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MEETING OF THE PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION
ON THE PROTECTION AND USE OF TRANSBOUNDARY
WATERCOURSES AND INTERNATIONAL LAKES

Working Group on Water Management

REPORT ON THE FIRST MEETING

Introduction

1. The first meeting of the Working Group on Water Management took place in Budapest on 23-24 September 1998, at the invitation of the Government of Hungary.
2. Delegations from the following countries attended: Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, United Kingdom and Uzbekistan.
3. A representative of the Holy See attended the meeting.
4. Representatives of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UN/ECE) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) also participated.
5. The meeting was opened by Mr. Robert RAKICS, Head of the Department on Integrated Pollution Control of the Hungarian Ministry for Environment. He addressed the meeting on behalf of the host country.

6. Mrs. Lea Kauppi, Chairperson of the Meeting of the Parties, made an opening statement on behalf of the Bureau. She chaired the meeting of the Working Group on two agenda items: adoption of the agenda and election of officers.

7. The Working Group welcomed the statements made during the opening session and agreed to bear them in mind when discussing the various agenda items.

I. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND ELECTION OF OFFICERS

8. The Working Group adopted the agenda, as set out in document MP.WAT/WG.1/1998/1. It elected Mr. B. WARNAT (Germany) and Mr. G. HOLLO (Hungary) as its Chairperson and Vice-Chairpersons, respectively.

II. POLICY ISSUES

9. The Working Group took note of the information provided by the delegations of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Czech Republic, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Poland, Spain, Ukraine, United Kingdom, and Uzbekistan on the status of the ratification process and of other issues linked to the implementation of the Convention.

10. The Working Group also took note of the information provided by UNEP on its water-related activities. It noted with appreciation the readiness of UNEP to cooperate with the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention, the Working Group and various task forces.

11. The Working Group examined document MP.WAT/WG.1/1998/3 with the draft questionnaire on policies and strategies on the protection and use of transboundary waters. It decided to focus this review on the implementation of those provisions of part II of the Convention that did not form part of other activities under the work plan (e.g. activities of task forces and expert groups). It also agreed on the topics that should become part of the revised questionnaire and requested the secretariat to draw up and circulate this revised questionnaire to delegations. The Working Group invited delegations to return the completed questionnaire by 1 March 1999. It requested the secretariat to draw up a preliminary review of policies and strategies for its consideration at its second meeting.

12. The Working Group welcomed the offer of the delegation of the Netherlands to lead a small drafting group to identify issues and elements that could be included in a preliminary draft policy document on priority activities to be undertaken between 2000 and 2003. It requested delegations to communicate to the secretariat as soon as possible - preferably with their replies to the above questionnaire, i.e. by 1 March 1999 - proposals on water management issues as well as relevant legal, administrative, economic, financial and technical measures that could become part of this policy document. Delegations that wished to take part in the activities of the small

drafting group were invited to contact the secretariat and the Netherlands delegation.

III. PARTNERS IN COOPERATION

A. Assistance to countries with economies in transition

13. The ECE Regional Adviser on Environment informed the Working Group about requests for assistance from countries in transition, both Parties and non-Parties to the Convention, and on the assistance provided. The Working Group also took note of the initiatives of the Bureau of the Meeting of the Parties to seek funding for specific projects through the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and to establish a concrete programme to strengthen the capability of present and potential Parties, particularly countries in transition, to comply with the obligations under the Convention.

B. Draft protocol on water and health to the 1992 Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes

14. The Chairman reported on progress made during the second intergovernmental meeting (Budapest, 21-23 September 1998) to draw up the draft protocol. The Working Party considered the need to convene an extraordinary meeting of the Parties in conjunction with the 1999 London Ministerial Conference to finalize the protocol. It suggested that the Bureau of the Meeting of the Parties should make other arrangements to enable the Parties to the Convention to express their agreement with the protocol and their intention to implement it at the London Conference.

C. Prevention of damage by waters

15. Several delegations reported on bilateral and multilateral initiatives and concerted action on flood prevention and protection. The secretariat reported on the outcome of the meeting International Decade on Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR) - Central Europe 1998 organized by the IDNDR secretariat in cooperation with the IDNDR National Committee of the Czech Republic (Prague, 9-10 June 1998). At the meeting, the participating countries had proposed to draw up a protocol on flood prevention and protection to the 1992 Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes.

