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Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on
the Protection and Use of Transboundary
Watercourses and International Lakes

Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management

Fourteenth meeting
Geneva, 22–24 October 2019

Report of the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management on its fourteenth meeting

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I. Introduction

1. The fourteenth 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 in Geneva, from 22 to 24 October 2019, and was preceded, on 21 October, by: the first meeting of the Expert Group on the Transboundary Water Allocation Handbook; and the regional workshop on reporting on Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2 for the pan-European region. The Working Group meeting was followed, in the afternoon of 24 October, by the event “Promoting an integrated and intersectoral approach to water management in the Mediterranean region”. All relevant documentation for the meeting is available on a dedicated page of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Water Convention web site.¹

A. Attendance

2. The fourteenth meeting was attended by delegations from the following countries: Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Benin, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Costa Rica, Côte d’Ivoire, Czechia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Estonia, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Gambia, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Guatemala, Guinea, Hungary, Iraq, Italy, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Luxembourg, Mauritania, Montenegro, Myanmar, Netherlands, Niger, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Norway, Paraguay, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Senegal, Serbia, Sierra Leone, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Sudan, Sudan, Suriname, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Togo, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine, United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, Viet Nam and Zimbabwe.

3. The European Union was also represented.

4. Also attending the meeting were representatives of the following international organizations: the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD); the United Nations Development Programme; the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Centre for Water and Environment; and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme.

5. Representatives of the following intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private sector and academic institutions were present: Aleff Group; the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS); Ecopotamie (France); the European Environment Agency (EEA); the Geneva School of Diplomacy and International Relations; Geneva Water Hub; Global Water Partnership (GWP); the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB); the International Network of Basin Organizations; the International Social Environmental Union; the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN); the International Water Assessment Centre (IWAC); iuventum (Switzerland); the Permanent Okavango River Basin Water Commission; the Orange Senqu River Commission; the Organization for the Development of the Senegal River; Plate Company Golden Crown Group Canada Incorporated, United Nations Association of Germany; Royal Institute of Technology (KTH Sweden); the Palestinian Water Authority; the Scientific Information Centre of the Interstate Coordination Water Commission of Central Asia; the Swiss Institute for Water Law and Climate Change; the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM); University of Northumbria (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland); Urbaniste Sans Frontière (France); Water Partnership Kyrgyzstan; and the World Federation of Engineering Organizations.

¹ See www.unece.org/index.php?id=50208.

B. Organizational matters

6. The Working Group re-elected as its Co-Chairs for the intersessional period 2019–2021 – Ms. Heide Jekel (Germany) and Ms. Lea Kauppi (Finland) – and adopted the agenda (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2019/1).

7. The Working Group adopted the report of the second joint meeting of the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management and the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2018/2-ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2018/2).

II. Progress in the ratification process and recent accessions

8. The secretariat informed the participants that, as of October 2019, the Convention had 43 Parties, Senegal being the most recent Party following the deposit of its instrument of accession on 31 August 2018.

9. The representative of Senegal underscored the importance of joining the Convention to support the country's effort to strengthen transboundary cooperation, notably on aquifers. He encouraged other countries to accede to the Convention and expressed the willingness of Senegal to share its experience of accession processes.

10. The representatives of Togo, Ghana, Uganda and Iraq reported on their efforts towards accession. The representative of Togo reported that accession had been approved by the Council of Ministers in July 2019 and the draft law on accession had been submitted to parliament. The accession process was expected to be finalized in early 2020.

11. The representative of Ghana reported that accession to the two global water conventions – the Water Convention and the Convention on the Law of the Non-navigational Uses of International Watercourses – had been approved by the Cabinet in August 2019 and discussions on accession were ongoing in parliament. She encouraged the countries of the Volta Basin to accede to the Water Convention following the recommendation of the Council of Ministers of the Volta Basin Authority in May 2019.

12. The representative of Uganda reaffirmed the interest of Uganda in acceding to the Water Convention. He reported on plans to hold a national meeting to discuss the global conventions and requested support from the secretariat.

13. A representative of Iraq reported that the draft law on accession to the Water Convention had already passed the first reading in parliament. It was expected that the accession process would be finalized in the near future. He requested support from the secretariat to organize a national workshop to pave the way for implementation of the Convention.

14. Several other countries then presented their efforts towards acceding to the Water Convention. The representative of the Republic of the Congo reported that the draft accession document had been prepared jointly by the Ministry of Water Resources and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for submission to the Council of Ministers.

15. The representative of Paraguay expressed interest in learning more about the Water Convention, reported on ongoing consultations in that regard, and issued an invitation regarding the provision of more capacity-building activities in his country. The representative of Lebanon confirmed that the country was on its way to acceding to the Convention. The representative of Bangladesh expressed interest in studying the two global water conventions and asked for support in that regard.

16. The representative of Sudan reaffirmed the country's interest in acceding to the Water Convention. He informed the Working Group about a national workshop on international water law held within the Ministry of Irrigation and Water Resources in October 2019, which had, among other things, examined the benefits for Sudan of potential accession to the global water conventions. A key outcome of the workshop had been a plan to set up a working group to study the global water conventions in more detail.

17. The representative of Niger reported that an interministerial committee had been established in June 2019 to coordinate and monitor the accession process. The representative of Nigeria also reported the setting-up of an interministerial committee to discuss the accession process.

18. The representative of Switzerland congratulated countries for their progress towards accession. She invited the secretariat to develop an information kit on accession procedures and collect accession documents to support countries in their efforts towards accession. The representative of ECCAS highlighted the importance of regional economic commissions in supporting accession processes.

