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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**

#### **Twelfth meeting**

Geneva, 5 and 6 July 2017

## **Report of the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management on its twelfth meeting**

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## I. Introduction

1. The twelfth 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 5 and 6 July 2017, back to back with the “Workshop on recent progress on transboundary water cooperation: from getting cooperation started to its long-term sustainability” (4 July 2017). 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 twelfth meeting was attended by delegations from the following countries: Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Benin, Botswana, Brazil, Burundi, Chad, Colombia, Costa Rica, Côte d’Ivoire, Ecuador, El Salvador, Estonia, Finland, France, Gambia, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Guinea, Hungary, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Pakistan, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Senegal, Slovakia, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Togo, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Republic of Tanzania, 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 Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention) secretariat; the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS); the Global Environment Facility (GEF); the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD); the International Sava River Basin Commission; the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN); the Mekong River Commission; the Organization of American States; the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development; the Sahara and Sahel Observatory; the Union for the Mediterranean; and UN-Water.

5. Representatives of the following non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and academic institutions were present: the Geneva Water Hub; Green Cross International; the International Network of Basin Organizations; the Scientific Information Centre of the Interstate Coordination Water Commission of Central Asia; the University of Geneva; the University of Lausanne; the World Wide Fund for Nature; and Zoï Environment Network.

### B. Organizational matters

6. Ms. Heide Jekel (Germany) and Ms. Lea Kauppi (Finland), Co-Chairs of the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management, opened the meeting. The Working Group adopted the agenda for its twelfth meeting as set out in document ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2017/1. Members then adopted the report of the eleventh meeting (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2016/2).

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<sup>1</sup> See [www.unece.org/index.php?id=43613](http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=43613).

## **II. Progress in the ratification process**

7. The secretariat informed participants that there had not been any new ratifications of the Water Convention, its Protocol on Water and Health, or the amendment to the Convention since the eleventh meeting of the Working Group (Geneva, 18–19 October 2016).

## **III. Support for implementation and application of the Convention**

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

8. The discussion on support for implementation and application of the Convention started with a celebration for the bilateral treaty on cooperation in the field of protection and sustainable development of the Dniester River basin, which had entered into force in June 2017. The Working Group congratulated the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine for the progress achieved. It was recalled that transboundary cooperation in the basin including the treaty itself had been supported by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and ECE, and that the treaty had been signed during the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention (Rome, 28–30 November 2012).

9. The Working Group was then informed of the progress achieved in different projects supporting implementation of the Convention in countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia carried out with the support of the ECE Regional Adviser on the Environment. In that regard, many participants expressed appreciation for the work of the Regional Adviser, Mr. Bo Libert.

10. The representative of Georgia reported that the country was in the process of preparing for accession to the Water Convention by preparing an agreement on cooperation with Azerbaijan for the protection and sustainable use of the water resources of the Kura River basin. A representative of Azerbaijan referred to some difficulties in the negotiation process but expressed hope that the negotiations would be finalized soon. He also thanked ECE for the support provided to the development of the river basin management plan and requested similar support for developing such a plan for the Alazani River.

11. The representative of Tajikistan reported on cooperation with Afghanistan, noting that a memorandum of understanding between the two countries had been signed in 2011 regarding cooperation on hydrology and floods.

12. The Working Group:

(a) Congratulated countries for their efforts and for the progress achieved under the different projects;

(b) Encouraged Afghanistan and Tajikistan to sign as soon as possible the memorandum of understanding on the exchange of information and cooperation in the field of environmental protection in the Panj/Amu Darya River basin;

(c) Encouraged Azerbaijan and Georgia to sign as soon as possible the agreement on cooperation for the protection and sustainable use of the water resources of the Kura River basin;

(d) Thanked donors who had provided resources for the different projects;

(e) Thanked the outgoing Regional Adviser for his engagement and support to the Water Convention over the past 15 years;

(f) Welcomed the new Regional Adviser on Environment and emphasized the important role that the Regional Adviser played to promote implementation of the Convention in the ECE region.

## **B. Implementation Committee**

13. A representative of the Implementation Committee reported on the outcomes of the Committee's seventh and eighth meetings (Budapest, 1–2 December 2016, and Haparanda, Sweden, 23–24 May 2017, respectively), and on the future plans of the Committee. At both meetings, the Committee had discussed the reporting exercise and how to better promote the implementation mechanism. Back to back with both meetings, a seminar had been organized in order to inform local stakeholders about the Committee and the Convention. The first seminar, held on 1 December 2016, had focused on tools and mechanisms for transboundary water dispute prevention and settlement in Europe; the second, held on 23 May 2017, had focused on the Water Convention and its Implementation Committee, with a view to promoting their work.

