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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

### Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management

#### Eleventh meeting

Geneva, 18 and 19 October 2016

## Report of the eleventh meeting of the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management

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## I. Introduction

1. The eleventh meeting of the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management under the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) took place at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, Switzerland, on 18 October and 19 October 2016. All relevant documentation for the meeting is available on a dedicated page of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Water Convention website.<sup>1</sup>

### A. Attendance

2. The eleventh meeting was attended by delegations from the following countries: Afghanistan, Albania, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Chad, China, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Czechia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ecuador, Egypt, Estonia, Finland, France, Gambia, Germany, Ghana, Honduras, Hungary, Iraq, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mauritania, Mongolia, Netherlands, Nigeria, Pakistan, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Senegal, Serbia, Somalia, State of Palestine, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Viet Nam.

3. The European Union was also represented.

4. Also attending the meeting were representatives of the following international and regional organizations: the African Ministers' Council on Water (AMCOW); the Economic Community of Central African States; the Economic Community of West African States; the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development; the Global Environment Facility (GEF) International Waters Learning Exchange and Research Network (IW:LEARN); the Global Water Partnership (GWP); the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD); the Niger Basin Authority; the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe; the Organization of American States; the Scientific Information Centre of the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination of Central Asia; the Scientific-Information Centre of the Interstate Commission on Sustainable Development; the Union for the Mediterranean; the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Water Education; the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP); UN-Water; and the Volta Basin Authority.

5. Representatives of the following non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and academic institutions were present: the Global Institute for Water, Environment and Health; Green Cross International; the International Committee for Rehabilitation Aid to Afghanistan; the International Rainwater Harvesting Alliance; the Public Fund "Water Initiatives Centre"; the Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI); the Swiss Institute for Water Law and Climate Change; the University of Geneva/Geneva Water Hub WaterLex; the World Wide Fund for Nature; and Zoï Environment Network.

### B. Organizational matters

6. The meeting was opened by the Deputy Director of the Environment Division of ECE. Subsequently, the Working Group re-elected as its Co-Chairs for the intersessional period 2016-2018 Ms. Heide Jekel (Germany) and Ms. Lea Kauppi (Finland). The Working Group then adopted its agenda, as set out in document ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2016/1, and

<sup>1</sup> See [www.unece.org/index.php?id=41733#/](http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=41733#/).

the report of its tenth meeting (Geneva, 24-25 June 2015) contained in document ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2015/2.

7. The Working Group was organized as a special session celebrating both the twentieth anniversary of the entry into force of the Convention in 2016 and its opening for global accession by all United Nations Member States, in effect since 1 March 2016. The Working Group also reviewed the implementation of the programme of work for 2016–2018 (ECE/MP.WAT/49/Add.1).

## **II. Progress in the ratification process, including ratification of the amendments to open the Convention to countries outside the region**

8. The secretariat informed participants about the status of ratification of the Convention, recalling that the amendments to articles 25 and 26 opening the Convention for accession by non-ECE countries, which had entered into force on 6 February 2013, had become operational on 1 March 2016, with the latest ratification by Ukraine, turning the Convention into a universally available framework for transboundary water cooperation.

## **III. Special session on the twentieth anniversary of the entry into force of the Convention and its opening for global accession**

9. The Co-Chairs of the Working Group and the Chair of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention opened the special session. It was recalled that the Convention had entered into force on 6 October 1996. Over the past 20 years, the Convention had proven its usefulness on the ground for enhancing transboundary water cooperation, supporting the development of agreements and the establishment and strengthening of joint institutions. Moreover, it had provided an intergovernmental platform for the progressive development and advancement of transboundary water cooperation. The Convention's institutional framework had supported Parties and non-Parties alike in implementation by promoting the sharing of experience, the development of guidance tools and the fostering of mutual assistance, while continuously adapting its work to the evolving needs of countries.

10. Further to the Convention's global opening, it was noted that several States not members of ECE had already started the accession process. The global opening provided numerous opportunities for existing and prospective Parties and for other actors engaged in supporting transboundary water cooperation. At the same time, a number of challenges needed to be addressed to ensure that the Convention could be most effective at the global level. In that respect, the views of countries from outside the ECE region would also be key to shape and organize the future work under the Convention.

11. Parties and non-Parties from within and outside the ECE region along with international and non-governmental organizations then briefly presented their experience in implementing or supporting implementation of the Convention, and their expectations for the future. Representatives of the following countries made statements: Austria, Belarus, Czechia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Germany, Netherlands, Romania, Russian Federation and Senegal. Speakers stressed that the Convention had brought their countries concrete benefits in terms of improving their transboundary water cooperation, namely through the exchange of experience in the Convention's institutional framework, including on emerging topics such as climate change. They also considered that the global opening of the Convention would further increase its relevance and usefulness. They expressed readiness to share their experiences worldwide.

