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**ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE**

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

Fifth session  
Geneva, 10–12 November 2009  
Item 6 (a) of the provisional agenda

MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT OF TRANSBOUNDARY WATERS

ASSESSMENT OF THE STATUS OF TRANSBOUNDARY RIVERS, LAKES AND  
GROUNDWATERS

**NOTE ON THE SECOND ASSESSMENT OF TRANSBOUNDARY RIVERS, LAKES  
AND GROUNDWATERS**

Note by the secretariat

*Summary*

This document builds on the experience gained from the preparation of the first Assessment of Transboundary Rivers, Lakes and Groundwaters and describes progress made in preparing the second Assessment and the challenges ahead. It also includes a proposal for decision by the Meeting of the Parties on future work. The document was prepared pursuant to decisions taken by the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment at its ninth and tenth meetings (Geneva, 17–18 June 2008, ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2008/2, paras. 7–34, and Bratislava, 10–11 June 2009, ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2009/2, paras. 8–44, respectively) and by the Working Group on Integrated Water Resource Management at its third and fourth meetings (Rome, 22–24 October 2008; ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2008/2, paras. 15–18, and Geneva, 8–9 July 2009; ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2009/2, paras. 44–48, respectively).

## I. PROPOSED ACTION BY THE MEETING OF THE PARTIES

1. The Meeting of the Parties may wish:

(a) To welcome the *First Assessment of Transboundary Rivers, Lakes and Groundwaters* as an impressive, pioneering work and to acknowledge the importance of regular assessments for providing an authoritative picture of the state of the transboundary water resources in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) region, and thereby for benchmarking progress achieved in implementing the Convention;

(b) To thank Finland for its leadership and for the substantive and financial support it provided to this activity, and to invite it to continue leading this area of work in the future;

(c) To thank all Parties, non-Parties and international organizations that contributed substantively and provided resources to the work;

(d) To note with satisfaction the progress achieved in preparing the second Assessment, recognizing at the same time the challenges that lie ahead and the needs for a strong commitment and the timely contribution of relevant, high-quality information to secure the activity's success;

(e) To entrust the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment, in cooperation with the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management, with finalizing the second Assessment in time for its submission to the Seventh Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe" scheduled to be held in Astana in 2011, and to prepare an analysis of the need to prepare a third Assessment and, if applicable, a strategy for its preparation, for consideration at the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties;

(f) To agree to make all efforts to ensure that the second Assessment is recognized within the "Environment for Europe" process as the key document on transboundary waters for the ministers' consideration;

(g) To call upon donors to mobilize the funds needed to support this important area of work.

## II. THE FIRST ASSESSMENT AND ITS ROLE

2. The *First Assessment of Transboundary Rivers, Lakes and Groundwaters* (ECE/MP.WAT/25)<sup>1</sup> was prepared for the Sixth Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe" (Belgrade, 10–12 October 2007) pursuant to the decision made by the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention at its third session (Madrid, 26–28 November 2003). The Sixth Ministerial Conference expressed its appreciation regarding the preparation of the first Assessment and invited the Meeting of the Parties to prepare the second Assessment for the next Ministerial Conference (ECE/BELGRADE.CONF/2007/8).

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.unece.org/env/water/publications/pub76.htm>

3. Preparation of the first Assessment, under the leadership of Finland, was truly an endeavour in partnership. Germany, Slovakia, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) all strongly supported the work. It was a major undertaking by UNECE countries, both Parties and non-Parties, as well as the Convention secretariat. More than 150 experts took part in its preparation. The report devoted more attention to the countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) and South-Eastern Europe (SEE), which face the greatest challenges and for which information had never before been presented in a systematic, comprehensive way. The Assessment includes 140 transboundary rivers (most of them with a basin area over 1,000 km<sup>2</sup>) and 30 transboundary lakes in the European and Asian parts of the UNECE region, as well as 70 transboundary aquifers in SEE, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

4. The first Assessment describes the hydrological regime of these water bodies, pressure factors in their basins, their status and transboundary impacts as well as trends, future developments and envisaged management measures. Water-sharing 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 first Assessment is a valuable starting point, one that has proven to have a number of strengths, namely: (a) a broad geographical scope, which allows for learning about a great number of river basins; (b) coverage of a wide spectrum of issues; and (c) new material on emerging subjects that was previously not readily available. Furthermore, the publication's well-designed layout has made it more accessible to different target groups and encouraged its wide use.