14. The Working Group:

(a) Took note of the report on the work of the Implementation Committee;

(b) Encouraged Parties to make use of the mechanism to support implementation of the Convention.

## **C. Reporting under the Convention and on Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2**

15. The Co-Chairs opened the discussion on reporting, recalling that, at its seventh session (Budapest, 17–19 November 2015), the Meeting of the Parties had adopted decision VII/2 (see ECE/MP.WAT/49/Add.2) introducing a reporting mechanism under the Convention. Reporting had started with a pilot exercise in 2017 to test the reporting template. Decision VII/2 encouraged all Parties and non-Parties, especially those sharing basins with Parties and those considering accession to the Convention, to participate in the pilot reporting exercise by submitting to the secretariat their filled-out reporting forms and their comments on the reporting template. The decision tasked the secretariat with preparing a synthesis report, providing an overview of the Convention's implementation and the advancement of transboundary water cooperation, on the basis of the reports received.

16. The Co-Chairs noted that the introduction of the reporting under the Convention had coincided with the adoption of target 6.5 of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015. Target 6.5 called for countries to implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate. 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 "proportion of transboundary basin area with an operational arrangement for transboundary cooperation". ECE and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) had led the development of the step-by-step methodology to calculate indicator 6.5.2 and had been proposed as "custodian agencies" for the indicator.

17. A representative of the ECE Statistical Division gave a presentation on measuring progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, confirming that the custodian agencies were in charge of submitting the country indicator data to the United Nations Statistics Division for all Sustainable Development Goal indicators, upon validation by the countries, if needed.

18. The secretariat presented current progress in the monitoring of the global water goal (Sustainable Development Goal 6), including the initial results of the reporting on indicator 6.5.2. It was recalled that at the Working Group's eleventh meeting it had been decided to combine the reporting under the Convention and the reporting on indicator 6.5.2, and to send only one template to all Parties to gather that information. The questionnaire had been sent to Parties in early January 2017. Similarly, all other countries in the world sharing transboundary waters had been invited to report on indicator 6.5.2 through a questionnaire which, in addition to a section on the calculation of 6.5.2, included three other sections based on the Convention's reporting template. All Parties had been invited to report by 15 May 2017 and all other countries by 15 June 2017, as the sending out of the questionnaires had been staggered. Countries had been requested to send their reports to both ECE and UNESCO.

19. The secretariat then presented the status of replies received, initial results and initial lessons learned.<sup>2</sup> Overall, the reporting template had been well understood by respondents, but some terms required clarification. Those comments could be addressed in the revision of the reporting template which was planned in advance of the next Meeting of the Parties. The envisaged process for revising the template and preparing the reporting decision was also presented, including the organization of a technical meeting for that purpose.

20. Many Working Group participants appreciated the high response rate in the pilot reporting exercise but noted with concern the data gaps, especially regarding transboundary groundwaters. Many delegations described the first reporting exercise as positive and useful, since it had supported national coordination, cooperation and data-sharing between different agencies, and had helped to identify strong and weak points and remaining gaps to be addressed regarding transboundary cooperation. It had also helped draw political attention to transboundary water cooperation, for example in ministries of foreign affairs. Some countries had consulted relevant sections of the template with other riparians before submitting their reports, such as Luxembourg or some Danube countries, or had set up a national committee to fill out the template, such as Chad. Others underlined the importance of working with the national statistical office.

21. Participants, including delegates from non-Parties, also appreciated having filled out the longer version of the questionnaire based on the Convention reporting template, since it had helped to substantiate the information provided.

22. A representative of Turkey criticized the indicator calculation methodology as restrictive and suggested simplifying it. A few delegations described difficulties they had faced in filling in the indicator section of the template and suggested calculating a separate value for surface and groundwaters as well as clarifying certain terms by adding a glossary.

23. The representative of the Netherlands expressed the country's intention to organize a global workshop on Sustainable Development Goal 6 indicators in November 2017 in order to review and discuss the monitoring framework for that Goal.

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<sup>2</sup> By 2018, 107 responses were received, i.e., reports had been submitted by 70 per cent of all countries sharing transboundary waters.

24. Several delegations, such as Austria, argued that an online reporting system would be useful in the future, and should be interlinked and compatible with the UN-Water data portal that was to be set up.

