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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

Twelfth meeting
Geneva, 2–4 May 2011

Report of the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment on its twelfth meeting*

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* This document was submitted late by the Environment Division due to resource constraints.

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Session of the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment only

I. Introduction

1. The twelfth meeting of the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment under the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) was held from 2 to 4 May 2011 in Geneva, Switzerland. A joint session with the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management took place on 4 May.

A. Attendance

2. The meeting was attended by representatives of the following member States of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE): Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Tajikistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. A representative from the Islamic Republic of Iran also attended as an observer.

3. The meeting was attended by representatives of the European Environment Agency (EEA) and the secretariat of the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention).

4. The meeting was also attended by representatives of the International Water Assessment Centre (IWAC), the secretariat of the International Sava River Basin Commission, the International Office for Water, the International Groundwater Resources Assessment Centre (IGRAC), the "Greenwomen" Analytical Environmental Agency, the International Environmental Association of Riverkeepers (Eco-TIRAS), the International Association of Hydrogeologists (IAH), WaterLex, Zoï Environment Network and the National Committee on the International Hydrological Programme, Azerbaijan.

B. Organizational matters

5. The Chair opened the meeting, stressing its importance, as it would bring to an end the three-year period of work on the second Assessment of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters. The special feature of the meeting — the joint session with the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management — was linked to that task.

6. The Working Group adopted its agenda as contained in document ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2011/1.

7. The Working Group adopted the report of its eleventh meeting (Geneva, 6–7 July 2010) (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2010/2), as well as the report of its extraordinary meeting focusing on the assessment of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters in Eastern and Northern Europe (Bratislava, 15–16 December 2010) (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2010/8).

II. Pilot projects on joint monitoring and assessment of transboundary waters, including data management and information exchange

8. Representatives of the International Office for Water and IWAC reported on the progress of the project “Strengthening capacity for data administration and exchange for monitoring and assessment of transboundary water resources in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia”, looking at its objectives, partners and the activities in the two pilot projects, and describing the activities already undertaken and the next steps planned. The project aimed to support development of capacities in data administration and data exchanges within the main national and regional authorities responsible for developing the production of information guiding water resource management. At the regional level, the project aimed to develop tools to facilitate identification of available information and to disseminate the results and experience obtained in the pilot areas to other transboundary river basins in order to help the riparian countries/concerned authorities develop their own information systems.

9. The analysis of the existing situation had started with identification of relevant actors and data sources as well as data flows for the two pilot basins, the Dniester River Basin and the Aral Sea Basin. The first workshop had taken place in the Republic of Moldova. Similar workshops were under preparation for Ukraine and the Central Asian countries. Following those, a survey of needs would be conducted and data exchange improved. The expected outputs also included an action plan for data management.

10. The Working Group welcomed the progress made on the capacity-building project, which would also be relevant and useful for possible future assessments under the Water Convention. In that connection, the importance of data comparability as well as the challenges of data storage were highlighted. The Working Group also recalled the link to the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) and the European Union (EU) directive establishing an Infrastructure for Spatial Information in the European Community (INSPIRE),¹ as well as the obligations under the ECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention).

III. Assistance to Parties to the Protocol on Water and Health on issues related to target setting, indicators and reporting

11. With regard to the Convention’s Protocol on Water and Health, the secretariat informed the Working Group about: (a) the results of the pilot reporting exercise held in accordance with article 7 of the Protocol; (b) the findings of the first regional report on the implementation of the Protocol (ECE/MP.WH/2010/2–EUDHP1003944/4.2/1/8); (c) the outcome of the second session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol (Bucharest, 23–25 November 2010); and (d) future work on target-setting, indicators and reporting for the period 2011–2013. Most countries had submitted reports during that first reporting exercise. The reports were of varying quality, but had provided a very good basis for future work. The first part on common indicators was data-rich, but information-poor and not much related to the second part on the targets set and the progress towards them. The reporting period had shown a lack of information in many countries as well as the

¹ Directive 2007/2/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 March 2007 establishing an Infrastructure for Spatial Information in the European Community (INSPIRE).

importance of data exchange and cooperation between different institutions and data providing authorities. Parties had had great difficulty in setting targets and reporting on environmental and water management issues such as water quality. That would provide an opportunity for cooperation, at the national level, through cooperation between relevant institutions.

