

The Second Assessment of Transboundary Rivers, Lakes and Groundwaters



The Second Assessment of Transboundary Rivers, Lakes and Groundwaters is the most comprehensive, up-to-date overview of the status of transboundary waters in the pan-European region. It covers more than 140 transboundary rivers, 25 transboundary lakes, about 200 transboundary groundwaters, 25 Ramsar Sites or other wetlands of transboundary importance.

The Second Assessment presents a broad analysis of transboundary water resources, pressure factors, quantity and quality status, and transboundary impacts, as well as responses and future trends (including predicted impacts of climate change). It therefore illustrates the overall progress made in the pan-European region as well as the challenges ahead and the hot spots.

THE STATUS OF TRANSBOUNDARY WATERS IS IMPROVING BUT STILL UNDER STRESS

The status of transboundary waters is improving in many parts of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) region thanks to the efforts to protect waters and the environment. However, transboundary water resources are still under great stress from a variety of causes including poor management practices, pollution (agriculture, wastewater discharges, etc.), overexploitation, unsustainable production and consumption patterns, hydromorphological pressures, inadequate investment in infrastructure and low efficiency in water use.

In Western and Central Europe changes caused to the rivers' natural flow by constructions have resulted in altered and degraded ecosystems (wetlands in particular), sedimentation and blocked fish migration. Diffuse pollution from the use of fertilizers and pesticides is a major cause for impaired water quality in the subregion.

In South-Eastern Europe, the steady growth of manufacturing, mining and hydropower sectors has resulted in additional environmental challenges, along with the challenges associated with current methods employed in agriculture. At the same time, the European Union (EU) accession process has driven improvement in national legal frameworks and water management-related investments, but cooperation on transboundary waters remains weak in many cases.

In Eastern Europe, the status of waters has improved, not least due to the investments in wastewater collection and treatment infrastructure. However there are remarkable differences between EU and non-EU countries, where wastewaters still represent a heavy pressure on transboundary waters.

