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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

Extraordinary meeting

Bratislava, 15 and 16 December 2010

Report of the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment on its extraordinary meeting

Introduction

1. The Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment at its eleventh meeting decided to hold an extraordinary meeting focusing on the assessment of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters in Eastern and Northern Europe, with the participation of members from Belarus, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Norway, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, the Russian Federation, Slovakia and Ukraine, as well as concerned international and non-governmental organizations (see report of the eleventh meeting ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2010/2).

2. The extraordinary meeting was held on 15 and 16 December 2010 in Bratislava, hosted by the International Water Assessment Center (IWAC) and held at the Slovak Hydrometeorological Institute.

A. Attendance

3. The meeting was attended by representatives of the following member States of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE): Belarus, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Slovakia and Ukraine.

4. The meeting was also attended by representatives of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and of the non-governmental organization Eco-TIRAS — International Environmental Association of River Keepers.

B. Organizational matters

5. The meeting was chaired by Ms. Lea Kauppi (Finland) and by the Vice-Chair of the Working Group, Mr. Boris Minarik (Slovakia).

6. The meeting was opened by Mr. Vladimir Rak, General Director of the Slovak Hydrometeorological Institute, who welcomed the participants and highlighted the importance of monitoring and assessment — and therefore of the second Assessment of Transboundary Rivers, Lakes and Groundwaters — for the Institute.

7. The Chair thanked the Slovak Hydrometeorological Institute for hosting the Working Group and recalled the objectives of the extraordinary meeting.

8. The Working Group adopted its agenda as contained in document ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2010/7.

II. Assessment of the status of transboundary waters in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe region

A. Developments since the eleventh meeting of the Working Group

9. The secretariat of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) updated the Working Group on developments related to the preparation of the second Assessment since the Group's eleventh meeting, in particular, progress of the subregional assessment in Central Asia. A major step had been the organization of a subregional workshop, held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, from 13 to 15 October 2010, and the follow-up to it, with data collection from concerned countries and preparation of draft assessments by the secretariat. It was noted with appreciation that non-UNECE countries, such as Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Mongolia, had also actively participated in the workshop and in the preparations of the second Assessment. The Working Group was also informed about the preparations for the assessment of Western and Central European countries, which had started with official correspondence to member States and concerned international organizations, in particular river basin commissions, and which would involve organization of a subregional workshop from 8 to 10 February in Budapest, Hungary.

B. Revision of the assessment of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters in Eastern and Northern Europe

10. The secretariat presented to the Working Group the revisions made to the summary of the assessment for Eastern and Northern Europe since its eleventh meeting, as well as its annexes and the main messages, on the basis of an information paper on the main findings of the assessment of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters in Eastern and Northern Europe (WGMA/Extra2010/Inf.1). The revisions mainly involved the incorporation of comments from Estonia and Romania, the addition of annexes (namely, descriptions of how water management in each country was organized, a list of bilateral and multilateral agreements concerning transboundary waters and the status of ratification of selected international conventions). In addition to general consolidation, more references to and examples of basins had been added to the summary based on the analysis of the filled-in datasheets. The inventory of groundwaters had also been revised, especially concerning linking aquifers to basins.

11. The secretariat presented the gaps in the present versions of the basin assessments (assessment of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters in Eastern and Northern Europe discharging into the Baltic Sea, White Sea, Barents Sea and Kara Sea (WGMA/Extra2010/Inf.2); and assessment of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters in Eastern and Northern Europe discharging into the Black Sea (WGMA/Extra2010/Inf.3)).

12. The secretariat informed the Working Group that very little updated information had been provided by the countries on the lakes. Therefore, the information on, for example, Lake Drisvyaty/Druksiai, Galadus, Pyhäjärvi, Saimaa and Stanca-Costesti Reservoir would need to be revised and complemented. Among the main gaps was that no information had been provided on the Polish part of the basins it shared. The secretariat also noted that riparian countries with a minor share of the basin would still need to be consulted in some cases, for example, the Czech Republic about the Vah River.

13. Among the challenges related to groundwater information highlighted by the secretariat was the fact that information was reported both on aquifers and groundwater bodies as defined under the European Union Water Framework Directive (EU WFD) — making it necessary to deal with the different concepts, the problem of matching aquifer sides across the border and a lack of location and delineation information for many aquifers/groundwater bodies.