6. The first Assessment marked the beginning of a long-term process of preparing periodic assessments, continuously updated, and designed to inform on the state of the transboundary water resources in the UNECE region as well as to assess the progress achieved in complying with and implementing the Convention.

7. 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 with regard to the management of shared water resources, provide the basis for continuous bilateral and multilateral cooperation under the 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 the protection and sustainable management of transboundary waters. Their revelations should lay the groundwork 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" Ministerial Conferences. They should 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 (see ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2008/3).

### III. THE SECOND ASSESSMENT

8. Preparations of the second Assessment started in 2008. They are overseen by the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment in cooperation with the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management. The two Working Groups have taken a number of decisions related to the scope and content of the second Assessment, including regarding its process of preparation, working arrangements and the partners to be involved in the process. A steering group made up of representatives of Finland (Chairperson), Georgia, Germany, Switzerland, Ukraine, the European Environment Agency (EEA), the International Water Assessment Centre (IWAC), UNESCO, OSCE, the secretariat of the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention) and the UNECE secretariat was entrusted with the close supervision and steering of the process of preparation (see ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2008/3, ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2009/3, ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2008/2, ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2009/2, ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2008/2 and ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2009/2).

9. In addition to updates of information available in the first Assessment, the main new features of the second Assessment, as compared to the first one, are as follows:

(a) The second Assessment will have an important focus on cooperation aspects and the progress achieved vis-à-vis implementation of legal and institutional measures for transboundary water cooperation, including the existence of joint bodies and joint monitoring programmes and related activities;

(b) It will have a more integrative nature and should illustrate the progress achieved in terms of implementation of integrated water resource management. Surface and groundwaters in the same basin will be considered in an integrated way;

(c) It will be enriched with information on certain overarching thematic issues specific to the different subregions (e.g. climate change impacts, impacts on human health, water allocation). This will allow for observing general trends in the status of waters for the entire UNECE region, and at the same time for obtaining more detailed pictures of the different subregions and providing insights into social and health aspects, as relevant;

(d) The second Assessment will thus have a stronger subregional focus and at the same time seek to involve non-UNECE countries sharing waters with the UNECE countries;

(e) In cooperation with the Ramsar Convention secretariat and the Parties to that Convention, assessments of a number of selected Ramsar sites<sup>2</sup> will also be included.

10. As was the case for the first edition, the second Assessment will be the result of a broad cooperative effort on the part of national and international organizations. It will both build on and contribute to the work of partners involved.

11. The second Assessment is being prepared by subregion, with SEE as the first subregion under review and the Caucasus as the second. The draft assessment of transboundary waters in

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<sup>2</sup> Wetlands designated as internationally important under the 1971 Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat.

SEE will be available for endorsement at the fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties (see ECE/MP.WAT/2009/8, ECE/MP.WAT/2009/9, ECE/MP.WAT/2009/10, ECE/MP.WAT/2009/11). The experience gained with the preparation of the assessment for SEE will inform the rest of the process of preparation of the second Assessment, in particular regarding the datasheets used to gather data on transboundary waters as well as the detail and focus of the information collected and reflected in the Assessment.

12. The time frame for the preparation of the second Assessment covers a period of three years (March 2008 to end 2011). The fund-raising for this activity has already proven to be a joint undertaking, as resources have been pooled from different donors. A number of countries and partner organizations already made donations or confirmed their willingness to take part in the Assessment's preparation.