12. The representatives of Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Senegal and Somalia expressed their countries' interest in the Convention, and in possibly acceding to it. They underlined that the Convention would help their countries to further improve transboundary cooperation with their neighbours, to cooperate on transboundary groundwaters and also to reinforce national water management and protection measures. The representative of Gambia informed the Working Group that his country had nearly finalized ratification of the 1997 United Nations Convention on the Law of Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses (Watercourses Convention).

13. The representative of the Union for the Mediterranean informed the Working Group that a ministerial meeting on water would take place in April 2017 where it was expected that a new water agenda for the region would be endorsed by a ministerial declaration. He invited the secretariat to contribute to that process.

14. A representative of Turkey informed the Working Group about the ongoing harmonization of the national water legislation with the relevant European Union directives. In addition, river basin councils had been created and several meetings on transboundary cooperation had been organized with Bulgaria.

15. The Working Group:

(a) Expressed its appreciation to representatives of Parties and non-Parties that presented testimonials during the session;

(b) Emphasized the progress in transboundary water cooperation that had been driven by the Convention, including: the signature of agreements and the establishment of joint bodies; enhanced cooperation on monitoring and assessment; the protection of water resources; the development of integrated water resources management plans — both at the national and transboundary levels; the reduction of flood risks in transboundary basins; and cooperation on adaptation to climate change;

(c) Reaffirmed the many benefits deriving from the opening of the Convention in terms of strengthened transboundary water cooperation: among others, a broader exchange of experience and good practice, the strengthening of political support to cooperation;

(d) Encouraged Parties and non-Parties to make the best use of the Convention, its framework and tools to further strengthen transboundary cooperation on the ground;

(e) Decided to organize a special thematic session on progress with regard to transboundary water cooperation worldwide in the framework of its next meeting.

## **IV. Support to implementation and application of the Convention**

### **A. Assistance supporting accession to and implementation of the Convention through projects on the ground and capacity development**

16. The ECE Regional Adviser on Environment informed the Working Group about experiences and the progress achieved in different projects supporting implementation of the Convention in countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. He highlighted that while the broadening of transboundary water cooperation to involve other sectors, such as hydropower, was an important and positive trend in projects, it also demanded significant time and additional political efforts.

17. Participants welcomed the report, stressed that development of cooperation was a long-term process and agreed that there was a need to expand transboundary water cooperation to other relevant sectors. As a response to requests for similar activities outside the ECE region, the secretariat explained that the mandate of the ECE Regional Adviser

was limited to supporting implementation of the Convention in the ECE region. However, under other areas of the Convention's programme of work, the ECE secretariat, in close cooperation with partners, was already engaged in supporting transboundary cooperation in a number of basins outside the ECE region. At the same time, the secretariat had limited capacity, which made the role of partners, in particular regional partners, fundamental.

## **B. Implementation Committee**

18. A representative of the Implementation Committee informed the Working Group about the outcome of the Committee's sixth meeting (Geneva, 3–4 May 2016) and the Committee's future plans, including in relation to the global opening of the Convention. In particular, he announced that the Bureau had entrusted the Committee with a new task — to support the secretariat in responding to legal queries from prospective new Parties including from outside the ECE region. Countries were encouraged to use the Implementation Committee, which could provide valuable assistance.

## **C. Reporting under the Convention**

19. At its seventh session (Budapest, 17–19 November 2015), the Meeting of the Parties adopted decision VII/2 (see ECE/MP.WAT/49/Add.2), which introduced a reporting mechanism under the Convention starting with a pilot exercise in 2016–2017 to test the draft template. On the basis of the reports submitted, the secretariat would prepare a synthesis report providing an overview of the Convention's implementation and the advancement of transboundary water cooperation.

20. A representative of UN-Water reported on the process of defining, testing and developing methodologies for the global indicators for the Sustainable Development Goal 6 on clean water and sanitation and about the Integrated Monitoring Initiative (GEMI), through which a baseline data collection, involving 60 countries, would be carried out in 2017.

21. With regard to the Sustainable Development Goal target 6.5 on integrated water resources management and transboundary cooperation, the secretariat explained that, to measure progress, indicator 6.5.2 had been agreed by the United Nations Statistical Commission in March 2016. The indicator was defined as the “percentage of transboundary basin area with an operational arrangement for transboundary cooperation”. ECE and UNESCO had led the development of the step-by-step methodology to calculate indicator 6.5.2<sup>2</sup> and had been proposed as “custodian agencies” for the indicator.

22. The secretariat then presented the Bureau proposal to combine the reporting under the Convention and the reporting on indicator 6.5.2 and to send only one template with a view to ensuring synergies.