25. Several participants argued that more attention should be given to regional organizations in the reporting exercise, since they could play a crucial role in mobilizing countries, data collection and validation, etc. The representative of the African Ministers' Council on Water considered it a challenge that many actors and organizations were involved in the reporting process. He suggested harmonizing the different systems and also data from different sources.

26. The Working Group:

(a) Welcomed the submission of national reports under the Convention and on Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2 by many countries;

(b) Encouraged all other countries sharing transboundary waters that had not yet submitted their national reports to do so as soon as possible, but by not later than 31 July 2017;

(c) Agreed to revise the template for reporting under the Convention to improve its clarity and coherence, addressing the comments received and the lessons learned;

(d) Stressed the importance of maintaining the coherence of reporting under the Convention and on indicator 6.5.2 to avoid duplication of efforts for Parties and to offer to non-Parties the possibility to go beyond reporting on the indicator value and depict a more accurate picture of the advancement of transboundary cooperation;

(e) Supported the organization of a technical meeting for the revision of the reporting template to be organized by ECE and UNESCO (with regard to indicator 6.5.2 reporting);

(f) Invited countries that had reported to send their comments on the reporting template by 30 September 2017 and, by the same date, to express their interest in participating in the expert meeting;

(g) On the basis of the work of the technical meeting, entrusted the Bureau to prepare a decision on reporting under the Convention including the revised template, for consideration at the next meeting of the Working Group with a view to submitting a final draft to the Meeting of the Parties at its eighth session (Astana, 10–12 October 2018);

(h) Entrusted the Bureau with the support of the secretariat, and in consultation with UNESCO for indicator 6.5.2, to prepare a first concept of a possible future online reporting and analysis platform, including a cost estimate for consideration at its next meeting;

(i) Called upon donors to provide resources for the work on reporting under the Convention and on indicator 6.5.2;

(j) Requested the secretariat to prepare, translate into French, Russian and Spanish publish and print the first report on implementation of the Convention, "Progress on transboundary water cooperation worldwide under the Water Convention", in advance of the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties.

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

27. The Co-Chairs recalled that, 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 had been prepared, in 2007 and 2011.<sup>3</sup> At its seventh session, the Meeting of the Parties had entrusted the Working Group on Integrated Resources Management and the 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. At its eleventh meeting, the Working Group had decided to establish an expert group to develop the concept for the third assessment.

28. The secretariat informed the Working Group about the preliminary proposal on the scope, content and assessment production process prepared by a group of experts from national authorities, basin commissions and international organizations at its first meeting (Geneva, 9–10 May 2017).

29. Several delegates questioned the added value of the proposed third assessment if only some basins were to be assessed in more detail, as proposed by the expert group, which would affect the completeness and comparability of the assessment.

30. The Co-Chairs concluded that the item required further discussion and consideration, and referred it to the Bureau for that purpose.<sup>4</sup>

## **IV. The global Convention — promotion and partnerships**

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

31. The secretariat, Parties and partners informed the Working Group about activities to build capacity and raise awareness of the Convention, such as the national workshop “The Water Convention: Opportunities and Perspectives for Sustainable Management of Transboundary Waters in Chad” organized at the request of the Government of Chad (N'Djamena, 29–30 March 2017), the training session “From Practitioner to practitioner: training on how to use the two global Water Conventions” (Geneva, 20–21 October 2016), and other initiatives at the regional and global levels to build capacity on and awareness of the Convention. Subsequently, countries from outside the ECE region presented their efforts towards acceding to the Water Convention.

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<sup>3</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).

<sup>4</sup> The Bureau at its twenty-fifth meeting discussed the matter and decided to replace the planned third assessment with other activities on monitoring and assessment, to be determined in the consultative process on the future programme of work for 2019–2021 of the Convention.