12. The secretariat suggested that cooperation between the Convention and the Protocol was particularly needed in relation to the target areas on water management required by the Protocol, which could also be an area of further work of the Working Group. In that regard, the secretariat encouraged delegates to get into a closer contact with their national colleagues working on the Protocol and on water supply and sanitation. Delegates asked for concrete recommendations for improvements in the future reporting.

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

13. The Working Group reviewed in detail the preliminary basin assessments prepared for all the subregions, i.e., South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, Eastern and Northern Europe, Central Asia and Western and Central Europe. Joint discussions with the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management held on 4 May focused on more general issues and on the main findings and messages for the different subregional assessments, as well as on the Executive Summary and the finalization of the Assessment (see sect. VIII below).

A. Assessment of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters in Western and Central Europe

14. The secretariat presented the preliminary assessments by basin of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters in Western and Central Europe prepared on the basis of the outcome of the subregional workshop held in Budapest from 8 to 10 February 2011 (see assessment of transboundary waters discharging into the Mediterranean, ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2011/14; assessment of transboundary waters discharging into the North Sea and Eastern Atlantic, ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2011/15; and assessment of transboundary waters discharging into the Baltic Sea, ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2011/16). The secretariat acknowledged that information provided in that subregion had been very detailed due to the work of river basin commissions, the reporting obligations under the EU Water Framework Directive² and the EEA State of Environment 2010 report. For that reason, some shortening of the basin assessments was still needed while, on the other hand, specific information and data were still missing for some of the basins. The secretariat requested countries to submit the missing information and comment on the basin assessments in a timely fashion, while paying particular attention to improving linkages between the subregional summary and the basin assessments, with a view to including some examples in the subregional summary.

15. The secretariat also presented the approach to the assessment of groundwaters within this subregion. At the subregional workshop in Budapest, EU countries had requested the secretariat to use the information they had submitted to the European Commission and which EEA had in turn provided to ECE. However, the maps produced

² Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy.

based on the information supplied by EEA as well as by the countries required a rapid validation. In that regard, countries were requested to check the draft maps to be posted on the meeting's website with their groundwater experts and to submit any comments by 20 May 2011.

16. The representative of Finland noted that in the basin assessments for Northern Europe a lot of emphasis had been put on pressures. The representative of Slovakia suggested including more information on drought and water scarcity for the relevant subregions, and improving the balance between mentions of Northern and Southern Europe in the subregional summary.

17. The Working Group requested the secretariat to send reminders on remaining gaps in the second Assessment to all concerned countries, especially those not present at the meeting, and to ask them to check especially the subregional summary. The Working Group also requested the secretariat to incorporate the comments received.

18. The delegation of Slovakia suggested collecting information on decreasing groundwater levels, i.e., water quantity issues, e.g., in a future assessment.

19. The Working Group:

(a) Reviewed and endorsed the assessments of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters in Central and Western Europe, in term of content, including the inventory and maps of groundwaters, based on the understanding that several comments still needed to be incorporated;

(b) Expressed its appreciation to the experts who had contributed to the assessment, while regretting that some Parties and non-Parties had not participated in the exercise, and that the information provided was in some cases insufficient;

(c) Invited countries concerned to provide any necessary corrections to the information contained in documents ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2011/14, ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2011/15 and ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2011/16 by 20 May 2011;

(d) Entrusted the secretariat with the finalization of the assessment for the subregion, including the relevant comments and performing the necessary editing and shortening to meet editorial needs.

B. Assessment of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters in Central Asia

20. The secretariat presented the preliminary basin assessments of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters in Central Asia (see assessment of transboundary waters discharging into the White Sea, the Barents Sea and the Kara Sea, ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2011/9; assessment of transboundary waters discharging into the Sea of Okhotsk and the Sea of Japan, ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2011/10; and assessment of transboundary waters discharging into the Aral Sea and other transboundary waters in Central Asia ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2011/11), which had been prepared on the basis of information presented in the subregional workshop held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, from 13 to 15 October 2010 and the inputs received through the datasheets submitted by countries. The secretariat also explained that maps for Central Asia were based on global databases due a lack of data from the countries, e.g., on land use/land cover and population.