23. Several delegates asked questions about the indicator development process and about indicator 6.5.2 in particular. In response to a question on how to define operability of transboundary cooperation arrangements, especially the meeting frequency, the secretariat replied that the joint body or its subsidiary bodies must meet at least annually. Responding to another question, the secretariat indicated that the term “cooperation arrangements” covered all kinds of treaties, conventions, memorandums of understanding and agreements ensuring formal cooperation in the field of transboundary waters. For

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<sup>2</sup> An integrated monitoring guide and the step-by-step methodology are available from <http://www.unwater.org/publications/step-step-methodology-monitoring-transboundary-cooperation-6-5-2/>.

reporting on sub-basins, the secretariat referred to the step-by-step methodology developed for reporting on indicator 6.5.2, and indicated that sub-basins could also be reported on, but countries should make sure not to double-count in the indicator calculation.

24. Overall, delegations voiced support for combining the reporting under the Convention and on indicator 6.5.2 owing to the importance of establishing a thorough baseline for indicator 6.5.2. It was also agreed that any unclear and open questions could be addressed in the possible revision of the reporting template, scheduled for autumn 2017 after the pilot reporting phase. Some countries, such as Germany, offered financial support for preparing the synthesis report on the implementation of the Convention.

25. Several organizations presented their efforts in the area of reporting. For example, the representative of the Global Water Partnership indicated that GWP was working on a background paper on indicator 6.5.2 and was testing the methodology in Bangladesh, Uganda and El Salvador. Also, the need for cooperation on capacity-building with regard to the indicator 6.5.2 with regional organizations, such as the African Ministers' Council on Water and the Global Water Partnership, was highlighted.

26. The Working Group:

(a) Decided to report in accordance with the revised reporting template including a section on indicator 6.5.2 in order to support at the same time monitoring of that indicator;

(b) Encouraged all Parties and non-Parties to participate in the pilot reporting exercise and submit the filled-out templates to the secretariat by 31 March 2017<sup>3</sup> in order to allow enough time for analysing the answers and eventually revising the reporting template, if needed, before the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties in 2018;

(c) Entrusted Bureau with the support of the secretariat to analyse the reports submitted with a view to determining if the template for reporting needed to be revised, and to report at its next meeting;

(d) Requested the secretariat to prepare a draft outline of the synthesis report on progress in the implementation of the Convention and also, in cooperation with UNESCO, an outline of a global report on the progress on transboundary water cooperation in relation to indicator 6.5.2;

(e) Called upon donors to consider providing financial resources for the development of the above-mentioned reports and resources for information management tools for the data elaboration and for the establishment of an online platform for reporting.

## **D. Development of a concept for a third comprehensive assessment**

27. Under the Convention, two comprehensive assessments of the status of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters in the European and Asian parts of the ECE region were prepared and published in 2007 and 2011.<sup>4</sup> At its seventh session, the Meeting of the Parties entrusted the Working Group on Integrated Resources Management and the

<sup>3</sup> Following the meeting and due to further delays in the process, the deadline was changed to 15 May for Parties and 15 June for non-Parties.

<sup>4</sup> *Our Waters: Joining Hands Across Borders — First Assessment of Transboundary Rivers, Lakes and Groundwaters* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.07.II.E.19), available from <http://www.unece.org/env/water/publications/pub76.html>; and *Second Assessment of Transboundary Rivers, Lakes and Groundwaters* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.11.II.E.15), available from [www.unece.org/?id=26343](http://www.unece.org/?id=26343).

Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment to develop a proposal for a third comprehensive assessment, including the thematic and geographical scope (taking into account the Convention's global opening), modalities and partners for implementation, financing options and links with other ongoing processes, such as the reporting under the Convention and the Transboundary Waters Assessment Programme.

28. The Working Group was informed about the plans related to the preparation of such a proposal. Regarding the value of a comprehensive assessment, the Co-Chair from Finland observed that such an exercise would convene Parties, non-Parties, potential future Parties and others to discuss emerging challenges and possible responses, hence supporting putting into practice the strategy for the Convention's opening. The transboundary focus and the intergovernmental participatory nature would distinguish the third assessment initiative from others. The Co-Chair proposed that the scope of the third comprehensive assessment be selected and volunteered basins from the ECE region and beyond. An expert group could be created to work on the concept and to map links to other processes. The expert group should have a representative composition, including Parties and non-Parties from all subregions of ECE and also countries from outside the ECE region, together with basin organizations, regional organizations and key partners with activities on the assessment of waters.

29. The representative of Azerbaijan noted that since the second assessment many new data had been collected with donor support, and mentioned that the Kura Basin or one of its sub-basins could be a good potential case for inclusion in the third assessment, notably thanks to the development of chemical, biological and investigative monitoring.