32. The representative of Colombia said that the country was currently studying the possibility of accession to the Convention and had also requested support from ECE for a bilateral cooperation project on river basin planning with Peru.
33. The Secretary-General of the Ministry of Water and Sanitation of Chad said that the law regarding the accession of Chad to the Water Convention would soon be submitted to parliament. Among lessons learned regarding the accession process was the need for the interested country to thoroughly understand the Convention; the importance of involving high-level policymakers, such as through ministerial meetings; the importance of involving the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and the important role of focal points in informing about the Convention at the national level. Accession to the Convention could also support implementation of existing basin agreements.
34. The representative of Pakistan underlined the usefulness of the information provided by Chad and suggested publishing good practices for the accession process on the website.
35. The representative of Peru reported that he had organized meetings with relevant actors at the national level and that a decision on whether to start the accession process would soon be taken and communicated.
36. The representative of Benin stated that the country was considering starting the accession process, following the recently completed accession process for the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Non-navigational Uses of International Watercourses (United Nations Watercourses Convention).
37. The representative of Côte d'Ivoire said that he was working with both the Ministry of Water and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to try and relaunch the process of accession in his country, while stressing the importance of ratification by the other riparian countries. Recently, cooperation with Ghana had been strengthened. Similarly, the delegate from Burundi expressed interest in the Convention.
38. The representative of Togo informed the Working Group that the Ministry of Water had started the process of considering accession, but certain clarifications were needed and therefore a request for support would soon be sent to the secretariat.
39. The delegate of Senegal informed the Working Group that his country had started the process of accession following a meeting between the secretariat and the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Water in June. He recommended promoting the Convention through regional organizations, such as the African Ministers' Council on Water and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).
40. Other countries represented at the meeting, such as Botswana, Costa Rica, Gambia, Guinea and Pakistan, also showed preliminary interest in the Convention. The delegate of Botswana stressed the need to demonstrate the usefulness of the Convention compared with existing regional frameworks, such as the regional Protocol on Shared Watercourses of the Southern African Development Community. The representative of Guinea expressed appreciation for the secretariat's support to the negotiation of the ECOWAS regional directive on shared water resources and for the Convention's presentation at the ECOWAS meeting in May.
41. The delegate of Viet Nam announced that a study comparing the Convention with national legislation had already started. He requested technical assistance from the secretariat and donors to help complete that assessment, for capacity-building on the Convention and for future participation in Convention events.

42. Representatives of regional organizations such as ECCAS and the Union for the Mediterranean also expressed their support for the Convention and their willingness to cooperate in its global opening.

43. Delegations from Parties such as France and Finland, as well as partners such as the Union for the Mediterranean and the World Wide Fund for Nature, also expressed their support for the Convention's globalization process. Other delegates stressed the importance of having a focal point in all new countries interested in accession and the need to increase their capacity and knowledge about the Convention. It was also suggested to organize additional awareness-raising missions on the Convention, for example by the Chair of the Meeting of the Parties.

## **B. Cooperation with partners**

44. The Working Group Co-Chairs recalled that, through its decision VII/4, at its seventh session the Meeting of the Parties had emphasized the importance of partnerships with international organizations, particularly with 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. Parties had decided to continue and further enhance cooperation with existing partners and to seek new partnerships, especially in the light of the global opening of the Convention, and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other global commitments. They had also decided to regularly review progress and gaps in the development of partnerships — also in connection with the development of the strategy for implementation of the Convention at the global level and its contribution to the achievement of the water-related Sustainable Development Goals — at the meetings of the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management. Partners were therefore invited to present their activities to strengthen transboundary cooperation, accession and implementation of the Convention and their future plans in that respect, including possible synergies.

45. The representative of the Global Environment Facility recalled that GEF was the largest donor for transboundary water cooperation, and encouraged participants to continue applying for funds for transboundary water cooperation from GEF and to make use of the outcomes of the GEF International Waters Learning Exchange and Resources Network (IW:LEARN) as well as the results of the Transboundary Waters Assessment Programme. He also noted that the GEF was currently in its replenishment phase and was elaborating a new strategy, and encouraged donors to provide support in that regard.

46. Regional partners such as the African Ministers' Council on Water, ECCAS and the Organization of American States also offered support in promoting the Convention through their channels. In particular, the representative of ECCAS noted that a regional convention for the prevention of conflicts related to transboundary waters was under development and requested ECE support for that initiative.

47. The representative of the African Ministers' Council on Water underlined the importance of transboundary water cooperation for the African continent and the usefulness of the Convention in that regard. Specific cooperation on thematic areas could be developed, such as on the benefits of cooperation. The conventions and international water law more broadly could be presented at the African Ministers' Council on Water technical advisory committee meeting as well as the experience of Chad in acceding to the Convention.

48. A representative of Brazil outlined the preparations for the Eighth World Water Forum, which would be held in that country (Brasilia, 18–23 March 2018).

49. Finally, a member of the secretariat briefed participants on the latest developments under the Protocol on Water and Health, such as the outcomes of the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol (Geneva, 14–16 November 2016), the current programme of work and areas for cooperation between the Convention and the Protocol, such as on water scarcity.

