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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 Monitoring and Assessment

Ninth meeting
Geneva, 17–18 June 2008
Item 4 of the provisional agenda

**THE SECOND ASSESSMENT OF TRANSBOUNDARY RIVERS, LAKES AND
GROUNDWATERS IN THE UNECE REGION**

Prepared by the Core Group on Monitoring and Assessment with the assistance from the
secretariat

Introduction

1. Parties to the Convention decided at their third meeting (Madrid, 26-28 November 2003) to prepare periodic assessments on the pressures, status and trends of transboundary surface waters and groundwaters in the region, in order to be able to assess compliance with the obligations of the Convention and to evaluate progress achieved.
2. The first Assessment of Transboundary Rivers, Lakes and Groundwaters was prepared for the Sixth Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe” (Belgrade, 10–12 October 2007) by the Convention’s Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment (WGMA). The Belgrade Ministerial Conference expressed its appreciation regarding the preparation of the first Assessment and invited the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention to prepare the second Assessment of transboundary waters for the next Ministerial Conference scheduled to take place in Astana (Kazakhstan) in 2011.

3. The preparation of the first Assessment was led by Finland with strong support from Slovakia, the United Kingdom, Germany, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Environment Programme and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). It has been a major undertaking by UNECE countries both Parties and non-Parties and the secretariat of the Convention. More than 150 experts took part in its preparation. The Assessment includes 140 transboundary rivers (most of them with a basin area over 1,000 km²) and 30 transboundary lakes in the European and Asian parts of the UNECE region, as well as 70 transboundary aquifers in South-Eastern Europe (SEE), the Caucasus and Central Asia. The project in general devoted more attention to the countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) and SEE, which face the greatest challenges and for which information had never been presented in a systematic, comprehensive way.

4. The first Assessment describes the hydrological regime of these water bodies, pressure factors in their basins, their status and transboundary impact, and trends, future developments and envisaged management measures. Watersharing among riparian countries, increasing groundwater abstraction for agricultural purposes and drinking water supply, pollution from diffuse sources (e.g. agriculture, urban areas) as well as point sources (e.g. municipal sewage treatment and aging industrial installations), and the effects of climate change on water resources are among the many issues documented.

5. The Assessment was valued as a good starting point that proved to have **a number of strengths**, namely: a broad geographical scope allows for learning about a great number of river basins; summarization covers a wide spectrum of issues; the presentation of new material on emerging subjects that was not easily available. Furthermore, the publication's **well-designed layout** has made it more accessible to different target groups and encouraged its wide use.

6. The eighth meeting of the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment (Helsinki, 25-27 June, 2007) agreed that the second Assessment of Transboundary Rivers, Lakes and Groundwaters should be prepared in a timely manner and also reflect some emerging aspects that were not included in the first Assessment. In this respect, the Working Group entrusted Finland, with the assistance of the secretariat, to organize a core group that would prepare a proposal on the next assessment for the next meeting of the Working Group. Following this request, an informal core group comprised of representatives¹ of Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Slovakia, United Kingdom and the European Environment Agency met in Geneva on 3 March 2006 and prepared the present document. The present document aims to facilitate the discussion on the subject.

I. WHY DO WE NEED THE SECOND ASSESSMENT?

7. The first Assessment should be seen as **a pioneering work initiating a long-term process**. The future assessments should provide a periodic review, continuously updated, designed to give an authoritative picture of the state of the transboundary water resources in the

¹ Georgia and Switzerland provided written inputs. Several countries and organizations were invited to the meeting, but were unable to participate due to technical reasons.

UNECE region and benchmark progress achieved. In addition, a thematic focus, for example on impact of climate change, could highlight emerging issues and attract attention.

8. Thus, the Assessments will keep the state of shared water resources under scrutiny and aim to bring positive changes to their management. They will promote informed decision-making on the management of shared water resources, provide the basis for continuous bilateral and multilateral cooperation under the Water Convention, and support all actors involved at the national, transboundary and regional levels. They should serve as a tool to identify trends and needs related to protection and sustainable management of transboundary waters and their finding should lay the ground for strategic directions for work under the Convention and be taken into consideration by the Meetings of the Parties and various political forums, including the “Environment for Europe” Conferences. They will also be useful source of information for investment by prospective donors. Furthermore, the assessments may in the future become the UNECE regional contribution to the World Water Assessment Report.

II. LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE PREPARATION OF THE FIRST ASSESSMENT

9. As the first Assessment was finalized rather late, it was not possible to submit it as a part of the formal agenda for decision by the Ministers attending the Belgrade Ministerial Conference. This prevented the dedication of sufficient attention to the issue at this high political level. Thus, the Second Assessment should be developed with the view of **presenting its findings and/or derived recommendations to the Astana Conference** in 2011, as a part of the formal agenda.

10. Adequate support to **promotional work** on the Assessment, to reach different target groups on the one hand, and to strengthen ownership by countries on the other, should be made.

11. Ways and means for **cooperation with the European Environment Agency** (EEA) need to be explored (e.g. synergies with the preparation of the Assessment reports by EEA, collection of information in the EEA countries; preparation of assessments related to the EEA countries and use of data available in European Environment Information and Observation Network (EIONET) and the Water Information System for Europe (WISE).

12. **Streamlining work with other relevant processes** under the Convention (e.g. the survey on adaptation to climate change in water sector) as well as under other bodies (e.g. reporting on the implementation of the European Union Water Framework Directive (WFD); activities of the Ground Water Core Group under WFD, and relevant programmes of World Meteorological Organization) should be considered in future planning.

13. **Experts from EU countries** should also participate actively in this exercise, as the national reports on the implementation of the EU Framework Directive could not serve as the only source of information (they do not include all type of information and not all of them are available in English).

14. Focal points should ensure that **national experts from other relevant thematic areas** take part in the work, when needed.
15. **Involvement of joint bodies** should also be strengthened.
16. To facilitate effective responses, **the questionnaires** that will be sent to countries **should contain already available information** (e.g. included in the first edition or collected from other sources), and countries should be asked to update and enrich it.
17. Furthermore, a number of **practical issues** should be taken into account for the future work:
 - (a) The questionnaire alone did not prove to be an effective tool. Subregional working meetings served as an effective mean for the collection of data, its verification and its joint acceptance by the riparian countries, as well as for the promotion of the Convention;
 - (b) Small payments for experts from EECCA and SEE countries would facilitate significantly the collection of data and their involvement in this activity;
 - (c) Enormous time pressures and the lack of human and financial resources were observed during the preparation of the first Assessment. Therefore, sufficient time for the collection of data and for the drafting and revision of the text, as well as adequate human and financial resources, are prerequisites for the success of this activity.

III. OPTIONS FOR SCOPE AND CONTENT OF THE SECOND ASSESSMENT

18. It might not be useful and strategically effective to prepare the second Assessment in a way that provides just an update of information included in the first edition. The major reason is that it would be very unlikely to observe significant changes in the status of waters within five years' time. Consequently, the key findings and political messages derived from the first Assessment would remain almost unchanged. Therefore, in addition to the updates of already available information, the second Assessment could have a **broader geographical scope** and be **enriched with some theme-specific information**. Furthermore, it could **inform on the progress in implementation of measures** to improve the status of waters. The new challenge for the second Assessment could be to **present in an integrated manner surface water and groundwater in the same basin**.

A. Thematic scope

19. For the above reasons, one possibility is to identify different overarching thematic issues specific for different subregions. This does not mean that the assessments would not include information on main pressures, impacts, status and responses, but rather they could additionally include, in an integrated manner, information on specific themes such as climate change impacts or impacts on human health or, for example, be oriented to water allocation or ecosystem issues. This would allow for observing general trends in the status of waters for the entire region and at the same time for learning more detailed information on some thematic issues identified as a priority by different subregions.

B. Geographic scope

20. One of the main advantages of the Assessments that make them unique is to provide a comprehensive overview for the whole UNECE region. Thus, the second Assessment could, in addition, cover:

- (a) The (few) transboundary rivers in the UNECE region not addressed in the first edition, and also including transboundary waters in North America, and
- (b) Transboundary groundwaters not addressed in the first edition (Europe, including entire territory of the Russian Federation) and North America (United States and Canada).

21. It could also cover some waters shared with non-UNECE countries (e.g. Kazakhstan and China; United States and Mexico).

C. Content

22. Content-wise, there might be different options for the organization of the second Assessment. The proposals below address identified gaps of the first edition. They could be combined in different ways. For example, in addition to the issues addressed in the first edition, the second Assessment could:

- (a) Address the impact of human activities on hydromorphological alterations and their influence on the status of watercourses, and/or;
- (b) Address some specific strategic aspects such as impact of climate change and human health impacts, and/or;
- (c) Address biological quality and biodiversity of transboundary water-related ecosystems (for example Ramsar transboundary sites, through a selected number of pilot sites), and/or;
- (d) With the view of the Astana Conference, have additional focus on some emerging issues for Central Asia, such as water quality; water allocation and uses, cross-regional issues (e.g. Kazakhstan-China cooperation on Balkhash and Irtysh), and/or;
- (e) Other...