30. The representative of Zoï Environment Network offered cooperation in the assessment process, encouraging participants to think in advance about embedding outputs, such as maps and graphs, into the process and to explore synergies with the next reporting cycle of the European Union. He suggested that an objective should be to strengthen monitoring processes at the national level and therefore it would be important to establish cooperation with the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) and other efforts to build and increase data and monitoring expertise at the national level.

31. A representative of UNEP expressed interest in participating in the expert group, highlighting in particular that a baseline overview of transboundary basins worldwide (including lakes and groundwaters) had been prepared through the GEF-funded Transboundary Waters Assessment Programme (TWAP), which should provide a useful basis for the third assessment. He also recommended linking the assessment to the Global Environment Outlook cycle.

32. The representative of Finland emphasized the need to complement the newly introduced reporting under the Water Convention with some sort of an assessment of the status of waters, which the third assessment could provide, but also to avoid overlap with other assessments and to be flexible in involving non-Parties.

33. The representative of Sweden suggested to include information from the reporting exercise in the third assessment. While admitting that it was important to showcase achievements, the comprehensiveness of the assessment had a certain value as well.

34. The Working Group:

(a) Decided to establish a small expert group to develop a proposal for the third comprehensive assessment, including the scope, methodology, partnership and funding needs, for consideration by the next meeting of the Working Group;

(b) Called upon donors to consider providing financial resources for the development of the third comprehensive assessment.



## V. Identifying, assessing and communicating the benefits of transboundary water cooperation

35. A representative of Estonia, co-lead Party for work programme area 2, on identifying, assessing and communicating the benefits of transboundary water cooperation, presented the content and latest developments regarding the *Policy Guidance Note on the Benefits of Transboundary Water Cooperation: Identification, Assessment and Communication* (ECE/MP.WAT/47)<sup>5</sup> (Policy Guidance Note), adopted at the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties. The publication sought to support governments and other actors in realizing the potential benefits of transboundary water cooperation. In that connection, he highlighted the importance of providing fact-based arguments for starting up cooperation or developing stronger cooperation, but also to attract financial resources to implement water cooperation solutions.

36. A representative of Serbia, co-lead Party for the work area, reported on benefit assessment simulation exercises carried out during national and regional workshops on the Water Convention (Tunis, 21–22 September 2016; and Campeche, Mexico, 3–4 October 2016), which had proved useful in improving understanding of the benefits of transboundary water cooperation and, indirectly, of acceding to the Water Convention.

37. The Working Group was informed about the ongoing and planned application of the Policy Guidance Note in a number of basins in the framework of the Convention. In the Drina Basin, an identification of the benefits of possible nexus solutions was being carried out with funds from Italy. In the Okavango-Cubango basin, a benefit assessment exercise was ongoing, in cooperation with the World Bank, and it had already proved useful in increasing the willingness of riparian countries to invest in stronger cooperation. In the IGAD region, thanks to a financial contribution from the United States of America, a benefit assessment exercise would be carried out in one of the region's basins, in cooperation with the International Union for Conservation of Nature. In the Middle East and Northern Africa, a benefit assessment exercise was planned, thanks to a contribution from Sweden.

38. A representative of IGAD highlighted the usefulness of the Policy Guidance Note in supporting transboundary water cooperation, and expressed hope that the planned benefit assessment exercise would support the ongoing negotiations on a regional water protocol on shared water resources in the IGAD region. A representative of the Russian Federation mentioned the need to strengthen activities on the benefits of transboundary water cooperation to show the benefits of implementing the Water Convention.

39. The Working Group:

- (a) Welcomed progress so far in applying the Policy Guidance Note;
- (b) Encouraged other interested basins and partners to also consider applying and using the Policy Guidance Note;
- (c) Decided to hold a global workshop to exchange experience on identifying, assessing and communicating the benefits of transboundary water cooperation in February 2018.

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<sup>5</sup> Available from [www.unece.org/index.php?id=41340&L=0](http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=41340&L=0).

## VI. The water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus in transboundary basins

40. The Chair of the Task Force on the Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystems Nexus recalled that, at its seventh session, the Meeting of the Parties had adopted the methodology for the assessment of the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus developed in the triennium 2013–2015,<sup>6</sup> had encouraged its further use and had decided to undertake further nexus assessments and to promote the findings and solutions identified. Recent activities in the area included, for example, the promotion of the findings from the assessments at the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Batumi, Georgia, 8-10 June 2016), the ongoing assessment of the Drina, the preparation of an assessment of the North-Western Sahara Aquifer System and the ongoing finalization of technical reports from the assessments on the Alazani/Ganykh, Sava and Syr Darya. In particular, the Chair welcomed that the energy sector's involvement in the nexus work had increased.

