with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), for SDG indicator 6.5.2.

At its eighth session (Astana, Kazakhstan, 10-12 October 2018), the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention recognized that due to the operationalization of the amendment to the Convention in 2016 allowing accession to all United Nations Member States, future programmes of work of the Convention would require additional regular budget resources. It therefore “requested the secretariat to take all necessary measures, including the provision of additional human and financial resources from the regular budget, to ensure the effective management and full implementation of the programme of work”.

The present document recalls the rationale for the Meeting of the Parties’ decision and contains a draft decision by the Commission and a draft resolution of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) prepared by the secretariat pursuant to the request of the Meeting of the Parties.

The UNECE Executive Committee (EXCOM) is invited to transmit the draft decision for consideration by the Commission at its 68th session (Geneva, 9-10 April 2019). Further, EXCOM may wish to consider lending its support to the decision by the Meeting of the Parties.

### **Recent developments related to the Water Convention provide new opportunities**

- Article 19 of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) stipulates that the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe serves as secretariat to the Water Convention.
- The Convention was negotiated as a regional instrument for the UNECE countries, thereby potentially servicing up to 54 Member States at the time of adoption of the Convention in 1992.
- The Convention was subsequently amended in 2003 to allow accession to all United Nations Member States. The amendment became “operational” in March 2016: as of that date, all United Nations Member States can accede to it.
- Chad and Senegal acceded to the Convention in 2018. More than 20 countries have already officially announced their intention to accede to the Convention.

- The eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention, which took place in Astana from 10 to 12 October 2018, was the first session held since the operationalization of the amendment allowing all United Nations Member States to accede to the Convention.
- The Meeting of the Parties devoted much attention to this new situation and took a number of decisions to support the implementation of the Convention at the global level. It adopted the programme of work under the Convention for 2019-2021 including activities at the global level (ECE/MP.WAT/54/Add.1, forthcoming) together with a Strategy for the implementation of the Convention at the global level (ECE/MP.WAT/54/Add.2, forthcoming).
- Indeed, the universalization of the Convention provides great opportunities to strengthen transboundary water cooperation. This is crucial as 60% of freshwater flow worldwide is in transboundary basins. 153 countries share rivers, lakes or aquifers with their neighbours. These transboundary waters support the incomes and livelihoods of more than 3 billion people, create social, economic and political interdependences, and play a crucial role for countless ecosystems. However, cooperation in transboundary basins is in most cases not fit to deal with existing and future challenges. By 2025, 1.8 billion people are projected to be living in countries or regions with absolute water scarcity, and two thirds of the world population could be under water stress conditions. As water is fundamental for human health, economic activities and environment sustainability, water insecurity can undermine the prospects of sustainable development, multiply the risks of conflicts and drive migration, especially in already fragile countries.
- The Convention has made a tangible difference in the pan-European region, which is the most advanced worldwide in terms of transboundary water cooperation. The Convention has fostered the sustainable management of shared resources and the creation of strong institutions which have promoted regional integration and prevented conflicts. Given this proven effectiveness, the secretariat of the Convention receives a growing number of requests for assistance, from countries and regional organizations from all regions, to promote transboundary water cooperation, including requests for policy advice, normative support, capacity building, and direct technical assistance.
- Therefore, the universalization of the Convention represents a substantial increase in the mandate and work of the secretariat.

#### **The secretariat to the Water Convention: current situation and additional resource needs**

- Since the '90s the Water Convention's secretariat comprises two Regular Budget (RB) professional staff: one at P-4 level (who manages the water unit and acts as part-time Convention Secretary and part-time as co-Secretary of the Protocol on Water and Health) and the other at P-3 level, mostly responsible for servicing the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management, a main subsidiary body of the Meeting of the Parties.
- Over the years, upon requests from the Meeting of the Parties, the substantive work areas and related workload have increased more than seven-fold supported by extrabudgetary (XB) funding. The number of XB funded staff has grown and the team is currently responsible for implementing a programme of activities with an annual average XB cost of more than 3.5 million USD. The water unit is nowadays composed of 15 staff members, including 2 RB

