



**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

Item 13 (b) of the provisional agenda

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

**PROPOSED PROCEDURE FOR PROPOSING THE HOSTING OF FUTURE SESSIONS  
OF THE MEETING OF THE PARTIES**

***Background and mandate for this document***

The eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties (Nur-Sultan, 10-12 October 2018) requested the secretariat in cooperation with the Bureau to formalize the procedure for proposing the hosting of future sessions of the Meeting of the Parties of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) and to disseminate this on time for the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties (see ECE/MP.WAT/54).

The present document contains information on the past practice for selecting host countries, the obligations and benefits for host countries, the relevant rules of the United Nations, a possible future procedure for selecting host countries and a draft decision by the Working Group.

The Working Group is invited to review the present document, make comments and decide on the next steps.

**1. *Practice so far under the Water Convention with regards to arranging Meetings of the Parties***

According to the text of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention), serviced by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, Meetings of the Parties are held every three years.

According to the Water Convention's rules of procedure (ECE/MP.WAT/54/Add.2):

*Rule 3: The meetings of the Parties shall be held at the United Nations Office at Geneva unless other appropriate arrangements are made by the Parties and/or the Bureau in consultation with the secretariat.*

So far, most sessions of the Meeting of the Parties have been held outside Geneva, namely:

Helsinki, Finland, 2 - 4 July 1997

The Hague, Netherlands, 23-25 March 2000

Madrid, Spain, 26-28 November 2003

Bonn, Germany, 20-22 November 2006

Geneva, Switzerland, 10-12 November 2009 (at the invitation of the Government of Switzerland)

Rome, Italy, 28-30 November 2012

Budapest, Hungary, 17-19 November 2015  
 Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan, 10-12 October 2018

Locations of the sessions of the Meeting of the Parties have been decided always at the previous session of the Meeting of the Parties, i.e. three years in advance. This time is important for the host country and the secretariat to properly prepare, in particular the host country needs to reserve a budget and a host country agreement has to be signed between the secretariat and the host country. At the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties in Nur-Sultan in 2018, the Meeting of the Parties welcomed Estonia offer to host the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties which will therefore be held in 2021 in Estonia (see ECE/MP.WAT/54).

It is also a practice of the Meeting of the Parties to elect a representative of the host country to chair the Meeting of the Parties for the following three years. This practice is common in many UN instances and has many benefits: the host country has time to prepare its chairmanship and can benefit from high-level political support; it allows the current chair and future chair to work together for continuity and efficiency; as hosting the Meeting of the Parties entails costs and efforts, for many countries it is important that such efforts are associated to a political interest and the international visibility linked to the chairmanship. It is therefore expected that this practice continues. In order to prepare for the chairmanship and to get experience in the work of the Bureau, host countries are usually elected as vice-chairs of the Bureau in the preceding period.

## **2. Rules within the United Nations for hosting intergovernmental meetings:**

The United Nations General Assembly, in resolution 40/243 of 18 December 1985, decided that United Nations bodies may hold sessions away from their established headquarters when a host government agrees to defray the additional costs directly or indirectly involved. United Nations administrative instruction ST/AI/342 provides guidelines for the preparation of host country agreements that fall under resolution 40/243.

The responsibilities of the host country and the secretariat are formally defined through a host country agreement which is usually signed about one year before the Meeting of the Parties.

The host country agreement defines:

- Procedures for invitation to the Meeting of the Parties by the host country together with UNECE
- Privileges and immunities
- Facilities to be made available by the host country for the session of the Meeting of the Parties, namely meeting and office space, personnel resources, office supplies and equipment interpretation and translation, local transportation, adequate medical facilities for first aid in emergencies, etc.
- Visa support for delegates

Hosting sessions of the Meeting of the Parties entails financial implications in line with United Nations General Assembly Resolution 47/202. Some are linked to local costs (e.g. venue, interpretation, hospitality, etc) and cannot be quantified by the secretariat. Other costs are linked to travel expenses, costs held by the secretariat for the preparation of the Meeting, etc.

The secretariat obviously plays also an important role in the preparations of the Meeting of the Parties, such as sending of invitations, preparation of official and unofficial documents, arranging participation, financial support to eligible participants, developing the programme, contacting speakers, coordinating side events, servicing the actual meeting and subsequent reports etc.

### **3. Role and benefits for the host country**

The role of the host country is far beyond the practical arrangements for the meeting, as its leadership is fundamental for the success of the Meeting.