41. Various delegates recognized the challenges of a nexus approach, but also appreciated its potential value. The representative of Serbia announced that a project proposal was under development and hoped for funding to be granted to allow for further work on the nexus in the Drina Basin, building on the Sava nexus assessment.

42. Further to the assessment of the Syr Darya Basin, a representative of Kyrgyzstan underlined that building more reservoirs on the Naryn would make it possible to better account for vegetation period needs when presently the biggest reservoir, Toktogul, operated in a mode giving priority to energy generation. Climate change was an additional challenge, especially its impact on glacier melting, which could affect water availability. Nonetheless, Kyrgyzstan was trying to implement the proposed solutions.

43. A representative of Kazakhstan noted that the nexus approach could be more easily applied at the national level. On the Irtysh River, Kazakhstan was seeking to take into account environmental needs in operating its hydropower plants. Kazakhstan was interested in applying a nexus approach to the Ural River, where cooperation with the Russian Federation was ongoing.

44. The Task Force Chair also presented plans for the global stocktaking workshop on the water-food-energy-ecosystem nexus (Geneva, Switzerland, 6–7 December 2016) and encouraged wide participation.

45. The Working Group then discussed how to carry out the second activity in the programme area, namely the collection of good practices and examples of water allocation, water sharing and benefits sharing. A representative of Finland outlined the proposed process for that exercise, which involved gathering cases on water allocation at the transboundary level and the organization of a global workshop on 17 and 18 October 2017.

46. The representative of Azerbaijan expressed interest in the water allocation work, regarding both surface water and groundwater, and willingness to cooperate. The representative of IGAD also indicated the Authority's interest in the topic, and in learning from the good practices to be shared at the workshop.

47. The Working Group:

(a) Welcomed progress in applying the nexus methodology in new basins and invited representatives of those basins to report back at its next meeting;

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<sup>6</sup> *Reconciling Resource Uses in Transboundary Basins: Assessment of the Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystems Nexus* (ECE/MP.WAT/46). Available from [www.unece.org/index.php?id=41427&L=0](http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=41427&L=0).

(b) Encouraged other basins to consider using the methodology and approach the secretariat officially in that regard;

(c) Welcomed the involvement of other sectors, in particular the energy sector, and encouraged them to also use the methodology, as appropriate;

(d) Agreed on the timeline proposal for the organization of the workshop on water allocation and encouraged countries to contribute their good practices.

## VII. Adapting to climate change in transboundary basins

48. The Co-Chairs of the Task Force on Water and Climate informed participants about the outcomes of the workshop on financing climate change adaptation in transboundary basins (Geneva, 13–14 September 2016), organized in cooperation with the Alliance for Global Water Adaptation (AGWA), the GEF Project International Waters Learning Exchange and Resource Network (IW:LEARN), the International Network of Basin Organizations, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the World Bank and the World Meteorological Organization. They further presented the results of the eighth meeting of the Task Force on Water and Climate (Geneva, 15 September 2016). The Task Force had decided to prepare a “words into action” guide on river basin management and transboundary cooperation in cooperation with the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. The Co-Chairs also presented progress on the pilot projects and other activities within the framework of the global network of basins working on climate change adaptation. Finally, they proposed that the Working Group adopt the strategy for future work on climate change adaptation in transboundary basins (ECE/MP.WAT/2015/4), underlining that its implementation had already started.

49. In the discussions, the Working Group appreciated the newly started focus on financing climate change adaptation in transboundary basins and the cooperation with the World Bank and regional banks on that topic. In that context, the representative of Germany noted that the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River was working on a revision of its adaptation strategy. A representative of Tajikistan reported on several national and regional climate change projects, highlighting also the economic dimension of adapting water management to climate change. The representative of the Scientific Information Centre of the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination of Central Asia informed the Working Group that a project on climate change adaptation and uncertainties was being implemented for the Syr Darya Basin, financed by the Swiss Development Cooperation, which included, among others, joint modelling combined with legal analysis.

50. The Working Group:

(a) Adopted the draft strategy for future work on climate change adaptation in transboundary basins under the Water Convention as contained in document ECE/MP.WAT/2015/4, which had been submitted to the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties;

(b) Welcomed the outcomes of the workshop on financing climate change adaptation in transboundary basins (Geneva, 13-14 September 2016), and recognized that topic as a priority for future work in the period 2016-2018 under the Task Force on Water and Climate, also in the light of the outcomes of the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (Paris, 30 November-12 December 2015);

(c) Endorsed the proposal to prepare, in cooperation with the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, a “words into action” guide on river basin management

and transboundary cooperation, and entrusted a drafting group under the Task Force on Water and Climate, led by the Netherlands, to prepare a draft and report on it at the Working Group's next meeting.