21. The Working Group noted with some concern that several Central Asian countries, such as Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Afghanistan, had not submitted any information for the second Assessment. The secretariat underlined that at present there were gaps and information lacking for most of the basins identified in the Assessment documents. In

particular, there was still a need to ensure consistency between the subregional and the basin assessments, as well as to review and complement the information on the organization of water resources management in each country. The countries concerned were requested to provide comments as soon as possible directly onto the electronic Word files of the draft assessments, using track changes mode to show the changes and/or comments.

22. The representative of Kazakhstan noted that basin names were sometimes used inconsistently in the second Assessment for Central Asia and requested harmonization. There was also incorrect information regarding Kazakhstan's cooperation with China in the draft Assessment, and the problematic situation of Lake Balkash should be highlighted. Since new data had in the meanwhile become available, Kazakhstan committed to providing updates on water withdrawals in the Chu basin, on the agreements between Kazakhstan and China and on groundwaters.

23. Countries took note of the fact that the water quality data from the Russian Federation and neighbouring Central Asian countries were not easily comparable due to different methodologies and indices. Harmonization of data was thus needed, and that work was currently ongoing. The secretariat suggested that a short description on the methodology for the different water quality indices could be included, as well as the reasons for their differences, and requested countries to provide such a short description.

24. Several delegates suggested including information on the transfer of pollution in future assessments.

25. The Working Group:

(a) Reviewed and endorsed the assessments of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters in Central Asia, in terms of content, with the understanding that several comments and additional information still needed to be incorporated;

(b) Expressed its appreciation to the experts who had contributed to the assessment, while regretting that some Parties and non-Parties had not participated in the exercise, and that the information provided was in some cases insufficient;

(c) Invited countries concerned to provide any necessary corrections to the information contained in documents ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2011/9, ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2011/10, ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2011/11 and ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2011/12 by 20 May 2011;

(d) Entrusted the secretariat with the finalization of the assessment for the subregion, including the relevant comments and performing the needed editing and shortening to meet editorial needs.

C. Assessment of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters in Eastern and Northern Europe

26. The subregional assessment of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters in Eastern and Northern Europe was further advanced and had already been discussed in detail at the Working Group's extraordinary meeting in Bratislava on 15–16 December 2010. Therefore, the secretariat presented inputs received from countries and subsequent changes made to the relevant assessments (see assessment of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters discharging into the Baltic Sea, ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2011/16; assessment of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters discharging into the Black Sea, ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2011/13; and assessment of transboundary waters discharging to the White Sea, the Barents Sea and the Kara Sea ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2011/9). The secretariat

specifically highlighted remaining gaps, especially regarding groundwaters and specific basin assessments.

27. Since Poland had not submitted any input, the Working Group encouraged it to comment on the Assessment. Slovakia offered support in this regard.

28. The Working Group:

(a) Reviewed and endorsed the assessments of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters in Eastern and Northern Europe, in terms of content, with the understanding that several comments still needed to be incorporated;

(b) Expressed its appreciation to the experts who had contributed to the assessment, while regretting that some Parties had not participated in the exercise, and that the information provided was in some cases insufficient;

(c) Invited countries concerned to provide any necessary corrections to the information contained in documents ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2011/9, ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2011/13 and ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2011/16 by 20 May 2011;

(d) Entrusted the secretariat with the finalization of the assessment for the subregion, including the relevant comments and performing the needed editing and shortening to meet editorial needs.

D. Assessment of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters in the Caucasus

29. The assessment of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters in the Caucasus was very advanced, and had been discussed in detail at the Working Group's last regular meeting (6–7 July 2010). The secretariat therefore informed participants about the latest input received and revisions made to the documents of the subregional assessment for the Caucasus (major findings of the assessment of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters for the Caucasus, ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2011/5–ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2011/5; assessment of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters discharging into the Caspian Sea, ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2011/12; and assessment of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters discharging into the Black Sea, ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2011/13). The secretariat stressed especially remaining gaps, such as limited information on discharges and water quality, groundwater and water management, as well as expected climate change impacts, and requested riparian countries to submit that information as soon as possible. It noted with appreciation that all Caucasian countries had been very cooperative in the assessment process, which had provided a good basis for further work in the subregion.