19. The representative of Ethiopia highlighted the Cooperative Framework Agreement for the Nile Basin and the role of the Nile Basin Initiative as a platform for exchanging information. He underscored that national dialogues on the potential benefits of accession to the Water Convention were needed.

20. The Working Group:

- (a) Congratulated countries on their efforts and progress towards accession to the Water Convention;
- (b) Encouraged other countries to start national dialogues on the benefits of accession.

III. Increasing awareness of and accession to the Convention and application of its principles drawing on the benefits of cooperation

A. Increasing capacity for implementation of the Convention and supporting national processes towards accession

21. The secretariat reported on activities carried out together with Parties and partners to build capacity and raise awareness of the Convention, such as sessions organized at the seventh Africa Water Week (Libreville, 29 October–2 November 2018), presentations at the first International Symposium on Transboundary Waters in Latin America (Lima, 8 and 9 November 2018), the ceremony organized to celebrate the accession of Chad to the Water Convention and the regional workshop on the Water Convention and the role of international law in transboundary cooperation (N'Djamena, 21 November 2018), the regional workshop for member countries of the Niger Basin Authority (Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, 11 April 2019) and the regional training on how to use the two global water conventions to advance transboundary cooperation on the ground (Dakar, 18 and 19 June 2019).

22. The secretariat also informed the Working Group about the national workshops on the Convention organized at the request of countries, jointly with partners, to support national accession processes, namely: the high-level consultation held in Lebanon (Beirut, 11 April 2019); and the national workshop held in Côte d'Ivoire (Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, 15 April 2019).

23. The secretariat introduced the road map to facilitate accession processes to the Water Convention (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2019/INF.2), which had been developed to provide guidance and address common questions related to accession processes. The secretariat also presented planned activities to further promote and build capacities on the Convention beyond the ECE region.

24. The representative of Cameroon reported on progress regarding accession, namely the establishment of an interministerial committee, and the preparation of a national workshop (Yaoundé, 5 and 6 November 2019).

25. A representative of the European Union reaffirmed the intention of the European Union to further support the global opening of the Convention, including financially, and

recalled the Council of the European Union Conclusions on Water Diplomacy,² adopted on 19 November 2018.

26. Several other countries then presented their efforts towards acceding to the Water Convention and shared lessons learned regarding accession processes. The representative of the United Republic of Tanzania reaffirmed the country's interest in acceding to the two global conventions and reported that preliminary discussions had been initiated at the national level.

27. The representative of Gambia reported on a national briefing on the Water Convention held in May 2019 and the resulting establishment of a steering committee to coordinate the accession process. He announced the submission of the official letter of interest to the Water Convention secretariat.

28. The representative of Côte d'Ivoire reported on the outcomes of the national workshop on the Water Convention held in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, on 15 April 2019, subsequent to which a law on accession had been submitted to the Council of Ministers. The representative requested further support from the secretariat.

29. The representatives of Mauritania and of Benin reaffirmed their interest in acceding to the Water Convention and stressed the importance of collaboration with regional mechanisms, notably basin organizations and regional economic commissions.

30. The representative of Bangladesh called for the enhancement of promotion and capacity-building activities in Asia on the global water conventions. The representative of Global Water Partnership expressed a willingness to support discussion and accession processes in Africa and Asia. The representatives of the Permanent Okavango River Basin Water Commission secretariat and the Organization for the Development of the Senegal River offered to support their member countries in accession processes.

31. The Working Group:

(a) Reaffirmed its commitment to supporting accession processes through the provision of technical and legal assistance, including by sharing Parties' expertise in implementation;

(b) Expressed appreciation for the assistance provided by existing Parties to support accession;

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

(d) Thanked the secretariat for the support it had provided to non-Parties in their efforts towards accession;

(e) Entrusted the secretariat, in cooperation with the lead Parties and based on the comments received, to finalize, publish and print the "Road map to facilitate accession processes to the Water Convention" and the "Frequently asked questions on the Water Convention" in Arabic, English, French, Russian and Spanish.

B. Implementation of the Strategy for the implementation of the Convention at the global level

32. A representative of the Bureau presented the steps taken regarding the Strategy for the implementation of the Convention at the global level (ECE/MP.WAT/54/Add.2), adopted by the Meeting of the Parties at its eighth session (Nur-Sultan, 10–12 October 2018), through individual and collective actions.

33. The Working Group:

² Available at www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2018/11/19/water-diplomacy-council-adopts-conclusions.

(a) Welcomed the actions taken to date by the Bureau, Parties, partners and the secretariat to implement the Strategy for the implementation of the Convention at the global level;

(b) Encouraged the Bureau, Parties, partners and the secretariat to accelerate efforts to implement the Strategy for a better management of transboundary waters worldwide.

C. Promoting and communicating the benefits of transboundary cooperation

34. The representative of Estonia, lead Party for the work on promoting and communicating the benefits of transboundary water cooperation, and the secretariat jointly presented an update on activities implemented on the basis of the application of the *Policy Guidance Note on the Benefits of Transboundary Water Cooperation: Identification, Assessment and Communication*,³ in particular in the Cubango-Okavango River Basin, the Sio-Malaba-Malakisi River Basin and the North-Western Sahara Aquifer System Basin. They also shared information on planned activities until 2021.

35. The representative of the Permanent Okavango River Basin Water Commission secretariat presented the policy brief building on the outcomes of a benefits assessment and a multisector investment opportunity analysis prepared with support from the World Bank Group. The representative of the United Republic of Tanzania shared information about a national report on the benefits and challenges of transboundary water cooperation for the United Republic of Tanzania, concluding that the benefits realized through cooperation outnumbered the challenges.

