



Ministry for the
Environment, Land and
Sea of Italy



Workshop: Promoting transboundary water cooperation in the Middle East and Northern Africa region on the basis of the Water Convention

16 November 2015

Ministry of Agriculture, Budapest, Hungary

Background

Water is an increasingly scarce resource in the Middle East and Northern Africa (MENA) region. Water resources, which mostly come from water bodies (surface waters and groundwaters) shared by two or more countries. Considering the growing water challenges in the region (impacts of climate change, population growth, increasing demand), transboundary cooperation between riparian countries is every day more important to guarantee sustainable development in the region. In addition, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development acknowledges the importance of transboundary water cooperation in the context of the Goal 6.5, which calls for the implementation of “integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate”. There are therefore strong incentives for MENA countries to strengthen transboundary cooperation in order to improve water resources management.

Over the past 20 years, the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) has driven significant improvement in transboundary water cooperation in the pan-European region. Following the entry into force in 2013 of the amendment allowing accession by all United Nations Member States to the Convention, the Water Convention has become a global multilateral legal and intergovernmental framework for transboundary water cooperation.

Since 2012, several activities have been implemented to highlight the importance of legal instruments for the promotion of sustainable transboundary waters management, and in particular to increase awareness and understanding of the Water Convention, its work as well as the possible benefits for MENA countries to accede to it:

- In 2012, the *International Roundtable on Transboundary Water Resources Management in the Southern Mediterranean* (Rome, 26-27 November 2012, organized back-to-back with the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties) contributed to an exchange of experience on transboundary water cooperation in the Southern Mediterranean region and increased awareness on different legal frameworks for transboundary water cooperation, including the Water Convention.
- The regional workshop *Legal frameworks for Cooperation on transboundary waters: key aspects and opportunities for the Arab countries* (Tunis, 11-12 June 2014) provided a platform to discuss the opportunity that the globalization of the Water Convention represents for the Arab region.

Many countries from the MENA region acknowledged that the Water Convention could be a source of inspiration for progress in the management of shared surface waters and groundwaters and could offer a solid cooperation framework. Upon requests by interested MENA countries, several national workshops have been organized and are being planned to further build capacity on the Water Convention and inform national processes of reflection about possible accession to the Water Convention (Beirut, Lebanon, 4-5 February 2015; Amman, Jordan, 10 March 2015).

The seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention (Budapest, 17-19 November 2015) will mark the Convention's effective transition into a global framework and will discuss how the Convention can best support transboundary water cooperation worldwide. It is therefore of particular importance that countries from the MENA region, the most advanced region in term of preparation to accession to the Water Convention, can voice their progress in studying the Water Convention and its applicability in their particular settings, as well further needs in order to have their priorities reflected in strategic directions of future work under the Convention.

Objectives of the workshop

The workshop aims to take stocks of progress achieved, discuss MENA countries experience and needs towards accession and implementation of the Convention and possible future activities to promote the Convention's accession and implementation.

In particular, the workshop will provide the opportunity to:

- Discuss opportunities and benefits, as well as possible challenges, deriving from the opening of the Water Convention and from becoming a Party to it, based on the outcomes of previous regional and national discussions;
- Share information on the process of preparing for accession to the Water Convention, lessons learnt and advice to countries which are embarking in it as well as possible support offered;
- Clarify requirements for proper implementation of the Water Convention, in particular by providing further explanation on specific issues and questions commonly raised by MENA countries (detailing some specific provisions of the Convention);
- Introduce the modalities and areas for technical assistance within the framework of the UNECE Water Convention, in particular by presenting the upcoming 2016-2018 programme of work of the Water Convention and decisions to be taken by the Meeting of the Parties during its seventh session;
- Identify possible activities and projects on shared water resources management, at technical and policy levels, that could be promoted by the riparians and supported during the next triennium.

Organization of work

The workshop will combine keynote presentations, panel discussions and facilitated plenary discussions to allow exchanges between participants. All participants from MENA countries will be encouraged to contribute actively to the discussions.

The workshop will be held one day before the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention.

Participation

The workshop will be attended by delegates from nine MENA countries: Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia as well as some representatives from the civil society from the MENA region.

Representatives from UNECE countries as well as international experts (amongst others from the Implementation Committee, river basin organizations, etc.) will also participate. In addition, representatives from international organizations, donor organizations, cooperation agencies and non-governmental organizations interested in the workshop will be invited.

It is expected that participants of the workshop will be governmental representatives at the Director level, who will then attend the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties (Budapest, 17-19 November 2015). Given the topics that will be discussed, delegations could include representatives from different relevant Ministries, such as water, agriculture, environment, foreign affairs, etc. The total expected number of participants is around 40-45.

Partners

The workshop is organized by the Ministry for the Environment Land and Sea of Italy, in cooperation with the Regional Environmental Center (REC) and UNECE and with the support of the Government of Hungary. The workshop is financially supported by the Ministry of Environment, Land and Sea of Italy.

Practical information and venue

- The workshop will be held at the Ministry of Agriculture, Kossuth Lajos tér 11, 1055 Budapest from 9:00am till 6:00pm on Monday 16 September.
- Coffee breaks and lunch will be provided.
- A dinner reception will be organized on 16 November 2015 at Rétezház Restaurant, 1051 Budapest, Október 6. u.22, www.reteshaz.com, +36-1-428-0135.
- Simultaneous interpretation English – Arabic will be provided.

Registration and visa

Participants who have not yet registered are kindly requested to:

- Confirm their participation by **28 October 2015** and send a completed **registration** form (in attachment) per representative to Jefferson Andrade, REC (jandrade@rec.org) and Chantal Demilecamps, UNECE (Chantal.demilecamps@unece.org).
- To send a **copy of their passport** as soon as possible and in any case **by 12 October 2015** to the UNECE Secretariat (cammile.marcelo@unece.org) should they need any support to obtain visa. Upon request, the Government of Hungary will provide participants with an invitation letter, which should be used to apply for a visa at the nearest Hungarian Diplomatic representation. More information on visas to Hungary is available at: www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/water/MOP7/Logistics/Visas_and_entry_to_Hungary.pdf

Website of the workshop

More information on the workshop can be downloaded from the following webpage:

<http://www.unece.org/env/water/conventionmenaworkshop2015.html#/>

It includes background documents such as the brochure *The Global Opening of the 1992 UNECE Water Convention* and the publication *Guide to Implementing the Water Convention*.

Presentations will be made available on the website at the end of the workshop.