30. A representative of Georgia expressed Georgia's appreciation for the work done by the secretariat, and mentioned several amendments to the major findings of the subregional assessment for the Caucasus. The representative of Azerbaijan committed to providing additional information from the United Nations Development Programme-Global Environment Facility project. The representative of Armenia also committed to sending additional information, e.g., on cooperation with Turkey, and requested that the assessment for the Aras/Araks River be corrected by deleting the first sentence of paragraph 167 in document ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2011/12.

31. Upon request, the secretariat clarified that the information to be published in the second Assessment should correspond to the latest information at the time of finalization of the Assessment, i.e., as of May 2011.

32. The Working Group:

(a) Reviewed and endorsed the assessments of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters in the Caucasus, in terms of content, with the understanding that several comments still needed to be incorporated;

(b) Expressed its appreciation to the experts who had contributed to the assessment, while noting that the information provided was in some cases insufficient;

(c) Invited countries concerned to provide any necessary corrections to the information contained in documents ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2011/12 and ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2011/13 by 20 May 2011;

(d) Entrusted the secretariat with the finalization of the assessment for the subregion, including the relevant comments and performing the needed editing and shortening to meet editorial needs.

E. Assessment of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters in South-Eastern Europe

33. The Working Group examined the final version of the subregional assessment for South-Eastern Europe (see major findings of the assessment for South-Eastern Europe, ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2011/7–ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2011/7; assessment of transboundary waters discharging to the Mediterranean ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2011/14; and assessment of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters discharging into the Black Sea ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2011/13), revised following the comments made during and after the last regular meeting of the Working Group.

34. The representative of Serbia thanked the secretariat for the subregional assessment and confirmed that Serbia would provide several corrections.

35. The delegation of Bulgaria reminded the secretariat to include some information it had submitted relating to the delineation of transboundary aquifers. It was also of the view that the subregional summary and the executive summary should focus more on the progress made in relation to sustainable management of transboundary waters, as well as in improving the status of waters.

36. The Working Group:

(a) Reviewed and endorsed the assessments of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters in South-Eastern Europe, in terms of content, with the understanding that several comments still needed to be incorporated;

(b) Expressed its appreciation to the experts who had contributed to the assessment, while regretting that some Parties and non-Parties had not participated in the exercise, and that the information provided was in some cases insufficient;

(c) Invited countries concerned to provide any necessary corrections to the information contained in documents ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2011/13 and ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2011/14 by 20 May 2011;

(d) Entrusted the secretariat with the finalization of the assessment for the subregion, including the relevant comments and performing the needed editing and shortening to meet editorial needs.

F. Maps and graphics for the second Assessment

37. IGRAC presented the groundwater maps prepared so far for the second Assessment, as well as the remaining gaps and points needing to be verified. The delegates were requested to check the location and extent of the transboundary aquifers and groundwater bodies with their groundwater specialist colleagues. The challenges related to dealing with two different concepts, aquifers and groundwater bodies, were highlighted.

38. The Working Group decided to distinguish on the maps aquifers and groundwater bodies, grouped if necessary. It agreed to use the data submitted by EU member States in the framework of the reporting under the EU Water Framework Directive to the European Commission, and decided that it would be indicated on the maps for which groundwater bodies the information had been checked by EEA (not all of the information had been checked by EEA) The Working Group decided that the countries could request that some aquifers not be included in the second Assessment if they so wished; however those included in the 1999 inventory but not confirmed would be included.

39. It was suggested that the maps would be titled “transboundary groundwaters”. IGRAC agreed to streamline the maps.

40. A representative of Georgia mentioned that the boundaries of the aquifers for the Caucasus should be checked due to some inaccuracies.

41. Subsequently, the secretariat presented to the Working Group the maps and graphics to be included in the second Assessment, such as overview maps of transboundary surface waters and groundwaters, summary graphs of discharges, basin maps and accompanying graphics (land use/land cover, population and discharges), individual figures provided by countries and maps for the executive summary. Priority had been given to figures provided by countries in drawing up the maps and graphics, but, when necessary, selected datasets had been used to fill gaps.

42. The Working Group invited countries to provide any necessary corrections or additions to the maps and inventory of transboundary groundwaters by 20 May 2011 and entrusted the secretariat to finalize the maps and graphics for publication in the second Assessment.