36. Representatives of several delegations, including Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Montenegro, highlighted the importance of focusing on the benefits of cooperation, as a complementary approach to the work on climate change adaptation, negotiation of agreements and nexus assessment. The representative of the International Union for Conservation of Nature recalled the joint work with the Convention secretariat to identify the benefits of cooperation in the Sio-Malaba-Malakisi River Basin.

37. The Working Group:

(a) Welcomed progress made to date in applying the *Policy Guidance Note on the Benefits of Transboundary Cooperation* and the inspiring outcomes, namely that numerous benefits had been derived from strengthened transboundary water cooperation;

(b) Acknowledged the value added of cooperation with partners in supporting benefits dialogues in transboundary basins;

(c) Encouraged other interested basins and partners to consider using and applying the *Policy Guidance Note*.

D. Supporting the development of agreements and the establishment of joint bodies

38. A representative of the ECE secretariat reported on support provided to the Central Asian countries to strengthen their capacities in the management of hydrotechnical installations through the revision of national dam safety frameworks and the promotion of subregional cooperation. He stated that countries had agreed to negotiate a region-wide agreement on the safe management of dams. Bilateral cooperation on dams located on transboundary rivers was another priority area that had been identified. The project “Strengthening cooperation on water quality management in Central Asia” (funded by the Government of Finland) assisted the States in establishing a mechanism for better information-sharing on declining water quality in the subregion and improved cooperation

³ United Nations publication, ECE/MP.WAT/47.

on data management and monitoring. Finally, the Working Group was informed about ECE assistance to increase adaptive capacity in the Chu-Talas and Dniester Basins.

39. The secretariat reported on the Global workshop on the development of transboundary cooperation agreements or other arrangements, to be organized on 1 and 2 April 2020 in Geneva, including preliminary ideas for the scope, topics, partners and objectives of the workshop and plans for preparing a checklist for developing such agreements.

40. The Working Group:

(a) Welcomed progress achieved in different projects supporting the development of agreements and the establishment of joint bodies in countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia and Africa;

(b) Entrusted the secretariat, together with the lead Party, to organize the Global workshop on developing transboundary agreements or other arrangements, and invited partners to express interest in collaborating on its planning and organization;

(c) Entrusted the secretariat, in cooperation with the lead Party, to develop the draft publication “Developing agreements of transboundary basins: Checklist and good practices”, for submission to the Working Group at its fifteenth meeting and, subsequently, to finalize, print and translate the publication into Arabic, French, Russian and Spanish.

E. Implementation Committee

41. A representative of the Implementation Committee recalled the composition of the Committee following the elections held at the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties and reported on the Committee’s awareness-raising activities. The Working Group:

(a) Welcomed the efforts of the Committee in raising awareness, including through a side event during the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties (Nur-Sultan, 10–12 October 2018) and a Committee member’s participation in the Global Water Partnership Pan-Asia Capacity Development Training Workshop on Water Governance: International Water Law and Multi-stakeholder Processes (Kunming, China, 13–15 December 2018);

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

IV. Reporting on Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2 and under the Convention

42. The representative of UN-Water presented the progress of the UN-Water Integrated Monitoring Initiative for Sustainable Development Goal 6,⁴ as well as the timeline for its further development and the recently launched Sustainable Development Goal 6 Data Portal.⁵ The representative of UNEP reported on progress made regarding reporting under Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.1.

43. The representative of the European Environment Agency emphasized the need to harmonize data to be provided for reporting on Sustainable Development Goal target 6.5 and in line with the European Union Water Framework Directive.⁶

44. A representative of the secretariat reported on the recent outcomes of the reporting on Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2 and described the efforts made to improve the quality of reporting by: revising the reporting template (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2019/INF.3); developing the draft guide to reporting under the Water Convention and as a contribution to

⁴ See www.sdg6monitoring.org/.

⁵ See www.sdg6data.org/.

⁶ Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy, *Official Journal of the European Communities*, L 327 (2000), pp. 1–72.

Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2 (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2019/INF.4); and carrying out capacity-building activities.

45. The representative of Chad highlighted that preparation of the national report for Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2 had increased attention to water issues at the national level. The representative of Germany appreciated the revised template and the *Guide to reporting under the Water Convention* and as a contribution to Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2. The representative of Egypt expressed appreciation of the *Guide*.

46. The Working Group:

(a) Welcomed the upgrading of Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2 as a tier I indicator in November 2018 by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators,⁷ confirming the high methodological standards of the indicator;

(b) Expressed its appreciation to the drafting group for the development of the draft guide to reporting under the Water Convention and as a contribution to Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2, in particular for all the contributions received from States sharing transboundary waters, both Parties and non-Parties, in the elaboration process of the guide;

(c) Decided that any final comments on the draft guide to reporting under the Water Convention and as a contribution to Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2 should be sent to the secretariat in writing by 1 November 2019;

(d) Entrusted the secretariat, in cooperation with the Bureau, to finalize the guide to reporting under the Water Convention and as a contribution to Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2 and to publish and print it in English, French, Russian and Spanish, as well as, pending availability of resources, in Arabic, in time for the next reporting exercise;

(e) Welcomed the organization of capacity-building activities on Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2 by ECE and UNESCO, in collaboration with regional partners, in 2019 and 2020;

(f) Endorsed the revision of the question related to aquifer classification in the template for reporting under the Convention and decided that the template, amended accordingly, should be used for the next reporting exercise;