14. The secretariat drew the Working Group's attention to the following common problems with tables and figures: reported population density not matching with the calculated one, a limited reported coverage of land use/land cover data and missing gauging station locations.

15. Specific information needs were reviewed basin by basin. At the same time, the secretariat informed the Working Group that in order to keep the length of the second Assessment manageable, some shortening of the text would be necessary.

16. During the discussion that followed, the representative of Eco-TIRAS suggested that other stakeholders such as NGOs and academia should be consulted in the preparations of the second Assessment. The secretariat recalled that the second Assessment was based on official information provided and endorsed by member States. At the same time, the process was very open and participative with involvement of other stakeholders in both the meetings of the Working Group and in subregional workshops. It was therefore suggested that other stakeholders interested in amending and completing the information contained in the Assessment should submit written suggestions to the Working Group at its twelfth meeting for decision.

17. The Chair underlined that the integration of water quantity and quality was an issue, and one which was becoming more important with climate change. In addition, more focus should be put not only on the impacts of climate change, but also on adaptation measures. Policy integration was also crucial, as agricultural policy largely impacted the state of the environment and of water resources. It was highlighted that even the EU countries experienced complications in comparing recent results with historical data and derivation of trends after changes in monitoring programmes required by the EU WFD. As an example, Finland was still using both the old and the new methodology in parallel to some degree, and measuring some of the previous parameters.

18. Hungary required the Aquifer Tiszahat/Qall,N,Pg+K2 to be removed from the inventory, as there was no agreement on whether it was transboundary or not.

19. The Working Group noted with concern that Poland had not provided inputs to the Eastern and Northern Europe assessment and invited it to do so as soon as possible. It also invited all Eastern and Northern European countries to provide missing data and to revise and comment the inventory of groundwaters by 31 January 2011.

20. The Working Group invited the countries to provide amendments and additions to the information contained in documents WGMA/Extra2010/Inf.1, WGMA/Extra2010/Inf.2 and WGMA/Extra2010/Inf.3 by 31 January 2011.

C. Maps and graphics for the subregional assessment of Eastern and Northern Europe

21. The secretariat informed the Working Group on the overall approach to the development of maps and graphics to be included in the second Assessment, on related work by the Institut F.-A. Forel of the University of Geneva in cooperation with UNEP/GRID Europe¹ and by the International Groundwater Resources Assessment Centre through examples, and on the progress achieved so far. As agreed by the Working Group at its eleventh meeting, the overall approach involved presenting more assessment content in the form of maps and graphs for more effective communication, surface water and groundwater being presented to the degree possible in an integrated way. Figures provided by the countries were used as a priority for the graphics, but gaps were filled from selected datasets.²

22. The secretariat informed the Working Group that the graphics to be included would replace related text in the final printed version in some cases. For example, the discharges were to be presented in a graphical form accompanying basin maps and therefore the tables would be left out. The secretariat would also try to find a way to present water resource figures graphically or as a summary table, which would allow leaving these out from the text. However, a number of information gaps needed to be filled to be able to develop the graphics, in particular information on land use/land cover, population and discharges (including gauging station coordinates).

23. The secretariat also invited suggestions for additional maps and graphics to be included in the second Assessment (for instance, maps showing distribution of pressures and hot spots, graphics showing the variation of water quantity and quality over time or along a river). Where water quality graphs were provided by member States, the underlying figures would also be needed in order to reproduce the graphs in the common format of the second Assessment.

24. Furthermore, the secretariat pointed to the need for clarification related to a number of aquifers in Northern and Eastern Europe for which there was no agreement on their transboundary nature. There was also a need for advice as to whether the number of transboundary aquifers identified in earlier inventories included in the draft map should be included in the second Assessment.

25. The Working Group invited the countries to check the listed transboundary aquifers (or groundwater bodies) and their locations and delineations in the draft map that was made available, and to send any necessary corrections to the secretariat.

26. As for additional thematic maps, the Working Group proposed — in response to a suggestion by Ukraine — that if the availability of information allowed, the maps should show the status of the transboundary waters. It was noted that that would certainly be limited by differences in assessment between riparian countries where different assessment

¹ United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Global Resource Information Database (GRID) European network.