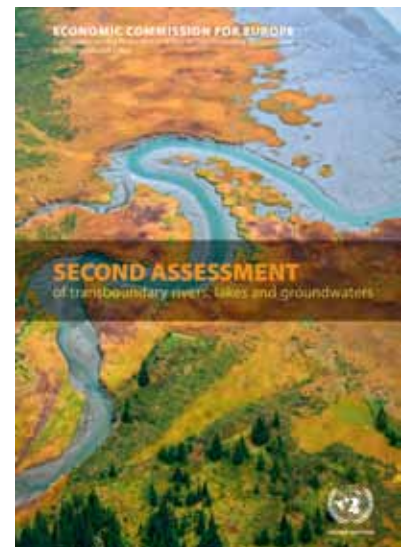
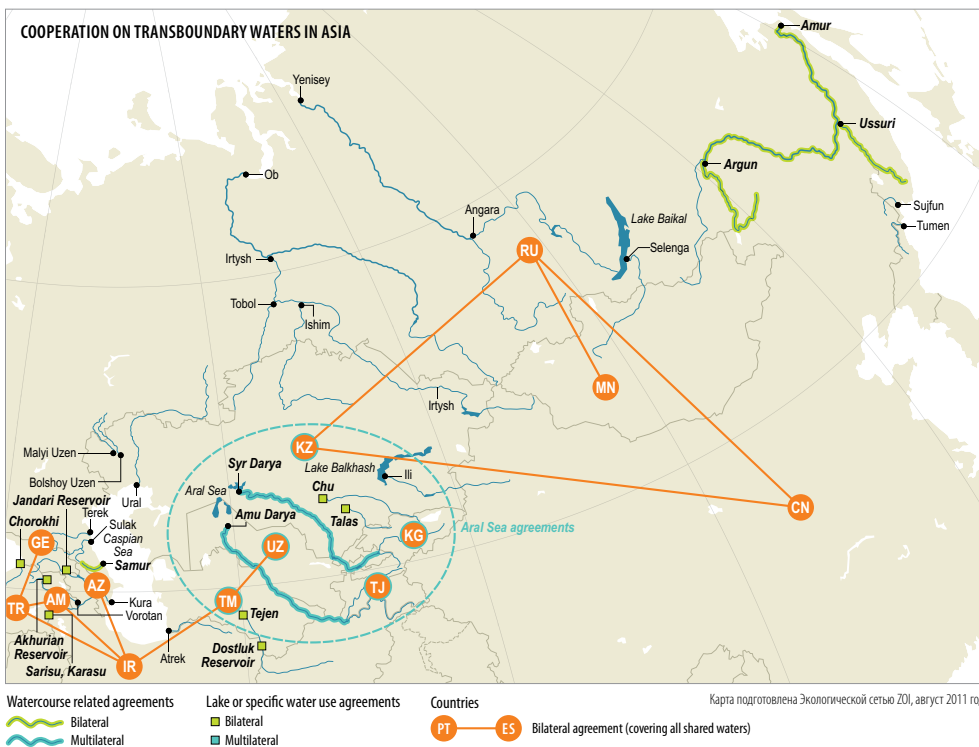
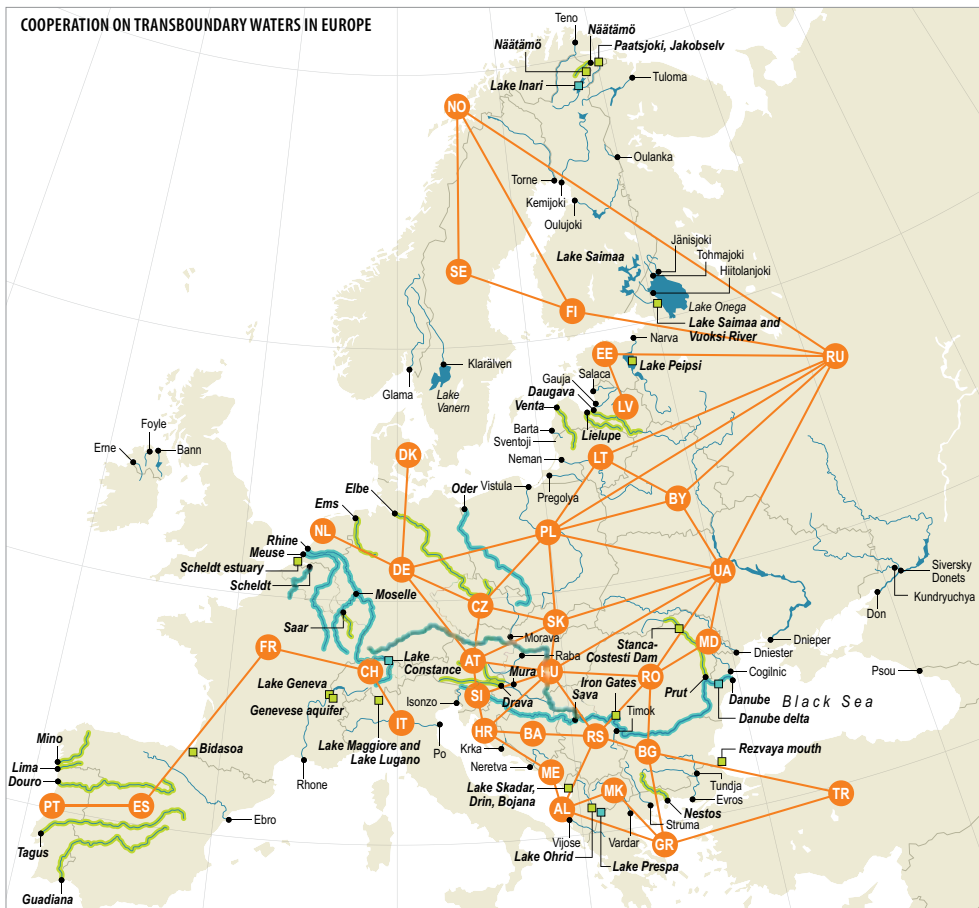
In the Caucasus, economic development is prioritized and there is a need to enhance environmental protection to ensure long-term sustainability. Despite some modest progress in bilateral cooperation, no basin-wide agreement exists for the management of the Kura River, the main river in the subregion, and a greater political commitment is needed.

In Central Asia, agreements signed in recent years are positive steps towards improving transboundary cooperation. However, the lack of properly implemented basin-wide agreements on the main rivers of Central Asia (the Amu Darya and Syr Darya) is a major hindrance. Further efforts in the subregion are needed to improve water efficiency. Environmental impact assessments should be carried out in a more systematic manner.



STIMULUS TO TAKE ACTION

The Second Assessment provides relevant information and stimulus for Governments, river basin organizations and international and non-governmental organizations to take action to improve the status of transboundary waters and related ecosystems. The information enables improved understanding of the problems and strengthens the knowledge base for identification and implementation of appropriate management measures to reduce transboundary impacts and to protect shared waters. The process of the Second Assessment served to identify gaps in knowledge, to seek a common understanding of issues, to promote harmonization of approaches across the region, to benchmark progress and to assess the results of measures taken.



The Second Assessment was prepared under the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes as a collective effort by Parties and non-Parties to the Convention, including countries outside the UNECE region. It was prepared upon request by the Sixth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference as an input for the Seventh "Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference" in Astana, Kazakhstan (21–23 September 2011).

The full report and the executive summary are available in English and in Russian at:
http://www.unece.org/env/water/publications/pub/second_assessment.html