- P staff, 8 XB P staff, 1 Junior Professional Officer (JPO), and 4 General (G) staff (1 RB and 3 XB) staff.
- Chad acceded to the Water Convention in February 2018, Senegal in August 2018, and several other countries are advanced in the process. Since the opening of the Convention, more than 120 countries have been involved in the Convention's activities. The Convention's universalization represents a substantial increase in the mandate and work of the secretariat.
    - From the geographical point of view, the secretariat does not engage only with UNECE countries but with all UN Member States. As an example, 88 countries participated in the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties.
    - From the substantial point of view, the activities under the Convention cover a much larger spectrum as they need to address challenges of very different countries, with different level of socio-economic development and at very different stages of progress in transboundary water cooperation. This is reflected in the fact that the Convention's programme of work for 2019-2021 includes additional areas of work specifically requested by new and perspective Parties from other regions, such as monitoring and assessment of transboundary water resources, which was previously disrupted.
  - Given the range and complexity of the activities, the RB resources available for managing staff and financial resources and, not less importantly, for managing the delivery of expected outputs are not anymore adequate. Similarly, with the expansion of the unit from 3 to 15 staff, the managerial responsibilities are not commensurate to the current level of the manager of the unit (P-4).
  - Moreover, due to the Convention's growing recognition, the Secretary is more and more requested to interact with Ministers, Ambassadors and other high-level officials in countries. The heads of other global conventions have much higher seniority than P-4 to be able to have an adequate representation in similar situations.
  - The Meeting of the Parties, at its eighth session, considered the challenges faced by the secretariat deriving from the lack of appropriate staff resources to handle the implementation of the Convention's programme of work at the global level. It discussed the need for more regular budget resources, in particular to ensure that the secretariat was headed by a P-5 staff, and was informed of the relevant budgetary implications (260,000 USD per year, including general operating expenses). Based on such discussion, the Meeting of the Parties "requested the secretariat to take all necessary measures, including the provision of additional human and financial resources from the regular budget, to ensure the effective management and full implementation of the programme of work" (ECE/MP.WAT/54, forthcoming).
  - Without such additional resources, the secretariat will not be able to deliver on its increased mandate and the opportunities offered by the universalisation of the Convention will not be seized.

## **Draft decision on the implementation of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes at the global level**

At its 68th meeting, the Commission:

*Welcomed* the operationalization in 2016 of the amendment to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) allowing accession to all United Nations Member States;

*Also welcomed* the accession by Chad and Senegal to the Convention in 2018 and the interest to accede by 20 countries<sup>1</sup> officially expressed at the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties (Astana, 10-12 October 2018);

*Noted* the adoption at the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties of the Strategy for the implementation of the Convention at the global level (ECE/MP.WAT/54/Add.2, forthcoming);

*Also noted* the adoption at the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties of the programme of work for 2019-2021 (ECE/MP.WAT/54/Add.1, forthcoming) to support the Convention's implementation which will contribute to the objectives set in the Strategy;

*Recognized* that due to the operationalization of the amendment to the Convention in 2016 and the growing number of Parties, the management and implementation of future programmes of work under the Convention would require additional regular budget resources;

*Requested* the secretariat to take all necessary measures, including the provision of additional human and financial resources from the regular budget, to ensure effective management and full implementation of the Convention's programme of work;

*Decided* to transmit to the Economic and Social Council at its session of 2019 a draft resolution on this issue for consideration and possible adoption.

## **Draft ECOSOC resolution on the implementation of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes at the global level**

*The Economic and Social Council,*

*Noting* the adoption by the 68<sup>th</sup> session Economic Commission for Europe (Geneva, 9-10 April 2019) of decision ... on implementation of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) at the global level, which is annexed to the present resolution,

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<sup>1</sup> Benin, Cameroon, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Central African Republic, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Iraq, Jordan, Mauritania, Mongolia, Niger, Nigeria, Uganda, Togo, Tunisia, Somalia, Suriname and Viet Nam.

*Endorses* the decision of the Economic Commission for Europe on the implementation of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes at the global level.

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**Next steps:**

The UNECE Executive Committee (EXCOM) is invited to transmit the draft decision for consideration by the Commission at its 68th session (Geneva, 9-10 April 2019). Further, EXCOM may wish to consider lending its support to the decision by the Meeting of the Parties.

Draft EXCOM decision:

EXCOM thanks the Chair of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes at the global level for the briefing on the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention, held in Astana, Kazakhstan, on 10-12 October 2018.

EXCOM takes note of the request of the Meeting of the Parties for “the secretariat to take all necessary measures, including the provision of additional human and financial resources from the regular budget, to ensure the effective management and full implementation of the programme of work”.

EXCOM approves the submission of the related draft decision contained in informal document 2019/3 to the sixty-eighth session of the Commission for consideration under agenda item 6 “Other issues calling for decision by the Commission”.

EXCOM encourages delegations to liaise with their New York counterparts on the issue.

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