² Detailed information on the maps and graphics in the second Assessment and model/prototype basin maps and graphics (approved by the Working Group in July 2010) are presented in document WGMA/2010/Inf.3–WGIWRM/2010/Inf.2.

methodologies were applied and where there was no joint assessment. Notably, marked differences in water quality classification approaches existed between the EU and non-EU countries.

D. Next steps

27. The Working Group agreed that all amendments and corrections, including the missing information, the checking of the inventory of transboundary surface waters and groundwaters, the checking of the maps and graphics, and the provision of additional graphics to be included in the second Assessment should be provided to the secretariat at the latest by 31 January 2011. It was pointed out that information provided later than the deadline would be at risk of not being included in the revised version of the Assessment prepared for the twelfth meeting of the Working Group in May 2011.

E. Preparation of the executive summary of the second Assessment

28. At their joint meeting (7 July 2010), the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment and the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management agreed that an executive summary with the main political messages of the second Assessment should be prepared for publication in time for the Seventh “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference, scheduled to be held in Astana from 21 to 23 September 2011. The secretariat presented a proposal for the outline and content of the second Assessment, including the maps and graphics to be included (WGMA/Extra2010/Inf.4).

29. The Working Group also discussed the main issues to be highlighted in the executive summary for Northern and Eastern Europe. Many countries agreed that the following issues were common and of high importance for the subregion:

- Municipal wastewater pollution and the need for investments in wastewater treatment plants;
- Impacts of diffuse pollution by agriculture, including nitrates;
- Hydromorphological alterations, which were recognized as important in EU countries but for which there was less awareness in the non-EU countries;
- Difficulties in applying the EU WFD across the EU border, in particular with regard to harmonization of classification systems for assessment of water;
- At the same time, a positive influence of the EU WFD, in particular on the promotion of harmonization of approaches and the common goal of working towards a good status of water resources;
- Gaps in legal and institutional frameworks for transboundary cooperation (for example, in the Dniester, Bug, Dnieper, Daugava and Neman River Basins) and absence of river basin management plans at the national (in particular in non-EU countries) and transboundary levels;
- Extreme events, in particular floods and the need for cooperation between riparian countries to reduce flood risks.

30. Other problems mentioned that were common also for other regions included: a lack of integration in the management of surface waters and groundwaters; the need for improvement of the knowledge base, in particular the inventory of sources of pollution and the development of spatial data sets; and improved exchange of information. It was also

mentioned that in the future the Assessment should give more prominence to the issue of sediments.

31. The Working Group was invited to provide inputs to the secretariat for the executive summary by 31 January 2011.

III. International Water Assessment Center

32. The Director of IWAC, Mr. Boris Minarik, recalled the mandate of IWAC and its programme of work adopted at fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties. He updated the Working Group on the progress achieved and planned activities in implementation of the IWAC workplan, including: (a) support to the programme of pilot projects on adaptation to climate change, in particular providing technical support to the secretariat in implementing the project; (b) participation in the project “Strengthening capacity for data administration and exchange for monitoring and assessment of transboundary water resources in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia”, implemented in cooperation with the International Office for Water, with financial support from the French Global Environment Fund; (c) support to the preparation of the second Assessment of transboundary waters; and (d) cooperation with other international organizations (UNDP, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Global Water Partnership) to share information, develop synergies and carry out joint activities.

33. As for proposed future work, it was planned that IWAC would be engaged in the National Policy Dialogues in countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia carried out in the framework of the EU Water Initiative, assisting UNECE and the countries concerned.

34. There has also been some preliminary thought given to developing a regional catalogue/database centre on transboundary waters as a continuation of the project funded by the French Global Environment Fund. Moreover, there were plans to develop a number of technical and capacity-building projects in the countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia and in South-Eastern Europe.

35. The secretariat expressed high appreciation for the work carried so far by IWAC, acknowledging the remarkable difference that IWAC was making in the implementation of the Convention and of its programme of work in the region, in particular in the countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia and South-Eastern Europe. For future projects, the secretariat also wished to maintain a close coordination between IWAC and the projects carried out by UNECE, so that IWAC and UNECE could support and reinforce each other through their comparative advantages.

IV. Closure of the meeting

36. The Vice-Chair closed the meeting at 12.30 p.m. on Thursday, 16 December 2010.