V. Assessment of Assessments report for the Seventh “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference

43. A representative of EEA informed the Working Group of the plans and progress achieved in the preparation of the Europe’s Environment — Assessment of Assessments report to be prepared for the Seventh “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference to be held in Astana in September 2011. The Assessment of Assessments report was built on existing reports and on participation of countries through a steering group, a group of experts nominated by countries and national contact points. Delegates should check the draft of the Assessment of Assessment report, especially chapters 2 and 4, and submit comments by the end of May 2011.

44. The Working Group recognized the need to ensure consistency in messages between the two assessment processes, and thus to bring a unified general message to the Astana Ministerial Conference. In addition, several of the conclusions of the Assessment of Assessments were considered relevant for possible future assessments under the Convention. For example, one of the conclusions of the Assessment of Assessments had been that many assessments were mainly factual and did not lead to policy-relevant recommendations. That could be taken into account in future assessments under the

Convention as well. In addition, the recommendation to improve the integrated character of the assessments by providing standards, approaches and methodologies to combine data and information from different sources could also be useful for future assessments under the Convention.

VI. Sharing of experiences and capacity-building

45. The secretariat recalled the new approach towards sharing of experiences and capacity-building in the workplan for 2010–2012, which included workshops organized by the secretariat as well as workshops to be organized by lead countries. The subregional workshops in the process of preparing the second Assessment had been important also for sharing of experience. In addition, the planned workshop on transboundary groundwaters in the framework of the Capacity for Water Cooperation project, as well as the workshop on cooperation between ECE and non-ECE countries, would have important components on monitoring and assessment.

46. The Working Group suggested that capacity-building needs might also be identified in bilateral or multilateral cooperation as well as in the framework of the National Policy Dialogues (NPDs). In that connection, the representative of Finland offered to present Finland's experience and methodologies used for balancing different water uses. It was also proposed that a seminar could be organized on data management, based on the outcomes of the pilot projects on data management for all ECE countries. In addition, the International Office for Water suggested that it could test new approaches to maps, as well as to develop indicators for governance, in the framework of their project.

47. The Working Group welcomed the suggestions made and proposed to consider them when planning the new programme of work for 2013–2015.

VII. Programme of work on monitoring and assessment for 2010–2012 and beyond

48. The Working Group reviewed progress made on the implementation of the Convention's workplan on monitoring and assessment for 2010–2012 (ECE/MP.WAT/29/Add.1), and concluded that no revisions were needed.

49. The delegation of Slovakia suggested including water scarcity and drought and water quantity more prominently into the new work programme. The International Office for Water proposed extending the pilot projects on data management to other subregions and basins of the ECE region as one possible part of the new programme of work.

50. The Working Group entrusted its Chair and Vice-Chair, in cooperation with the Bureau, with preparing a draft proposal for the future programme of work 2013–2015 for its next meeting.

Joint session with the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management

VIII. Status and finalization of the second Assessment of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters

51. During the joint session, the two Working Groups discussed strategic issues related to the preparation and finalization of the second Assessment, as well as the main findings and messages from the different subregional assessments.

52. The secretariat updated the two Working Groups on developments related to the second Assessment since the last joint session of the two working groups (Geneva, 7 July 2010), specifically focusing on the outcomes of the subregional workshops for Central Asia (Almaty, Kazakhstan, 13–15 October 2010) and Western and Central Europe (Budapest, 8–10 February 2011).

A. Major findings of the second Assessment for all subregions

53. The secretariat presented the draft major findings from the assessment for all subregions: the Caucasus (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2011/5–ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2011/5), Northern and Eastern Europe (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2011/6–ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2011/6), Central Asia (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2011/4–ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2011/4), Western and Central Europe (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2011/8–ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2011/8) and South-Eastern Europe (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2011/7–ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2011/7).

54. Regarding the major findings for Western and Central Europe, a representative of Germany suggested that the role which the European Union (EU) Water Framework Directive had played in the improvement of transboundary cooperation be explained, that the occurrence of water quantity problems be clarified and that the study by the International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine (ICPR) on climate change impacts be mentioned as a relevant example in the subregional summary.

55. The representative of the Czech Republic remarked that a few corrections were needed in the Assessment in relation to hydromorphological changes and transboundary agreements involving the country, some of which were missing in the list. In addition, nitrogen should be added as one of the main reasons for eutrophication mentioned in the Assessment.