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

50. The Co-Chairs 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, in cooperation with non-Parties, key partners and the secretariat, to develop a strategy for the implementation of the Convention at the global level, including the relationship to the United Nations Watercourses Convention and the role of key partners, for adoption at the next session of the Meeting of the Parties.

51. The Chair of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention presented the draft revised strategy, which had been prepared by the Bureau with the support of the secretariat (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2017/5). Overall, meeting participants appreciated and welcomed the new strategy. It was suggested, among others, to highlight the Convention's role in water diplomacy, to further explain the relationship of the Water Convention to the United Nations Watercourses Convention and to make more frequent mention of groundwater and the Protocol on Water and Health.

52. The Working Group:

(a) Welcomed the progress towards accession made by several countries from outside the ECE region and encouraged others to start national dialogues on the benefits of accession;

(b) Reaffirmed its commitment to support efforts to accede to the Convention through the provision of technical and legal assistance, including by sharing Parties' expertise in implementation;

(c) Thanked donors that had provided resources to support activities promoting the Convention outside the ECE region and lead Parties and the Bureau for providing political leadership;

(d) Thanked partners and encouraged them to further strengthen cooperation with the Convention and support its implementation at the global level;

(e) Called on countries and partners to continue to actively contribute to the development of the strategy for implementation of the Convention at the global level and send their written comments on the draft strategy by 15 September 2017;

(f) Entrusted the Bureau, in consultation with relevant concerned countries and partners, and with the support of the secretariat, to further revise the draft global strategy for the Convention based on the comments received, for the Working Group's consideration at its next meeting;

(g) Also entrusted the Bureau, partners and the secretariat to lay the basis for the implementation of certain actions that would require the close involvement of partners (e.g., the preparation of memoranda of understanding, etc.);

(h) Entrusted the Bureau, with the assistance of the secretariat, to review past decisions under the Convention that might require revision owing to the Convention's opening for accession to countries outside the ECE region, and to present a proposal for any such revisions at its next meeting, with a view to thereafter submitting draft decisions to the Meeting of the Parties for adoption at its next session.

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

53. The representative of Estonia, co-lead Party for the work area, highlighted that 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) provided a conceptual framework — to be tailored to specific basin needs — to support countries' dialogues on the benefits of transboundary water cooperation. The secretariat reported that the Policy Guidance Note had been applied in several basins — specifically in the Drina, Okavango-Cubango and Sio-Malaba-Malakisi (SMM) river basins — with the aim of exploring the possible additional benefits that could be reached through the strengthening and broadening of cooperation.

54. The representative of Botswana shared conclusions from the benefit assessment exercise carried out in the Okavango-Cubango basin with the Permanent Okavango River Basin Commission, which had aimed at informing the implementation of the strategic action programme for the basin and identifying potential benefits not yet attained. The assessment had proven useful in collecting countries' perceptions of the current and potential benefits and beneficiaries of cooperation in the basin, both at the national and basin levels.

55. The representative of IGAD presented the benefit opportunities assessment dialogue that had started in the Sio-Malaba-Malakisi basin in the framework of the project "Strengthening transboundary water governance and cooperation in the IGAD region" funded by the United States of America and jointly implemented by ECE, IGAD and the International Union for Conservation of Nature. Such work at the basin level complemented work at the IGAD regional level.

56. The representative of Tanzania underlined the importance of understanding and communicating the benefits of cooperation. A paper on the benefits of transboundary water cooperation for Tanzania, aimed at increasing political attention to the topic, was currently under preparation in the Ministry of Water and Irrigation.

57. Participants were invited to express interest in applying the Policy Guidance Note. The representative from Estonia introduced possible future activities in that area of work, including the organization of a global workshop on the topic in February 2018.

58. 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 guidance note;
- (c) Thanked donors and lead Parties for their support to the work on identifying, assessing and communicating the benefits of transboundary water cooperation;

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

(d) Requested the secretariat and lead Parties to develop a brochure on experiences in identifying, assessing and communicating the benefits of transboundary cooperation in the pilot basins for consideration at its next meeting and to subsequently translate, publish and print the brochure in Arabic, English, French, Spanish and Russian for submission to the Meeting of the Parties at its eighth session;

(e) Invited countries, joint bodies, international organizations and NGOs to share their experience on the topic during the relevant global workshop planned for February 2018.