IV. TIMELINE

Date	Action
March 2008	Meeting of the Core Group to prepare a proposal on the Second Assessment for consideration by Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment (WGMA). Secretariat, in consultation with volunteering countries and EEA, will prepare drafts questionnaires for groundwater and surface waters.
June 2008	WGMA will provide comments on the proposal and will entrust a core group with the finalization of the proposal on the Assessment and the preparation of questionnaires for data collection.
September 2008	Meeting of the Core Group will prepare draft content of the Assessment and the questionnaires to be sent to countries.
October 2008–April 2009	Survey among countries; collection of data; preparation of the compiled information sheets; three subregional meetings (i.e. EECCA, SEE with neighboring countries, and Western Europe, North Europe and North America) focused on missing information.
May-April 2009	Preparation of the draft documents. ²
July 2009	Meeting of WGMA to comment the draft documents and the content of the Assessment.
July-November 2009	Collection of missing data; preparation of new and revised drafts for the Meeting of the Parties.
November (end)-December 2009	Meeting of the Parties to consider draft documents.
November 2009-September 2010	Consultations with countries; 3 subregional meetings; preparation of new and revised drafts.
September 2010	WGMA will provide comments on the drafts and will endorse them.
September 2010-February 2011	Final consultations with countries; finalization of the text, editing and publishing; finalization of the findings/recommendations derived from the Assessment.
February-June 2011	Final negotiations on the Assessment and preparation for the Seventh “Environment for Europe Conference”; communication with countries and stakeholders to promote the Assessment.
June (possibly) 2011	Seventh “Environment for Europe” Conference to consider the Assessment and take decision(s) on the findings/recommendations derived from the Assessment (to be submitted as the Category I document).

² Available drafts or/and their summaries should be communicated to Working Group of Senior Officials, the preparatory body for the Astana Conference, throughout the process, as required.

V. BUDGET ESTIMATE AND FUNDRAISING

23. The total estimated costs for the preparation of the second assessment are around \$710,000 up to 2011 (3 years). The sum covers personnel costs, organizations of subregional meetings, travel of staff, travel of participants including to the meetings of the WGMA, consultancy fees for experts, editing, translation, layout, and production of maps (see the table 1).

Table 1. Budget estimate

Item	Sum in USD
Personnel costs: 1 L extrabudgetary staff member for the period September 2008-June 2011 (60% working time; it is a minimum that should be allocated; some of the time the staff member will need to work 100%, sometimes he/she will work part-time)	330,000
Organization of 6 subregional meetings, including travel of staff and participants	140,000
Organization of 3 meetings of WGMA, including travel of staff and participants	45,000
Consultancy fees: (experts, editing, translation, design and layout)	160,000
Production of maps	35,000
Total	710,000

24. Different modalities for raising funds should be considered. These include: (a) contributions to the Water Convention Trust Fund, and (b) contributions in kind through providing human resources and covering meeting costs and consultancies/experts services. The fund-raising should be seen as a joint undertaking aimed to pool resources from different donors, so that the project could be handled in the spirit of true transboundary cooperation. In addition to Governments, possible partners-donors could include the Global Water Partnership, International Water Assessment Center (IWAC), WMO, UNESCO, and World Water Assessment Programme.

25. An adequately qualified an extrabudgetary staff member responsible for the preparation of the second Assessment is a key for the success of this challenging exercise. The major requirements for his/her qualification will be extensive knowledge of and experience in transboundary water issues, the ability to write analytical papers, and professional knowledge of English and Russian. The responsible staff member should start working on the preparation of the second Assessment from September 2008, at the latest. The present and envisaged workload prevents the current staff of the secretariat from assuming full responsibility for this demanding task.

26. At the time of writing, the following contributions and pledges had been made to support preparation of the second Assessment: €5,000 by Finland and 80,000 CHF by Switzerland.

Issues to be considered by the Working Group

- What are the strengths of the first Assessment to build upon?
- What should be different in the second Assessment and what should stay the same?
- How can the Assessments most effectively support the overall work under the Convention?
- The first Assessment has been an exercise done in partnership with countries and international organizations. How should support and leadership from countries, both EU and non-EU countries, and key partner organizations be strengthened?
- How can the effective use of resources be ensured, and ways and means for cooperation with EEA agreed upon?
- Which kind of guidance SEE and EECCA countries would need to prepare effectively high quality contributions to this exercise?
- How should the necessary funds be raised?