56. With regard to the major findings for Eastern and Northern Europe, the representative from Finland also suggested highlighting more clearly the importance of water bodies' temperature and hydromorphological alterations; mentioning potentially negative effects of climate change mitigation measures, such as increased production of biomass for bioenergy; and stressing the need for cross-sectoral cooperation and mainstreaming of environmental considerations.

57. The representative of the Federal Service for Hydrometeorology and Environmental Monitoring of the Russian Federation (Roshydromet) suggested mentioning the transboundary agreement between Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation and the ongoing harmonization of water quality assessment methodologies as a good practice example in the subregional summary for Central Asia. A representative of Kazakhstan requested clarifying the causes of dam failure mentioned in the Central Asia summary.

58. The representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran expressed interest in support from the Convention and its secretariat in improving its transboundary cooperation with neighbouring countries, in particular Afghanistan.

59. Regarding the subregional summary for the Caucasus, the delegation from Georgia requested that the groundwater maps be corrected and the Armenian delegation suggested adding a few paragraphs on the progress made in the subregion regarding water management.

60. With regard to the subregional summary for South-Eastern Europe, the delegation from Greece mentioned several corrections to be made in relation to its transboundary agreements.

61. A representative of the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat; Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar Convention) reported on the Ramsar Convention's input to the second Assessment, reflecting on the successful cooperation which had allowed including a number of transboundary Ramsar sites in the Assessment, as well as on lessons learned and possibilities for future cooperation. He also invited the Convention's focal points and secretariat to attend Ramsar Convention activities, such as the European regional meeting, scheduled to take place in September 2011 in Slovakia.

62. The Working Groups:

(a) Reviewed and endorsed the content for all assessments of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters, and in particular the documents containing the major findings for the subregions (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2011/4–ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2011/4; ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2011/5–ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2011/5; ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2011/6–ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2011/6; ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2011/7–ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2011/7 and ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2011/8–ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2011/8);

(b) Expressed their appreciation to the experts for their input, as well as to IWAC, the Ramsar Convention secretariat and the Water Convention secretariat, for the substantive work done;

(c) Invited Parties and non-Parties to provide any necessary corrections/additions to the information contained in the documents with the main findings by subregion by 20 May 2011;

(d) Entrusted the secretariat with the finalization of the assessments, including the relevant comments and performing the necessary editing and shortening to meet editorial needs.

B. Executive summary of the second Assessment

63. The secretariat presented a draft of the executive summary for the second Assessment, targeted at policymakers (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2011/3–ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2011/3). The executive summary followed the main structure of the Assessment and thus was structured according to subregions.

64. The Working Groups agreed that the draft executive summary should be shortened to approximately 10 pages of text and 10 pages of graphics and other illustrations.

65. The Working Groups invited Parties and non-Parties to provide any additional comments to the executive summary by 20 May 2011. The Working Group entrusted the secretariat and the Bureau of the Water Convention to finalize the executive summary on the basis of the comments received.

C. Final layout and content of the second Assessment and its finalization

66. The secretariat recalled the final layout and content of the second Assessment on the basis of the outline that was endorsed by the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment at its eleventh session (informal document WGMA/2010/Inf.3–WGIWRM/2010/Inf.2).

67. The Working Groups agreed that any comment should be sent by 20 May 2011 for the timely finalization and printing of the second Assessment in time for the Seventh “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference, to be held from 21 to 23 September 2011 in Astana.

D. Promotion and dissemination of the second Assessment

68. The Working Groups decided that the first step in promoting the Assessment should be the launch at the Astana Ministerial Conference, as well as at a side event. Additional presentations should also be given at other European and international events, such as the World Water Forum. A CD-ROM would be produced in time for distribution in Astana.

69. The Working Group encouraged countries to promote the second Assessment at the national level, within their national, regional and local authorities, in national newspapers and journals and in river basin commissions, as well as in national assessments and communications. The representative of Germany suggested preparing and disseminating a model presentation on the Assessment. The Finnish representative suggested collecting communication and promotion materials from countries, such as articles, through the website. It was also suggested that IWAC could support the subregional promotion of the Assessment. Countries were encouraged to consider translating the basin assessments and, if possible, the executive summary into their national languages. The second Assessment could also be used to promote the benefits of the Convention, including among non-Parties, especially in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

70. The Working Groups agreed to hold a workshop in the first half of 2012 in order to discuss the findings of the second Assessment with a view to, at the same time, discussing the future programme of work for 2013–2015 under the Convention so that it could respond to the challenges identified in the second Assessment. The secretariat and the Bureau were entrusted with the organization of the workshop.³

IX. Future Assessments under the Convention

71. The secretariat presented the main lessons learned, benefits and shortcomings of the second Assessment process, as well as some suggestions regarding possible future assessments.