## **VIII. Opening the Convention, promotion and partnerships**

### **A. Promoting accession by raising awareness about the Convention and developing capacity to implement its provisions**

51. The Working Group was informed about the national workshops on the Water Convention organized at the request of countries outside the ECE region interested in acceding to the Convention, namely for Iraq (Amman, 10–11 January 2016) and Tunisia (Tunis, 21–22 September 2016), and also about other efforts at the regional and global levels to build capacity on and awareness of the Convention.

52. The representative of Iraq said that the country was still studying possible accession within the national committee created for that purpose. Following the national workshop in Amman, several meetings of the committee had taken place, but some questions were still being asked by other ministries. A decision would be taken by the Council of Ministers soon.

53. The representative of Tunisia stated that the national workshop had clarified many questions and Tunisia was now preparing for accession by studying whether any modification to national laws were needed and preparing the ratification law.

54. The delegate of Honduras reported on the outcomes of the regional workshop for Latin American countries on general principles for transboundary water cooperation, including the Water Convention, organized by ECE, the Economic Commission for Latin America, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the World Wide Fund for Nature and other partners on 3 and 4 October 2016 in Campeche, Mexico. The workshop had highlighted the added value of the Convention, but also the challenges to its ratification in the Latin American region, such as a lack of knowledge about the Convention, a lack of political will and trust, and diffuse fears of losing sovereignty. She, however, stated that the Convention could help Honduras in its cooperation with neighbouring countries.

55. The delegate of Switzerland suggested the preparation of a list of frequently asked questions on the Water Convention specifically for countries from outside the ECE region interested in the Convention, and proposed that interested non-ECE countries could also motivate their neighbours to attend the Convention meetings. Some delegates offered support for the activities on the Convention's global opening, for example the representative of Portugal expressed readiness to share experience on transboundary water cooperation with Spain.

56. The representative of Turkey informed the Working Group that a meeting on transboundary cooperation with Iraq had taken place in August 2016, where, among others, topics such as data exchange had been discussed. The delegate of the State of Palestine expressed interest in the Convention and regretted that the State of Palestine could not accede to it.

57. The representative of Chad noted that Chad had started the process of accession by informing relevant stakeholders from other ministries, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the parliament and researchers about the Convention. A national workshop and a preparatory national meeting were planned for early 2017. It was hoped that the accession would also improve cooperation in the Lake Chad Basin. The representative of Viet Nam said that the country had started gathering information on the Convention and consulting

with stakeholders. She also asked for support with capacity-building. The delegate of Côte d'Ivoire reiterated the country's request for support from the secretariat for a possible accession process.

58. Representatives of Ecuador and Colombia informed the Working Group that they had also started national discussions on the Water Convention and had additionally made efforts to improve transboundary cooperation with neighbouring countries, including Peru. They requested support for those processes from the secretariat.

## **B. Cooperation with partners**

59. It was recalled that, at its seventh session, through decision VII/4, the Meeting of the Parties had emphasized the importance of partnerships with international organizations, in particular regional commissions and other UN-Water members, financing institutions, joint bodies, NGOs, academia and the business sector, to strengthen transboundary water cooperation, support the Convention's implementation on the ground and ensure the execution of the programme of work. It had decided to continue and further enhance cooperation with existing partners and to seek new partnerships, in particular in the light of the global opening of the Convention, and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other global commitments.

60. The representative of the Global Water Partnership offered future cooperation between the Partnership and the Convention on a number of the Convention's work programme areas, including benefits of cooperation, nexus assessments, climate change adaptation and the Convention's global opening. The Global Water Partnership had translated the Policy Guidance Note *on the Benefits of Transboundary Water Cooperation: Identification, Assessment and Communication* (ECE/MP.WAT/47) into Chinese and it would be presented at an upcoming national workshop on international water law in Xiamen, China. As for future cooperation opportunities, she proposed possible nexus assessments on the Mékrou and Lake Bugesera Basins in Africa, the next training on international water law organized by the Global Water Partnership and partners in Uganda in June 2017 and cooperation on monitoring the Sustainable Development Goal 6.5.2 indicator. Finally, she expressed interest in formalizing the cooperation between ECE and the Global Water Partnership by signing a memorandum of understanding.

61. A representative of Geneva University offered cooperation in the dissemination of information and capacity-building on the Water Convention and in the development of the strategy for the implementation of the Convention at the global level. The representative of the World Wide Fund for Nature reported on plans for cooperation between ECE, the Fund, the Global Water Partnership and the International Union for Conservation of Nature, for example with regard to establishing a web portal on the two global water conventions and the creation of a database of legal experts who could build capacity and promote the conventions.