#### IV. LESSONS LEARNED AND CHALLENGES

13. **Strong and effective support to the work from the Convention's focal points is the precondition** for the success of this activity. **Focal points should facilitate the prompt nomination of national experts**, also from other relevant thematic areas, **and ensure that they take part in the work.**

14. **Parties and non-Parties should** be aware of the very tight preparatory schedule and **provide the required inputs in a timely manner.** Delays in the submission of information from SEE countries are creating difficulties in terms of ensuring adequate preparation of the assessment for SEE as well as with the quality of the product to be submitted to the fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties. Moreover, delays are also hampering future work, in particular preparations for the assessment for the Caucasus subregion, which is suffering because secretariat resources are still taken up by the finalization of the assessment of SEE. If similar difficulties are also encountered in the next steps of the process, the final objective of submitting the second Assessment to the next "Environment for Europe" Ministerial Conference will be jeopardized.

15. **Assessments of transboundary groundwaters tend to be more complicated than surface waters** and tend to be considered as a second priority. There is a risk that transboundary groundwaters may become a weak point of the second Assessment and that the desired integration of surface and groundwaters assessments will not be achieved. Therefore, **countries should ensure the nomination and active involvement of groundwater experts** in the process.

16. As the first Assessment was finalized rather late, it was not possible to submit it as a part of the formal agenda of the Belgrade Ministerial Conference. This prevented the dedication of sufficient attention to the issue at this high political level. Therefore, **timely promotion of the issue of transboundary waters within the "Environment for Europe" process and securing the prominent role for the second Assessment at the Conference are two important tasks.**

17. **Cooperation with the EEA is essential** and needs to be further defined to avoid duplication of efforts and build synergies with the assessment reports to be prepared by EEA. It is necessary to ensure that information collected by EEA and its relevant assessment can be used in preparation for the second Assessment, including data available in the European Environment

Information and Observation Network (EIONET) and the Water Information System for Europe (WISE).

18. **Streamlining work with other relevant processes under the Convention, as well as under other frameworks, should be considered in planning.** Synergies should be sought in particular with the process of reporting on implementation under the European Union (EU) Water Framework Directive (WFD), the activities of the Ground Water Core Group under the WFD, the UNESCO-ISARM project<sup>3</sup> and the relevant programmes of World Meteorological Organization.

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

20. **Involvement of joint bodies should also be ensured.**

21. To facilitate effective responses, **the datasheets** that will be sent to countries **should contain already available information** (e.g. information included in the first edition or collected from other sources), and countries should be asked to update and enrich them. Countries are asked to make available to the secretariat in English recent relevant information that should be used to pre-fill the datasheets, such as reports on WFD implementation, reports prepared by joint bodies, and documents produced in the framework of international projects.

22. The preparation of the Assessment cannot rely on the datasheets alone. **Subregional meetings are an effective means for the collection of data**, its verification and its joint acceptance by the riparian countries. The meetings should include a general session on priority themes for the subregion as well as a session specifically dedicated to the second Assessment. This will allow participation not only at the technical level but also at the political level.

23. Enormous time pressures and the lack of human and financial resources were observed during the preparation of the first Assessment. Due to the late availability of the required financial resources, work on the second Assessment was also delayed. **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 fundamental to the success of this activity. Donors should make available the needed resources as soon as possible** so that the secretariat can divert efforts from fund-raising to the organization of and substantive contributions to the second Assessment.

24. **Effective promotion of the second Assessment is needed** to advance its political relevance and thereby facilitate active contributions by Parties and non-Parties as well as the implementation and follow-up to its recommendations. In this regard, not only the steering group and the secretariat have a role to play, but also all focal points. The secretariat can make suitable materials available upon request.

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<sup>3</sup> The UNESCO project on Internationally Shared Aquifer Resources Management.