16. The Working Group considered it opportune to prepare recommendations and guidelines for ECE Governments on flood prevention, rather than starting immediately with the drafting of legally binding provisions. It welcomed the offer of the delegation of Germany to lead a task force on flood prevention and protection with a twofold mandate: to prepare draft recommendations/guidelines for consideration and adoption at the second meeting of the Parties to the Convention (22-24 March 2000), and to prepare a seminar (tentatively scheduled to be held in Berlin on 7-8 October 1999) to assist in the drawing-up of these recommendations/guidelines. The Working

Group set an overall timetable for the task force activities, and invited delegations as well as representatives of the IDNDR secretariat, other international organizations and joint bodies to assist in the preparation of these recommendations/guidelines.¹/ Moreover, it invited the delegation of Germany to report on progress at its second meeting.

D. Work under other ECE environmental conventions

17. The secretariat reported on the work carried out under the 1991 Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context and the 1992 Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents. Following programme element 1.1 of the work plan, the Working Group requested its Bureau to consider, together with the Bureau of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context, the opportunity for both bodies to examine jointly the use of EIA for activities affecting transboundary waters.

18. The Working Group also endorsed the decisions adopted at the seventh meeting of the Signatories to the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents of relevance to the activities under the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, including the:

(a) Recommendations of the Workshop on the Prevention of Chemical Accidents and the Limitation of their Impact on Transboundary Waters (CEP/WG.4/1998/16 - MP.WAT/WG.1/1998/7);

(b) Establishment of a joint ad hoc expert group to jointly develop a long-term work programme for the implementation of the provisions common to both Conventions, taking into account the outcome of the above Workshop;

(c) Preparation by the joint ad hoc expert group of, inter alia, an inventory of hazardous activities along transboundary rivers.

E. Cooperation with the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy

19. The secretariat informed the Working Group of the preparations for the fifth session of the Committee on Environmental Policy (28 September to 2 October 1998). The Working Group invited its Bureau to examine, jointly with the Bureau of the Meeting of the Parties, the role of the Working Group in the follow-up to the Aarhus Ministerial Conference, as stipulated in the Helsinki Declaration of the first meeting of the Parties.

20. It also invited the task force on legal and administrative aspects, with Greece as lead country, at its next meeting in Budapest on 1 and 2 December 1998:

(a) To make the necessary arrangements to contribute to the forthcoming ECE workshop on Implementation, compliance monitoring and enforcement of ECE environmental conventions; and

(b) To examine, inter alia, the link between the Convention and the draft protocol on water and health, to assess the compatibility of the Convention and those of the Convention on the Law of the Non-navigational Uses of International Watercourses, and to make arrangements for the setting-up of an advisory service on legal instruments.

IV. FOLLOW-UP TO CONFERENCES AND WORKSHOPS

A. Management of transboundary waters in Europe

21. The Working Group took note with appreciation of the outcome of the International Conference on Management of Transboundary Waters in Europe, as contained in document MP.WAT/WG.1/1998/4, hosted by Poland. It welcomed the proposal by the delegation of Poland to organize a second international conference on management of transboundary waters in 2001 and to host the meetings of the preparatory committee. The Working Group expressed its gratitude to the host country and the Governments of Germany and the Netherlands for the financial support provided to participants from countries in transition to attend the Conference, and to the Netherlands Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management for covering the costs of preparing, editing and publishing the conference proceedings.

B. Protection against groundwater depletion in large catchment areas

22. The Working Group took note with appreciation of the outcome of the International Workshop, hosted by Hungary, on groundwater depletion in basin regions: problems arising between the rivers Danube and Tisza, as contained in document MP.WAT/WG.1/1998/5. It welcomed the arrangements made between the host country, the scientific board of the Workshop and the task force on monitoring and assessment for the drawing-up of the draft guidelines on monitoring and assessment of transboundary groundwaters (see ECE/MP.WAT/2, annex II, programme element 3.6.1). The Working Group also welcomed Hungary's offer to consider convening a follow-up workshop after the second meeting of the Parties to the Convention. Moreover, it expressed its gratitude to the Government of Hungary and the other donor countries and organizations for their financial support and contributions in kind to the Workshop.