(g) Reiterated the need for close cooperation between UNESCO and ECE on all reporting-related activities;

(h) Recalled that the deadline for reporting under the Water Convention and Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2 would be 30 June 2020;

(i) Encouraged States to cooperate at the basin level in the second cycle of reporting on Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2 and under the Convention, and to make use of the available guidance material;

(j) Requested the secretariat to prepare, publish and translate into French and Russian a report on the results of the second reporting exercise on the Water Convention by 2021, and to prepare, together with UNESCO and in the framework of UN-Water, a report on the results of the second reporting exercise on Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2 and to translate it into Arabic, French, Russian and Spanish;

(k) Called upon States to make use of the reports in order to improve their transboundary cooperation, in particular by adopting national or basin-wide targets and action plans;

(l) Expressed appreciation for the initiatives taken by partners, in particular the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia and Global Water Partnership, to capitalize on the reporting of Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2

⁷ See https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/List_of_changes_since_15_Oct_2018.pdf.

in order to build capacity and strengthen cooperation, and invited other actors to follow those examples.

V. Promoting an integrated and intersectoral approach to water management at all levels

A. Water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus in transboundary basins

47. The Working Group was informed about the progress achieved in developing the nexus assessments for the Drina River Basin (follow-up), the North-Western Sahara Aquifer System and the Drin River Basin.

48. The representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Libya, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Tunisia shared their experiences and the representatives of Benin, Egypt, Ethiopia and Senegal highlighted the importance of the nexus approach in their regions.

49. The secretariat presented a document (ECE/ENERGY/GE.7/2019/5-ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2019/5) developed in cooperation with the ECE Sustainable Energy Division that introduces a tool-kit for policymakers to sustainably deploy renewable energy, accounting for nexus and transboundary considerations and the plan for future activities, including the publication of the tool-kit and the development of a synthesis document summarizing nexus solutions.

50. The Working Group:

(a) Welcomed progress with the nexus assessments and invited representatives of the basins concerned to: actively participate in the subsequent steps of the respective nexus assessments; make use of results in developing policies and interventions; and explore the possibility of implementing the solutions identified, in collaboration across sectors;

(b) Welcomed the cooperation with the energy sector, in particular, the ECE Group of Experts on Renewable Energy, and encouraged it to promote integration, through the nexus perspective, of water resources, land use, ecosystems and other intersectoral considerations into renewable energy policy, planning and deployment, as well as related dialogues (such as the Hard Talks);

(c) Invited countries and organizations, in particular those involved in nexus assessments and Hard Talks on renewable energy investment, to provide comments on and inputs to the assessment tool introduced in the document entitled “Sustainable renewable energy investments and development: accounting for water resources and the environment with a nexus approach” (ECE/ENERGY/GE.7/2019/5–ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2019/5) by 15 November 2019, and to help identify opportunities to apply the tool to policies and projects;

(d) Entrusted the secretariat, in cooperation with the lead Party, to work with the ECE Sustainable Energy Division to develop the above-mentioned tool into the publication “Towards sustainable renewable energy investment and deployment. Trade-offs and opportunities with water resources and the environment”, as well as to finalize, publish and print the publication in Arabic, English, French, Russian and Spanish;

(e) Entrusted the secretariat, in cooperation with the lead Party, to: proceed with the preparation of a synthesis publication “Balancing resource management trade-offs and synergies in transboundary basins: synthesis of nexus solutions”; develop a draft for discussion at the sixth meeting of the Task Force on the Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystems Nexus (Geneva, 22 and 23 October 2020) and for review at the subsequent meeting of the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management; and subsequently finalize and print the publication and translate it into Arabic, French, Russian and Spanish;

(f) Invited countries and organizations, in particular those involved in nexus assessments, to contribute to the synthesis publication with their experience;

(g) Encouraged interested countries and organizations to consider applying and using the *Methodology for assessing the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus in transboundary basins and experiences from its application: synthesis*.⁸

B. Supporting equitable and sustainable water allocation in the transboundary context

51. The representative of Hungary presented an overview of the process of development of the transboundary water allocation handbook. He described the handbook's purpose and the topics covered therein, the role of the Expert Group on the Transboundary Water Allocation Handbook and partners in its regard, related regional workshops and the timeline for its publication and launch at the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties (29 September –1 October 2021, Tallinn, Estonia). He welcomed input to the process and the document.

52. The representative of the United Republic of Tanzania noted the water allocation plan between the United Republic of Tanzania and Kenya as a potential case study.

53. The representative of Slovakia noted the need to include good case studies, especially regarding drought-affected regions.

54. The representative of Austria said that Austria was committed to sharing a case study on transboundary groundwater allocation between Austria and Germany.

55. The representative of Kenya expressed the hope that the handbook would cover all aspects of allocation, including benefit-sharing across sectors. He noted that, once completed, the handbook could facilitate his country's accession to the Convention.

56. The representative of Ethiopia expressed the hope that the handbook would cover all aspects of water allocation, not only volumetric apportionment. The representative of Egypt expressed the hope that the handbook would be based on the main principles of international water law. The representative of Ghana suggested that the handbook should also address water quality. The representative of Azerbaijan said that groundwater should be a key theme of the handbook.

57. The representative of Bangladesh welcomed the development of the handbook and commented that his country would consult such a document in future transboundary water negotiations. He proposed that the handbook include the topics of both equitable and reasonable utilization and transboundary water negotiations.