In particular, the political support provided by the host country is important for:

- The political outcome of the meeting, creation of consensus and support to the different decisions adopted at the Meeting of the Parties
- Ensuring visibility and impact of the event, including by promoting high-level participation and by promoting its results in relevant international fora.

Hosting the Meeting of the Parties does not solely come with responsibilities for the host country, there are also several benefits linked to it.

Hosting the Meeting of the Parties gives wider exposure to the Water Convention. This helps to promote the multisectoral engagement needed at the national level for the comprehensive implementation of the Convention, for example between the ministries in charge of water, energy, environment, foreign affairs etc. Hosting a Meeting of the Parties reaffirms the country's commitment to transboundary water cooperation on the global stage, raising the profile of the host country and its key officials by showcasing achievements to the bodies and agencies of the Water Convention's institutional framework, across the UN system more widely, and key representatives in the water sector from across the world. It may also help developing wider networks and alliances and open up space for related high-level discussions and possible avenues for inter-governmental profile-building, networking and developing joint projects.

Finally, it is a unique opportunity for the host nation to showcase its city and country to participants from all over the world, who may not have travelled to the host country before.

### **4. Implications related to the chairmanship of the Convention for three years following the Meeting of the Parties**

In accordance with the established practice under the Convention, the host country takes the chairmanship of the Convention for the following 3 years. The role of the Chair and of the country holding the chairmanship is fundamental in terms of promotion and support to the Convention worldwide, the positioning of transboundary water cooperation on the international agenda, etc.

As the Chair becomes the "face and voice" of the Convention and has a key role in promoting transboundary water cooperation, it is key that she/he has an appropriate level to effectively convey political messages. It is also important that she/he has enough time and resources, including financial resources to be able to attend international events and other relevant meetings. In case of Chairs from least developed and developing countries, financial resources for travels of the Chair can be made available from the Convention's trust fund in accordance with UN rules and procedures.

For an effective membership, the involvement is beyond the Chair herself/himself: it is important that different relevant Ministries (foreign affairs, environment, etc) support the chairmanship from both the technical and political points of view. A good practice followed by the Government of Kazakhstan has been to establish a small interministerial group for coordinating presidency activities at the international and national level. An important role is also to be played by missions and embassies of the host country throughout the world which can play an active role during the presidency and therefore needs to be adequately mobilised.

The practice under the Convention that the hosting is announced 3 years ahead and the chairmanship runs up to 6 years after the decision provides a very useful perspective to achieve the political priorities of the host country, position the Meeting of the Parties in the national and international agenda, ensure buy-in and commitment by national actors, etc.

**5. Possible procedure for selecting Parties hosting sessions of the Meeting of the Parties under the Water Convention:**

- 20 months after the last session of the Meeting of the Parties: the secretariat disseminates by electronic means to all focal points of Parties a call for proposals to host the Meeting of the Parties. The call should remind the obligations of the host country. The call should also describe the elements to be included in the proposal, such as possible location, possible level of representation by the host country, motivation by the country to host the Meeting of the Parties and specific ideas, if any, on the organization of the session and relevant side events or side meetings. It is clear that no country can commit with such advance thus the proposal is to be understood as a potential plan and not as a firm commitment.
- 30 months after the last session of the Meeting of the Parties: deadline for submitting proposals to host the Meeting of the Parties to the Secretariat. If the proposal requires clarifications, the secretariat might get back to the Party concerned.
- On the basis of information by the secretariat, the Bureau monitors the proposals received and, in case there is no proposal submitted, it might decide to reach out to one or more Parties to invite to consider hosting the Meeting of the Parties.
- 6 weeks before the next Meeting of the Parties: the secretariat submits an overview of the proposals received, for consideration and decision by the Meeting of the Parties.

**6. Possible decision by the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management**

*The Working Group is invited to discuss the above procedure and to test it for the selection of the host of the 10<sup>th</sup> session of the Meeting of the Parties.*

1. *Requests 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 the obligations of the host country and describe the elements to be included in the proposal.*
2. *Invites Parties to submit proposals to host the tenth session of the Meeting of the Parties by 30 April 2021;*
3. *Requests the Secretariat to submit 6 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;*
4. *Also requests the Secretariat, based on the experience gained, to prepare a draft decision by the Meeting of the Parties on the hosting of 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.*