C. Water and industrial accidents

23. The Working Group welcomed the offer of the delegation of Germany to:

(a) Lead the joint ad hoc expert group under the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes and the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents to develop a long-term work programme for the implementation of the provisions common to both Conventions (see para. 18);

(b) Host the first meeting of this group in Berlin on 26 and 27 October 1998;

(c) Arrange for the preparation of a seminar on water and industrial accidents, tentatively scheduled to take place in Hamburg from 4 to 6 October 1999, with the assistance of the ad hoc group. It also took note of the offer of various delegations to designate participants for the joint ad hoc group.
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V. WORK PLAN

24. The Working Group considered the elements of the work plan (ECE/MP.WAT/2, annex II) that had not been taken up under previous agenda items. It welcomed the offer of the delegation of Germany to prepare a workshop on joint bodies, tentatively scheduled to take place in Bonn, Germany, on 13 and 14 September 1999. This workshop would form an additional input to programme element 1.1.

25. The delegation of the Russian Federation reported on the preparations for the International Congress and Exhibition-Fair (ICEF): Large Rivers - 99, scheduled to take place in Nizhny Novgorod, Russian Federation, from 25 to 29 May 1999. The Working Group welcomed the offer of this delegation to make the workshop on the revival of the river Volga (programme element 2.4) part of ICEF. It also took note of the fact that the proposed workshop on the restoration of the aquatic ecosystems of the Dnieper River Basin, which was also part of this programme element, was still in the planning phase as arrangements were being made for possible co-financing through the Tacis programme of the European Union.

26. The delegation of Estonia reported on the preparations for the international conference on land-based pollution control in catchment areas of transboundary lakes. The Working Group agreed that the conference should take place in early November 1999 in Estonia.

27. It also welcomed the progress made by the task force on monitoring and assessment, with the Netherlands as lead country, and invited the Government of the Netherlands - at the specific request of the delegations of Hungary, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation and Slovakia - to consider the possibility of setting up a collaborating centre on monitoring and assessment within the Netherlands Institute on Inland Water Management and Waste Water Treatment (RIZA).

28. The Working Group took note of the achievements of the task force on laboratory quality management and accreditation with Hungary as lead country.

VI. DATE AND VENUE OF THE SECOND MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP AND OTHER MEETINGS OF RELEVANCE TO THE CONVENTION

29. The Working Group welcomed the offer of the delegation of Germany to hold the second meeting of the Working Group in Bonn, Germany, on 15 and 16 September 1999 in conjunction with the workshop on joint bodies (see para. 24). It also noted with appreciation that the Government of the Netherlands had made arrangements to hold the second meeting of the Parties to

the Convention in The Hague, Netherlands, from 22 to 24 March 2000 on the occasion of the World Day for Water (22 March) and in conjunction with the World Water Forum (17-22 March 2000).

30. The Working Group invited delegations to inform the secretariat of the dates and venues of international meetings of relevance to the activities under the Convention, and requested the secretariat to compile and circulate this information to the focal points.

VII. OTHER BUSINESS

31. The delegation of the Russian Federation reported on the outcome of the third international congress "Water: Ecology and Technology" (Moscow, 26-30 May 1998). The Working Group encouraged delegations to participate in the fourth congress, scheduled to take place in Moscow from 29 May to 2 June 2000. The fourth Congress would review, inter alia, the progress made during the interim implementation of the protocol on water and health after its adoption at the London Ministerial Conference.

VIII. CLOSING OF THE MEETING

32. The Working Group noted that the report of its first meeting would be adopted at its second meeting.

33. The Working Group expressed its gratitude to the Government of Hungary for the excellent organization of the meeting, for its hospitality, and for the financial assistance provided to enable representatives of countries in transition to participate.

34. Mr. Janos REMAI, Head of the Department for Water Management of the Hungarian Ministry of Transport, Communication and Waters, closed the meeting.

Notes:

1/ By 29 October 1998, Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands, Poland, the Russian Federation and Switzerland had designated members to the task force. Representatives of the ECE and IDNDR secretariats as well as of the International Commission for the Protection of the Elbe and the International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine also participate.

2/ By 26 October 1998, Belarus, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hungary, Netherlands, Poland, Russian Federation, Switzerland and United States had designated experts to the joint ad hoc group. Representatives of the ECE secretariat as well as of the International Commission for the Protection of the Elbe and the International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine also participate in it.