58. The secretariat clarified that the handbook would not be prescriptive and was intended only as a reference document for guidance and application by practitioners to specific contexts where it was deemed relevant.

59. The secretariat encouraged the submission of case studies for the handbook, especially case studies from Latin America and on groundwater, which were seen as areas to be strengthened based on initial feedback from the first meeting of the Expert Group (Geneva, 21 October 2019). The representative of Germany highlighted the Trifinio Aquifer as an example for a case study.

60. The Working Group:

(a) Welcomed the outcomes of the first meeting of the Expert Group on the Transboundary Water Allocation Handbook;

(b) Decided to organize the regional workshops on transboundary water allocation in 2020 in Central and Eastern Europe, Central Asia and one region of Africa.

⁸ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.18.II.E.31.

C. Supporting National Policy Dialogues on Integrated Water Resources Management under the European Union Water Initiative

61. The secretariat and representatives of the European Union Water Initiative plus programme partners, OECD and the International Office for Water of France briefed the Working Group on recent developments under the European Union Water Initiative National Policy Dialogues⁹ on Integrated Water Resources Management (facilitated by ECE) and on Water Supply and Sanitation (facilitated by OECD) and in particular on the European Union Water Initiative plus programme¹⁰ in the countries of Eastern Europe and the Caucasus. Representatives highlighted the results of the Initiative achieved in 2019 in the areas of legislative and institutional reforms, river basin management planning, monitoring, public participation and awareness-raising, and outlined planned activities for 2020. It was noted that funding for the National Policy Dialogue process in the Eastern Partnership countries would end in 2020.

62. The secretariat also presented a new European Union-funded project on the European Union Water Initiative National Policy Dialogues for Central Asia.

63. The representative of the Republic of Moldova presented activities under the European Union Water Initiative plus programme in 2018–2019 and highlighted legislative and institutional reforms that had taken place in his country, including the creation of an Environmental Agency and the reform of the Water Agency.

64. Representatives of Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia and Kazakhstan expressed appreciation for the continued support provided through the European Union Water Initiative and outlined recent and future activities supported through the overall framework of the National Policy Dialogues. They shared concrete results in the areas of strategic planning of water resources management, legal and regulatory reforms, river basin management planning, monitoring, transboundary water cooperation and the revision of targets in the context of the Protocol on Water and Health.

65. The Working Group:

(a) Welcomed the progress regarding the National Policy Dialogues in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, and thanked the European Union and other donors for the financial support provided in that regard, specifically noting the start of a new project on National Policy Dialogues in Central Asia 2019–2022 as part of the European Union-funded European Union-Central Asia Enhanced Regional Cooperation on Environment, Climate Change and Water project;¹¹

(b) Requested the secretariat, in cooperation with other European Union Water Initiative partners, to develop, publish and print a publication on water policy reforms in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia – achievements of the European Union Water Initiative 2006–2020 in English and Russian and submit it to the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties;

(c) Noted that the National Policy Dialogue process in the countries of Eastern Europe and the Caucasus would run out of funding in 2020 and encouraged the European Union and other donors to continue supporting financially the work of the National Policy Dialogues in the countries of Eastern Europe and the Caucasus through follow-up actions to the European Union Water Initiative plus programme.

⁹ Detailed information on National Policy Dialogues is available at www.unece.org/env/water/npd/countrydialogues.html.

¹⁰ Detailed information about the project is available at <https://euwipluseast.eu/index.php/en/>.

¹¹ Detailed information about the project is available at <https://wecoop2.eu/project>.

VI. Supporting monitoring, assessment and information-sharing in transboundary basins

A. Global workshop on exchange of data and information in transboundary basins

66. The representative of the secretariat described the areas to be covered by the Global workshop on exchange of data and information in transboundary basins (Geneva, 4 and 5 December 2019). The Global workshop had been organized in partnership with the International Network of Basin Organizations, the International Water Assessment Centre, the International Office for Water of France, the World Meteorological Organization, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands and Senegal, and would be followed by the fifteenth meeting of the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment on 6 December 2019. The above-mentioned meeting would discuss strategic directions for future work on monitoring, assessment and data exchange under the Convention.

67. The representative of Chad emphasized the importance of involving the basin organizations in data exchange processes. The representative of ECCAS stressed the importance of involving regional organizations in transboundary data management, particularly in basins without a transboundary basin organization.

B. International Water Assessment Centre

68. A representative of the International Water Assessment Centre described the activities under the projects “Sustainable water allocation in the transboundary context” and “Environmental flow – the basis for conservation of the ecological system”, funded by Kazakhstan and implemented by the International Water Assessment Centre. Both projects represented a part of the global process on development of the transboundary water allocation handbook under the Convention. Such activities as a technical meeting of national experts and a regional workshop on transboundary water allocation were planned for December 2019, in Nur-Sultan, and July 2020 in Almaty, Kazakhstan, respectively. The representative also reported on International Water Assessment Centre cooperation with Slovakia and Hungary, as well as on activities on ecosystem conservation and information management in the Ural River Basin.

69. The Working Group:

(a) Welcomed the progress regarding activities on monitoring and assessment and encouraged countries to nominate appropriate experts for the Global workshop on exchange of data and information in transboundary basins and the fifteenth meeting of the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment (Geneva, 4–6 December 2019) by the deadline of 30 October 2019;

(b) Welcomed the progress made by the International Water Assessment Centre.