72. WaterLex suggested involving non-governmental organizations more strongly in future Assessments and also to focus more on social, economic and institutional issues, as well as cooperation. WaterLex suggested also strengthening linkages with the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters.

³ The strategic workshop on the future work under the ECE Water Convention, “Building on the findings of the Second Assessment and other results achieved”, was held on 14 and 15 February 2012 in Geneva.

73. The Working Groups decided to develop the next general, comprehensive assessment in 8 to 10 years, when measurable changes compared with the situation in 2011 could be expected. In between, in order to ensure continuity of the Assessment process, a thematic assessment focusing on a specific topic and having a specific approach would be prepared within four years (by 2015). While the Working Groups did not agree on the specific thematic scope, several options were flagged such as a focus on a specific pressure (e.g., agriculture, hydropower), a cross-cutting theme (e.g., climate change and extreme events, ecosystems and biodiversity) or a response measure (e.g., river basin management plans, monitoring and assessment systems).

X. Preparations for the Seventh “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference

74. The secretariat presented the preparations for the Astana Ministerial Conference to be held from 21 to 23 September 2011 in Kazakhstan. As sustainable management of water and water-related ecosystems was one of the two main topics of the Conference, it provided a good opportunity to raise issues relevant for the water sector. As background for the ministers’ discussions, an official substantive document on water and water-related ecosystems had been prepared by the Water Convention secretariat in cooperation with numerous international and non-governmental organizations for discussion at the special session of the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) (Geneva, 24–27 May 2011). The secretariat informed the Working Groups that the official substantive document (ECE/ASTANA.CONF/2011/3) would be complemented by an unofficial document containing good practices sent by countries that could not be included in the official document.

75. Countries were invited to submit comments to the draft official document through their CEP delegates. A representative of Hungary, on behalf of the EU, suggested stressing more the role of groundwater and of education in the official substantive document.

76. Countries informed the Working Groups about plans for their ministers’ and other high-level officials’ presence at the Conference, as well as plans for interventions in certain round tables and for the organization of side events.

77. The Chair of the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention presented the draft Astana Water Action document (ECE/CEP/2011/S/L.4) developed under the auspices of the Water Convention Bureau by a drafting group composed of nominated members. The Astana Water Action was expected to be one of the concrete outcomes of the Astana Conference. The document was a collection of actions for improving the status of water and water-related ecosystems through their more sustainable management. Governments were invited to commit voluntarily to specific actions before or at the Ministerial Conference, and to report on their implementation at the following “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference.

78. Delegates expressed satisfaction with the visibility of the Convention during the Ministerial Conference and its role in the preparatory process. They suggested demonstrating at the launch of the second Assessment its close link to the *Europe’s Environment Assessment of Assessments* prepared by the European Environment Agency.

XI. International Water Assessment Centre

79. Mr. Boris Minarik, Director of IWAC, presented an overview on the work of the Centre (WGMA/2011/Inf.2–WGIWRM/2011/Inf.1). The secretariat and the Working

Groups thanked IWAC for its support to the Convention and its programme of work and recognized its increasing importance as the technical arm of the Convention.

XII. Dates and venues of the next meetings of the Working Groups and closing of the meeting

80. The Working Groups decided to hold their next meeting starting with a joint session on 27 June 2012, followed by a session of the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management only on 28 and 29 June (morning only).⁴ The meetings would be preceded on 26 June by a meeting of the Core Group on Groundwater and followed by a meeting of the Core Group on National Policy Dialogues (NPDs) on 29 June in the afternoon.

81. The Chair of the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment closed the meeting at 5.30 p.m. on Wednesday, 4 May 2011.

⁴ Due to the unavailability of interpretation services and to ensure further coordination between the two Working Groups, the next meeting was held as a joint meeting of the two Working Groups on 3 and 4 July 2012, back to back with a meeting of the Core Group on National Policy Dialogues on 2 July 2012.