62. The delegate of the Organization of American States also expressed hope for increased cooperation with the Water Convention and offered support regarding the accession of Latin American countries. The delegate of the African Ministers' Council on Water indicated future cooperation possibilities with regard to Africa Water Week and on monitoring and reporting on transboundary waters. He informed that AMCOW had established an online platform in cooperation with the UNEP Collaborating Centre on Water and Environment, where all African countries had been asked to report on global and regional water indicators, including those of Sustainable Development Goal 6.

63. Finally, the Working Group was informed about the ongoing preparations for the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Water and Health (Geneva, 14–16 November 2016), its draft programme of work for 2017–2019 and options for

reinforcing cooperation between the Convention and the Protocol, e.g., with regard to activities on climate change adaptation. In that regard, a joint workshop of the Convention and the Protocol on water scarcity was planned in 2017.

64. Finally, the representative of Turkey invited all participants to the Fourth Istanbul International Water Forum, to be held on 10 and 11 May 2017. The Forum would be focused on the theme of water and peace and would also include an exhibition.

### **C. Strategy for the implementation of the Convention at the global level**

65. It was recalled that, at its seventh session, through its decision VII/3 on establishing a framework for the implementation of the Convention at the global level, the Meeting of the Parties had entrusted the Bureau and the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management to develop a strategy for the implementation of the Convention at the global level, including the relationship with the Watercourses Convention and the role of key partners, for adoption at its next session.

66. In that regard, a draft discussion paper on the strategy, prepared by the Bureau with the support of the secretariat as an informal meeting document (WG.1/2016/INF.2), was presented to the Working Group. Subsequently, participants discussed in small groups the draft strategy elements and concrete activities to be undertaken. A number of proposals were made on the strategic goals contained in section 5 of the discussion paper, as set out below.

67. Suggestions regarding increased awareness of and political support for the Convention (strategic goal 1) included informing neighbouring non-Parties about the Convention, working with regional and other organizations to promote the Convention and practical ideas, such as sending a letter to all United Nations Member States about the Convention's anniversary and its achievements. Other suggestions included working with the High-Level Panel on Water to promote the Convention, reaching out to parliamentarians or organizing an event on the Convention at the annual United Nations treaty day during the General Assembly in New York or other events so that ministries of foreign affairs could be more informed about and more engaged with the Convention.

68. In terms of material, it was proposed to prepare additional targeted information material for different audiences, such as policymakers, but also to use the water-related conferences and meetings, such as water weeks in other continents, to promote the Convention.

69. To increase accession to the Convention (strategic goal 2 in the discussion paper), participants suggested collecting success stories of the Convention's implementation and elaborating a publication with frequently asked questions on the Convention, a technical road map for accession and model documents. Another group suggested organizing additional national workshops on the Convention by the secretariat, but also by the countries themselves, e.g., at the initiative of one riparian country, which could then invite the other riparian countries to discuss the Convention and the secretariat to share best practices.

70. Regarding increasing capacity to implement the Convention (strategic goal 3), it was suggested to train government officials on the Convention, to prepare a document on the benefits of the Convention and to increase cooperation with financial institutions, banks, the private sector, river basin organizations and other partners, for example with regard to organizing and financing workshops on the Convention. Participants also proposed organizing study tours or twinning exercises between countries and river basin commissions on their experience with the Convention and transboundary cooperation and also preparing a roster of legal experts on the Convention. Other measures proposed

included preparing country diagnostics or assessments on the implementation of the Convention or readiness for it, establishing national follow-up mechanisms and exchanging experience, for example through the African Network of Basin Organizations or the International Network of Basin Organizations.

71. With respect to supporting implementation of relevant Sustainable Development Goals through the Convention (strategic goal 4 in the discussion paper), in particular target 6.5, participants suggested considering not only Sustainable Development Goal 6 on water, but also other water-related goals such as on energy or food. The Convention's work on the nexus was considered relevant here.

72. Participants also discussed possible new partnerships (strategic goal 5) and suggested adding the Global Water Partnership as a key partner, including a new category such as professional knowledge partners, academia, think tanks and regional organizations. Partners should join the strategic planning on the Convention and also be offered training. The need was stressed to prepare a mapping of activities and actors on transboundary water cooperation, to use existing platforms such as the Global Environment Facility's International Waters Learning and Exchange Network for promotion and to further expand effective partnerships. Outreach to youth was also proposed, for example through electronic communication and social media tools, and by using existing cooperation platforms and downscaling them to the regional level.

73. Another group suggested using high-level political forums, such as the African Union, or other meetings at the ministerial or Head of State level, where an information session on the Convention could be included. It was also proposed to increase cooperation with UN-Water, GEF and global multilateral environmental agreements, such as the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

74. Participants stressed the usefulness of regional workshops on the Convention and experiences of transboundary cooperation. In advance of such events, regional studies should be prepared in order to identify barriers to the Convention's ratification in the respective region. Finally, delegates underlined that documents and publications prepared in the framework of the Convention should be translated into Spanish.