VII. Adapting to climate change in transboundary basins

70. The Co-Chairs of the Task Force on Water and Climate informed the participants about the outcomes of the fourth meeting of the Global network of basins working on climate change adaptation (Geneva, 14 and 15 February 2019), the Global Workshop on Ecosystem-based Adaptation in Transboundary Basins (Geneva, 29 and 30 April 2019) and the tenth meeting of the Task Force on Water and Climate (Geneva, 1 May 2019). Recent publications such as the *Words into Action Guidelines: Implementation Guide for addressing water-related disasters and transboundary cooperation. Integrating disaster risk management with water management and climate change adaptation*¹² and *Financing Climate Change*

¹² United Nations publication, Sales No. E.18.II.E.30.

Adaptation in Transboundary Basins: Preparing Bankable Projects,¹³ prepared by the World Bank Group in cooperation with ECE, the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the International Network of Basin Organizations, were presented to the Working Group, along with the Convention's contribution to global processes such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. The Year of Action launched by the Global Commission on Adaptation including the Water Action Track was introduced.¹⁴

71. The representative of the International Network of Basin Organizations described the opportunities for linking water and climate, as well as for showcasing ecosystem-based adaptation at the twenty-fifth Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (Madrid, 2–13 December 2019).¹⁵

72. The representative of the Republic of Moldova informed the Working Group about the development of the flood and drought risk management plans for the Dniester and Prut River Basins. He reported that the transboundary diagnostic analysis and the process of updating the operational rules for the reservoirs, including requirements for the environmental flow of the Dniester River Basin, took climate change into consideration.

73. The representative of the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction emphasized the link between disasters, water, transboundary cooperation and climate change and stressed the importance of cooperation with the Water Convention. He informed the Working Group about communication plans to promote the *Words into Action Implementation Guide for addressing water-related disasters and transboundary cooperation*.

74. The Working Group:

(a) Welcomed the outcomes of the fourth meeting of the Global network of basins working on climate change (Geneva, 14 and 15 February 2019), the Global Workshop on Ecosystem-based Adaptation in Transboundary Basins (Geneva, 29 and 30 April 2019) and the tenth meeting of the Task Force on Water and Climate (Geneva, 1 May 2019), and thanked the partners, including the International Network of Basin Organizations, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the WWF and the Alliance for Global Water Adaptation for co-organizing those events;

(b) Welcomed the finalization of the publication *Words into Action Implementation Guide for addressing water-related disasters and transboundary cooperation* in cooperation with the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction and called upon participants to use it in their everyday work and to promote it in their countries and basins;

(c) Expressed appreciation for the progress made regarding the pilot projects on climate change adaptation in transboundary basins, in particular the Dniester project, and encouraged other basins to join the Global network of basins working on climate change adaptation;

(d) Welcomed the trainings and the publication *Financing climate change adaptation in transboundary basins*, prepared by the World Bank Group in cooperation with ECE and partners, and encouraged the participants to promote and use the publication in their professional activities;

(e) Expressed appreciation for growing cooperation with financial institutions, in particular the World Bank Group, AfDB and the European Investment Bank;

(f) Stressed the importance of cooperation with global processes on climate and disasters, such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Global Commission on Adaptation, and encouraged the participants to strengthen cooperation between the water, climate and disaster

¹³ World Bank Group (Washington, D.C., 2019).

¹⁴ See <https://gca.org/global-commission-on-adaptation/year-of-action>.

¹⁵ The twenty-fifth Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change was subsequently held in Madrid.

risk reduction communities in their countries and basins, including through the organization of joint activities on water and climate on World Water Day 2020 (22 March).

VIII. Partnerships, communication and knowledge management

A. Cooperation with UN-Water, global and regional partners and other multilateral environmental agreements

75. The secretariat recalled that cooperation with partners was a great strength of the Convention work and an objective of the Strategy for the implementation of the Convention at the global level (ECE/MP.WAT/2018/6). It informed the Working Group about cooperation with UN-Water, the upcoming United Nations high-level meetings on water and sanitation in 2021 and 2023 (New York) and the development of the UN-Water policy brief on the two global water conventions.

76. Partners shared information about their activities related to transboundary water cooperation in support of the promotion, application and implementation of the Convention. A representative of the European Environment Agency highlighted the importance of the Agency's cooperation with the Union for the Mediterranean and reported on the development of a water knowledge platform. A representative of the Global Environment Facility International Waters Learning Exchange and Resource Network highlighted cooperation with the Convention, including the development of common tools on the nexus, climate change and benefits of cooperation, as well as support for Convention events. He announced the anticipated continuation of such cooperation in the period 2020–2024. A representative of the Global Water Partnership reported on cooperation with the Convention regarding several activities, to be continued in line with the priorities of the new Global Water Partnership 2020–2025 Strategy.¹⁶ The representative of the Union for the Mediterranean secretariat recalled the 2017 Ministerial Declaration of the Union for the Mediterranean Water Ministers,¹⁷ which had laid the foundations for synergies between activities implemented under the Convention and the Union for the Mediterranean Water Agenda.

77. The representative of France, also speaking on behalf of the International Union for Conservation of Nature, announced the holding of the International Union for Conservation of Nature World Conservation Congress 2020 (Marseille, France, 7–15 January 2021), which would focus on freshwater as a key factor for environmental and biodiversity conservation. She stated that a motion on “Cooperation on transboundary fresh waters to ensure ecosystem conservation, climate resilience and sustainable development” had been submitted, which she invited all International Union for Conservation of Nature members to support.

78. The co-secretariat of the Protocol on Water and Health informed the Working Group about the preparations for the fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol (Belgrade, 19–21 November 2019) and the Protocol's draft programme of work for 2020–2022 (ECE/MP.WH/2019/3–EUPCR/1814149/1.2/2019/MOP-5/09).