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

59. The secretariat introduced the overall progress with regard to work on the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus in transboundary basins, including the outcomes of the Global Workshop on the Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystems Nexus (Geneva, 6–7 December 2016) and the various publications and policy briefs published.

60. A representative of the International Sava River Basin Commission presented the assessment of the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus in the Drina River basin, as the key partner in that project, underlining the value of the nexus assessment approach in bringing together the different sectors and the riparian countries. The assessment in the Drina should be continued, in particular further analytical work, awareness-raising and capacity building should be carried out.

61. The Coordinator of the Intergovernmental Coordination Mechanism of Algeria, Libya and Tunisia on the North-Western Sahara Aquifer System presented the nexus assessment of that system, which was being carried out as a joint effort of ECE, the Global Water Partnership Mediterranean (GWP-Med) and the Sahara and Sahel Observatory (OSS). The challenge which the assessment should address, was to ensure the best use of that groundwater source for development of the region without degrading the status of the resource. The nexus assessment also presented an opportunity to inform a revision of the aquifer system's coordination mechanism and develop an overall vision for the system.

62. The secretary of the ECE Group of Experts on Renewable Energy pointed out that renewable energy sources could make various contributions to addressing nexus issues in a transboundary context. Drawing upon the Group of Expert's involvement in the nexus work under the Water Convention, he concluded that taking intersectoral links into account in energy planning could bring about a wider application and acceptance of renewable energy sources. He also mentioned some examples of future activities of the Group of Experts, notably linked to renewable energy source investments, where such an integrated approach would be taken into account.

63. With regard to future work, the secretariat informed the Working Group that ECE had been requested to provide support in the application of the methodology for the nexus dialogues in the Niger River Basin, in cooperation with the German Agency for International Cooperation, and in the Western Balkans, in cooperation with Global Water Partnership Mediterranean. Furthermore, the nexus assessment experiences would be summarized in a synthesis document for the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties.

64. The Chair of the Task Force on the Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystems Nexus (Finland) recalled the decision of the Meeting of the Parties to collect good practices and examples of water allocation, water sharing and benefits sharing. He presented some initial ideas for themes of the planned global workshop on water allocation in transboundary basins (Geneva,

16–17 October 2017). The Working Group then discussed the preparations for the workshop in small groups to gather views about the challenges in water allocation and success factors, as well as specific topics of interest for the workshop.

65. The Working Group:

(a) Welcomed progress in applying the nexus assessment methodology and invited representatives of the basins concerned to make use of the nexus assessment results in developing policies and interventions;

(b) Encouraged other basins to consider using the methodology;

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

(d) Thanked donors and the lead Party for supporting the nexus work;

(e) Requested the secretariat to prepare a synthesis publication on assessing the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus in transboundary basins since 2013 for consideration at its next meeting and subsequently to translate, publish and print it in Arabic, English, French, Russian and Spanish;

(f) Invited the lead Party for the work area, with the support of the secretariat, to further define the objectives, scope and programme of the global workshop on water allocation in transboundary basins to be held in October 2017, taking into account the comments received during the meeting;

(g) Invited interested countries, joint bodies and organizations to send suggestions by 31 August 2017 for good practices in water allocation that could be showcased at the workshop;

(h) Decided not to prepare the “Collection of good practices on water allocation and benefit-sharing” in the current biennium.

## **VII. Adapting to climate change in transboundary basins**

66. Representatives of the lead Parties for the work on adapting to climate change in transboundary basins, the Netherlands and Switzerland, presented the recent progress in that area, such as the pilot projects, including those within the framework of the global network of basins working on climate change adaptation, and the preparations for the “International Workshop on Water Scarcity: Taking Action in Transboundary Basins and Reducing Health Impacts” (Geneva, 11–12 December 2017), a joint activity under the Water Convention and the Protocol on Water and Health. The Co-Chairs of the Task Force on Water and Climate also presented the outcomes of the training on how to prepare bankable projects for financing climate change adaptation in transboundary basins (Dakar, 21–23 June 2017), an innovative new activity implemented in cooperation with financial partners and multilateral development banks such as the African Development Bank, the European Investment Bank and the World Bank. That training had for the first time enabled representatives of transboundary basins and river basin organizations in Europe and Africa to learn about climate funding, criteria for bankability and available funding sources for adaptation projects in transboundary basins.