75. In concluding the session, the Co-Chairs thanked all participants for the very useful and concrete proposals and recalled that the strategy would need to be achievable, so it would be important to prioritize actions. They also underlined the role of all countries and actors in implementing the different actions, and therefore encouraged countries and partners to continue in their important efforts.

76. The Working Group:

(a) Welcomed the progress towards accession by several countries from outside the ECE region and encouraged further progress;

(b) Decided to continue supporting such efforts, through the provision of technical and legal assistance, including by sharing Parties' expertise in implementation;

(c) Thanked partners for their contributions, and encouraged them to further strengthen and broaden the scope of their cooperation with the Convention in view of the Convention's global opening and to contribute to the development of the strategy;

(d) Invited participants to send comments to the strategy by 30 November 2016;

(e) Entrusted the Bureau in cooperation with highly concerned countries from outside the ECE region and partners, with the support of the secretariat, to further develop the draft strategy for implementation of the Convention at the global level based on the discussions at the meeting, for consideration at its next session.

## **IX. European Union Water Initiative and National Policy Dialogues**

77. The Working Group was informed about recent developments in the European Union Water Initiative National Policy Dialogues on Integrated Water Resources Management (facilitated by ECE) and Water Supply and Sanitation (facilitated by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development). A representative of Romania, the chair of the European Union Water Initiative Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia Working Group, also informed participants about the outcomes of the group's most recent meetings, held on 12 and 13 May 2016 in Paris and on 17 October 2016 in Geneva. She also recalled the statement made at the meeting on 17 October by the representative of the European Commission affirming the continuation of funding for the period 2016-2020 in the six countries of the European Union Eastern Neighbourhood region.

78. The Working Group discussed the progress and lessons learned from the dialogues, and their continuation. The representative of Finland encouraged countries from Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia participating in National Policy Dialogues to gradually take more ownership and responsibility for the activities. The representative of the Global Water Partnership informed participants about their input and encouraged the continuation of the National Policy Dialogues.

79. The Working Group:

- (a) Welcomed the progress achieved in the framework of the National Policy Dialogues;
- (b) Welcomed the information on the continuation of funding for National Policy Dialogues in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus from the European Commission;
- (c) Appreciated the exchange between National Policy Dialogues in different countries.

## **X. International Water Assessment Centre**

80. A representative of Kazakhstan confirmed that the country would host the International Water Assessment Centre (IWAC) as of 2017 and that a certain financial support would be dedicated annually by the Kazakh Government for the operation of the Centre. The representative of Kazakhstan also presented the draft terms of reference of the Centre. The delegate of the Russian Federation expressed gratitude to Kazakhstan for taking over the hosting of the Centre.

81. The Working Group:

- (a) Expressed its appreciation to Kazakhstan for its efforts towards hosting the International Water Assessment Centre and for all the arrangements made;
- (b) Entrusted Kazakhstan and the Bureau, in consultation with the secretariat, to finalize the terms of reference, further develop the work programme of the International Water Assessment Centre and to inform the Working Group on developments and the progress achieved at its next meeting.

## **XI. Water and industrial accidents**

82. The Chair of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention presented the draft workplan for 2017–2018 of the Joint Ad Hoc Expert Group on Water and Industrial Accidents contained in informal document WG.1/2016/INF.4, which foresaw the



preparation of a guidance on firewater retention, the carrying out of transboundary response exercises and the promotion of guidance documents already developed by the group. He also encouraged nomination of experts for developing the guidance on firewater retention. The German delegate recalled that industrial accidents still happened, such as lately in Germany on a tributary of the river Neckar.

83. The Working Group:

(a) Approved the workplan of the Joint Ad Hoc Expert Group on Water and Industrial Accidents for 2017-2018;

(b) Encouraged countries to nominate appropriate technical experts for developing the guidance on firewater retention.

## **XII. Ongoing programme of work for 2016–2018**

84. The secretariat presented overall progress made in the implementation of the Convention's programme of work for 2016–2018 and the financial situation of the trust fund. Countries and partners were invited to make direct financial and in-kind contributions.

85. The Working Group decided to include in the ongoing programme of work for 2016-2018 the preparation of the "words into action" guide on river basin management and transboundary cooperation. Also as part of the ongoing programme of work for the Convention, the Working Group entrusted the secretariat with the preparation of a short publication on frequently asked questions about the Convention and a revised brochure on the Convention to be made available in English, French, Russian, Spanish and Arabic.

## **XIII. Date and venue of the next meeting of the Working Group**

86. The Working Group decided to hold its twelfth meeting on 5 and 6 July 2017 in Geneva.

87. The Co-Chairs closed the meeting at 5 p.m. on Wednesday, 19 October 2016.

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