79. The Working Group:

(a) Expressed appreciation for the key role played by partners, river basin organizations, regional economic communities, international organizations, NGOs and development partners in increasing capacity for implementation of the Convention and supporting national processes towards accession;

(b) Encouraged existing and new partners to continue promoting the Convention as a key instrument for strengthening transboundary water cooperation worldwide.

¹⁶ See www.gwp.org/globalassets/global/about-gwp/strategic-documents/gwp-strategy-2020-2025.pdf.

¹⁷ Union for the Mediterranean, Session document No. 09/17 Rev. 1. Available at https://ufmsecretariat.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Ministerial-Declaration-on-Water_Union-for-the-Mediterranean.pdf.

B. Exchange of experience of focal points

80. The Co-Chair recalled the main points included in decision VIII/2 on the designation and responsibilities of focal points (see ECE/MP.WAT/54/Add.2) adopted at the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties. She reported that, while the majority of Parties and other countries sharing transboundary waters had officially nominated their focal points for the Convention, a significant number of nominations were still missing. She invited the remaining countries to nominate focal points.

81. Participants took part in an interactive discussion on roles, challenges and good practices in activities of the focal points.

82. The Working Group:

(a) Reaffirmed the important role played by focal points as a key communication channel between the secretariat and countries;

(b) Welcomed the nomination of focal points by 89 Parties and non-Parties;

(c) Welcomed the progress in implementing decision VIII/2 on designation and responsibilities of focal points and encouraged countries to further implement the decision;

(d) Requested Parties that had not, to date, officially nominated a focal point to do so by the end of 2019;

(e) Encouraged non-Parties that had not, to date, officially nominated a focal point to do so by the end of 2019;

(f) Acknowledged the efforts and progress made in communication to further share and disseminate the results of the work carried out under the Water Convention;

(g) Entrusted the secretariat, in cooperation with the Bureau, to update the guide for focal points (ECE/MP.WAT/2009/13).

C. The application of the United Nations Framework Classification for Resources for the sustainable management of natural resources, including groundwater

83. The Working Group was informed about efforts under the ECE Committee on Sustainable Energy Expert Group on Resource Management to extend the scope of application of the United Nations Framework Classification from mineral and energy resources to groundwater. The Chair of the Expert Group and the Sustainable Development Goals Delivery Working Group highlighted the aspiration to integrate all resources into the United Nations Framework Classification using a nexus-like approach. He stated that renewable resources (energy) fell within the field of the Framework Classification's application and that the environment was accounted for. The representative of Sweden underlined the importance of accounting for ecosystems, closely connected with water. The representative of Switzerland pointed to the complexity of applying a more commodity-oriented economics approach to water resources.

84. The Working Group:

(a) Expressed appreciation for the information provided on the application of the Framework Classification to groundwater resources;

(b) Underlined that application of the Framework Classification to groundwater resources might be limited by the features that distinguished it from other natural resources, including: the coexistence of renewable resources and non-renewable resources; the transboundary nature of many groundwaters; the existence of groundwater-dependent ecosystems (for example, wetlands); and, most importantly, the fact that (ground)water, while being an economic good, was not a commodity and was vital for life;

(c) Invited the Expert Group on Resource Management under the ECE Committee on Sustainable Energy, and its subsidiary Groundwater Working Group, to assess how the

above-mentioned considerations could be captured in elaborating on the application of the Framework Classification to groundwater resources;

(d) Invited interested countries to designate an expert to strengthen the above-mentioned Expert Group and strongly encouraged the experts already in the Group to coordinate with their Water Convention focal point.

D. Activities of the Joint Expert Group on Water and Industrial Accidents

85. The Co-Chair of the Joint Ad Hoc Expert Group on Water and Industrial Accidents presented the Joint Expert Group's workplan for 2019–2020 (CP.TEIA/2018/INF.4), the new *Safety Guidelines and Good Practices for the Management and Retention of Firefighting Water*,¹⁸ the recently prepared communication material of the Joint Expert Group (such as a brochure and postcards)¹⁹ and other activities of the Group.

86. The Working Group:

(a) Expressed appreciation to the lead Parties and the Joint Expert Group for having prepared the brochure and postcards on the Group and its products;

(b) Encouraged countries and river basin organizations to participate in the Seminar on accidental transboundary water pollution prevention – contingency planning, early warning, mitigation (Budapest, 4–5 November 2019).

E. Communication and knowledge management

87. The secretariat presented its efforts to communicate about the activities, progress made and achievements in the Water Convention framework, especially through social media, the ECE Water Twitter account and the quarterly newsletter. The secretariat also reminded the participants to regularly check the Water Convention web page to access information about publications, articles, news, newsletters and events.

F. Contribution to global events, including the Ninth World Water Forum

88. The representative of Senegal described the preparations for the Ninth World Water Forum, to be organized from 22 to 27 March 2021, in Dakar, by the Government of Senegal and the World Water Council, in cooperation with strategic partners including the International Network of Basin Organizations, ECE and UNESCO. The World Water Forum would aim to promote transboundary cooperation and water security for peace and development. The kick-off meeting for the World Water Forum had been organized on 20 and 21 June 2019, in Dakar, and a memorandum of understanding had been signed between ECE and the executive secretariat of the World Water Forum, making ECE a strategic partner for the following priority of the Forum: “cooperation”.