67. A representative of Kyrgyzstan reported that, thanks to the project on climate change adaptation in the Chu-Talas basin implemented by ECE, a specific working group on long-term strategic planning and climate change adaptation had been created under the Chu-Talas Commission. The representative of Kazakhstan also expressed appreciation for the project.

The delegate of Lithuania provided information on the proposal for a project on the Neman and Bug basins submitted to GEF, which included conjunctive management. She expressed hope that the proposed project would soon be approved by the GEF Council.

68. Subsequently, the Working Group discussed input to global processes on climate change and disaster risk reduction. A representative of the Netherlands as the lead Party for the activity updated participants on the status of preparation of a “Words into Action” implementation guide on addressing water-related disasters and transboundary cooperation by the Task Force on Water and Climate, aimed at providing direction for implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 with regard to transboundary cooperation and water-related disasters. The guide was being prepared in cooperation with the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction.

69. The representative of Italy invited ECE and the Convention to contribute as a partner to the International Summit “Water and Climate: Meeting of the Great Rivers of the World” (Rome, 23–25 October 2017).

70. The Working Group:

(a) Welcomed the outcomes of the training on how to prepare bankable projects for climate change adaptation in transboundary basins and expressed appreciation for the fruitful cooperation with the financial institutions involved in the organization of that training as well as the Senegal River Basin Development Organization for hosting the event;

(b) Recognized that financing adaptation to climate change in transboundary basis was a priority topic for future work under the Task Force on Water and Climate and encouraged the organization of similar events, contingent on the availability of resources;

(c) Welcomed the progress in the preparation of a “Words into Action” implementation guide addressing water-related disasters and transboundary cooperation, and requested the Task Force on Water and Climate, led by the Netherlands, in cooperation with the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, to finalize the draft and present it at the next meeting of the Working Group;

(d) Also requested the secretariat to translate, publish and print the “Words into Action” guide in English, French, Russian and Spanish before the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties;

(e) Expressed appreciation for the progress achieved in the pilot projects on climate change adaptation in transboundary basins, in particular the completion of the Dniester climate change adaptation strategy and its implementation plan;

(f) Invited countries, joint bodies, international organizations and NGOs to share their experience on water scarcity management, both in transboundary basins and from the health perspective, at the International Workshop on Water Scarcity in December 2017, under the leadership of the Netherlands and Switzerland as Co-Chairs of the Task Force on Water and Climate, and in cooperation with Italy and Spain as lead countries under the Protocol on Water and Health;

(g) Welcomed the initiative of Italy to organize the International Summit “Water and Climate: Meeting of the Great Rivers of the World” and encouraged interested countries and basins to participate in the event.

## VIII. Water and industrial accidents

71. The Hungarian Co-Chair of the Joint Ad Hoc Expert Group on Water and Industrial Accidents presented progress in the implementation of the workplan for 2017–2018, especially the draft annotated outline of the guidance on firewater retention (WG.1/2017/INF.6).

72. The Working Group:

(a) Welcomed the progress made in the development of the guidance on firewater retention;

(b) Encouraged countries to send comments to the outline and the draft guidance, once developed, by the end of 2017;

(c) Requested the Joint Expert Group to present the revised draft of the guidance at the Working Group's next meeting.

## IX. European Union Water Initiative and national policy dialogues

73. The secretariat and a representative of Romania briefed the Working Group about recent developments under the European Union Water Initiative national policy dialogues (NPDs) on integrated water resources management (facilitated by ECE) and on water supply and sanitation (facilitated by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development). Participants were also informed about the inception phase of the 2016–2020 European Union Water Initiative Plus (EUWI+) project for six Eastern Partnership countries. At the first regional Steering Committee meeting of the EUWI+ project (Brussels, 15–16 May 2017), a draft inception report with six national workplans had been broadly accepted.

74. The Working Group discussed the progress and lessons learned from the national policy dialogues. The representative from Armenia observed that, even though EUWI+ was still in its preparatory inception phase, ECE had been able to meet the urgent request of the Ministry of Nature Protection and had helped to develop legislation regulating the provision of sanitation services. The representative of Belarus reiterated the importance of planned support for the EUWI+ project for the development of transboundary cooperation with Lithuania on the Neman River and with Latvia on the Western Dvina/Daugava River. The representative of Kazakhstan announced that, on 30 May 2017, a memorandum of understanding had been signed with ECE with regard to the National Policy Dialogue of Kazakhstan. The representative of Kazakhstan also expressed gratitude to ECE for its support over the years to the process of preparing new agreements with the Russian Federation on the transboundary Kigac Channel and Ural River.