89. Representatives from different countries informed the Working Group about planned national and regional events.

90. The Working Group:

(a) Welcomed the memorandum of understanding signed between ECE and the executive secretariat of the World Water Forum;

(b) Encouraged countries and organizations to contribute to the preparations for the Ninth World Water Forum.

¹⁸ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.19.II.E.29.

¹⁹ See www.unece.org/environmental-policy/conventions/industrial-accidents/publications.html.

IX. Facilitating financing of transboundary water cooperation

91. The representatives of the Netherlands and Switzerland, co-lead Parties for the work area on facilitating financing of transboundary water cooperation, recalled the main conclusions of the High-level workshop on financing transboundary water cooperation and basin development, organized in Nur-Sultan on 9 October 2018, in partnership with Kazakhstan, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the European Investment Bank, the Global Environment Facility International Waters: Learning Exchange and Resource Network and the World Bank Group.

92. The co-lead Parties then presented the main outcomes of activities carried out since the High-level workshop, including the session on mobilizing financial resources for transboundary water resources management and cooperation organized at the World Water Week 2019 (Stockholm, 28 August 2019), contributions to relevant international and regional meetings and the missions by the secretariat in March and April 2019 to Washington, D.C. and Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire) respectively, organized to strengthen partnerships with financial institutions including the Global Environment Facility, the World Bank Group and AfDB. Future activities in that area of work, namely the Global workshop on financing transboundary water cooperation and basin development to be held in Geneva, from 16 to 18 December 2020, and the background study to be developed for the Global workshop, were also presented.

93. A representative of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) shared IDB perspectives on financing transboundary water cooperation, highlighting the challenges. The benefits of improving transboundary water cooperation to optimize interventions from regional banks in shared basins were also underlined.

94. An interactive discussion on the issues and topics to be covered by the background study and the Global workshop in 2020 took place.

95. The Working Group:

(a) Welcomed progress made in the programme area on facilitating the financing of transboundary water cooperation and basin development;

(b) Welcomed the cooperation with global and regional financial institutions, namely the World Bank Group, AfDB, ADB and the European Investment Bank, and encouraged such institutions to continue to promote and participate in the work carried out on financing of transboundary water cooperation;

(c) Encouraged the development of further collaboration with financial institutions such as IDB;

(d) Invited countries and river basin organizations to share with the secretariat, by 15 January 2020, good practices, case studies and lessons learned from their region to be considered in the background study and discussed at the Global workshop on financing transboundary water cooperation and basin development;

(e) Entrusted the secretariat, in cooperation with the lead Parties and partners, to coordinate the development of the background study on financing transboundary water cooperation for the Global workshop.

X. Resources for the implementation of the programme of work

96. The Convention secretary presented the status of financial resources for implementation of the programme of work for 2019–2021 and expressed concern that only 14 out of 43 Parties were currently contributing financially to the Convention's activities.

97. Several countries, such as Bulgaria, Finland, Germany and Romania, reported on their commitment to financially contribute to the Convention.

98. The chief of the ECE Transboundary Cooperation Section reported that the Meeting of the Parties' request to increase ECE support from the regular budget to the Convention through the creation of a P-5 position as secretary of the Convention (ECE/MP.WAT/54,

paras. 102 and 103) had been channelled to the Economic and Social Council in New York, which had, in July 2019 taken note of, but not endorsed, the request. He encouraged all countries to support establishment of the P-5 post through their respective ministries and missions to the United Nations.

99. The Working Group:

- (a) Thanked all donors for their contributions to the Convention trust fund;
- (b) Invited Parties, non-Parties and other donors to provide financial resources for the implementation of the programme of work, if possible unearmarked;
- (c) Encouraged donors to accept the overall aggregated financial report prepared annually for the Working Group instead of individual reports for each contribution, if possible.

XI. Implementation of other decisions taken by the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties

A. Developing a more sustainable funding mechanism for the work under the Convention

100. The representative of the secretariat reported on the preliminary approach by the Bureau for a more sustainable funding mechanism for the work under the Convention. Following further discussions by the Bureau, a document on that issue would be submitted to the next meeting of the Working Group.

B. Developing a procedure for selection of host countries for future sessions of the Meeting of the Parties

101. The representative of Estonia informed the Working Group about the preparations for the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties, to be held in autumn 2021 in Estonia. The Convention secretary presented the possible procedure for selection of host countries for future sessions of the Meeting of the Parties.

102. The Working Group:

- (a) Requested the secretariat to disseminate by electronic means to all focal points of Parties, by 12 June 2020, a call for proposals to host the tenth session of the Meeting of the Parties. The call should remind focal points about the obligations of the host country and describe the elements to be included in the proposal;
- (b) Invited Parties to submit proposals to host the tenth session of the Meeting of the Parties by 30 April 2021;
- (c) Requested the secretariat to submit, six weeks before the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties, an overview of the proposals received, for consideration and decision by the Meeting of the Parties;
- (d) Also requested the secretariat, based on the experience gained, to prepare a draft decision by the Meeting of the Parties on the hosting of sessions of the Meetings of the Parties, for consideration by the Working Group at its sixteenth meeting and subsequent adoption by the Meeting of the Parties at its ninth session.

XII. Ongoing programme of work for 2019–2021

103. A representative of the secretariat stated that no adjustments were needed for the programme of work for 2019–2021. 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) Requested the secretariat to reprint missing publications, as needed.

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

104. The Working Group decided to hold its fifteenth meeting from 15 to 17 June 2020, in Geneva.

105. The Co-Chairs closed the meeting at 12.30 p.m. on Thursday, 24 October 2019.