75. The Working Group:

(a) Welcomed the successful conclusion of the inception phase of the EUWI+ project and expressed confidence that the project would contribute to strengthened water governance and enhanced cooperation on transboundary waters in the Eastern Partnership countries;

(b) Expressed concerns that the national policy dialogue process in Central Asian countries would run out of funding soon and encouraged the European Commission and other donors to continue to support financially the work of the national policy dialogues in the countries of Central Asia.

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

76. At the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties, Kazakhstan had offered to host the International Water Assessment Centre, the Convention's collaborative centre, as of 2017. A representative of Kazakhstan informed the Working Group that the memorandum of understanding between Kazakhstan and ECE was about to be signed, and that the opening of the Centre was foreseen for the end of 2017. He also presented the Centre's terms of reference (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2017/4) and planned activities.

77. The Working Group:

(a) Congratulated Kazakhstan on the signature of the memorandum of understanding with ECE on the International Water Assessment Centre and for all the arrangements made;

(b) Entrusted Kazakhstan and the Bureau, in consultation with the secretariat, with developing a concrete work programme for the International Water Assessment Centre, and to report back to the Working Group at the next meeting in that regard.

## **XI. Ongoing programme of work for 2016–2018 and initial discussion on the programme of work for 2019–2021**

78. The Working Group reviewed the overall progress made in the implementation of the Convention's programme of work for 2016–2018. All activities were well on track and no major amendments were necessary, except some changes to the publication programme.

79. The secretariat provided a report on the financial situation of the Convention's trust fund, which had evolved positively. However, some problems still existed such as that certain programme areas were underfunded and that the Convention relied heavily on a few major donors, whereas many other Parties did not contribute at all. In that regard, the representative of Luxembourg announced that the country would make a financial contribution to the trust fund of the Convention and encouraged other countries to follow its example.

80. The Working Group began discussions on the preparations for the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties to be held in October 2018 in Astana, and the development of the future programme of work for 2019–2021. A few comments were made with regard to the future programme of work, namely that more efforts were needed to involve "unwilling countries" in the Convention and that the Convention should also focus on difficult basins with conflict potential. The representatives of Peru and Senegal reiterated their support for the development of a third comprehensive assessment of transboundary waters. The Working Group then decided to develop the future programme of work for 2019–2021 in a broad consultative process, including a survey among Parties, non-Parties and partners, and interviews and discussions in the Convention's subsidiary bodies. The Working Group entrusted the Bureau with preparing a proposal for the future programme of work based on the outcomes of those processes to be submitted for consideration at the Working Group's next meeting.

81. Finally, a representative of Kazakhstan presented the preparations for the eighth Meeting of the Parties, to be held in Astana, indicating that the host-country agreement would soon be signed. He invited all countries sharing transboundary waters to attend the meeting at a high level.

82. The Working Group:

(a) Welcomed progress under the different areas of work and thanked the countries involved, lead Parties, donors and the secretariat for the positive results;

(b) Noted with concern the gaps in funding to be able to carry out all planned activities and encouraged Parties to enhance their contributions to the Water Convention's trust fund;

(c) Decided not to develop and print the "Integrated Water Resources Management in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia: European Union Water Initiative National Policy Dialogues progress report";

(d) Requested the secretariat to prepare a new brochure on the Convention in all the official United Nations languages, to print in French the "Economic Commission for Europe Water Convention and the United Nations Watercourses Convention: An analysis of their harmonized contribution to international water law" (ECE/MP.WAT/42), and to reprint missing publications, such as the brochure on the Global Opening of the Water Convention (ECE/MP.WAT/43/Rev.1) and the Model Provisions on Transboundary Groundwaters (ECE/MP.WAT/40) in English and French, and the publication "Reconciling resource uses in transboundary basins: assessment of the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus" (ECE/MP.WAT/46) in English;

(e) Invited countries and partners to actively contribute to the development of the future programme of work for 2019–2021 by answering the upcoming online survey, after consultations in their countries or organizations;

(f) Entrusted the Bureau, on the basis of the inputs received and any other additional consultation, to prepare a draft of the programme of work for 2019–2021 for discussion at its next meeting, before submission for adoption by the Meeting of the Parties, as well as a short visual version of it.

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

83. The Working Group decided to hold its thirteenth meeting from 28 to 30 May 2018 in Geneva.

84. The Co-Chairs closed the meeting at 5.30 p.m. on Thursday, 6 July 2017.

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