

High level panel

Peter Kovacs, State Secretary of Water, Hungary

(a) How has the Water Convention helped your country/organization to improve transboundary cooperation on the ground?

Hungary is a typical transboundary country (dominantly downstream but also upstream to Serbia) sharing waters with 7 neighbouring countries. Approximately 95 % of our surface waters arrive from abroad. Transboundary water cooperation has a long tradition – bilateral agreements with limited territorial and specific scope already exist from the 50's. We are aware of the importance of a firm legal and institutional framework for successful management of joint/shared waters which requires time, patience, mutual acceptance and trust building.

Hungary is fully aware of the need of further improvement of transboundary cooperation therefore HU participated in the elaboration of the Helsinki Water Convention which became one of the most important a basic international legal instrument. Its provisions and principles have been transformed into the Danube Protection Convention (initiative role of Hungary), some later the EU elaborated the Water Framework Directive – also strongly based on the principles of the Convention.

HU has initiated the upgrading of the old bilateral agreements and put them in line with the principles of the Convention and later with other water related legislative development (e.g. the river basin principle, inclusion of transboundary groundwaters) and widening the scope of the cooperation. We have completed it with already with some neighbours but the process is still ongoing

As HU is entirely in the Danube river basin the activities of the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR) has outstanding importance relevance for us. The achievements of the organisation are well known and we will learn more about its activity during this MoP - just to stress now that this joint body by today became the framework of successful cooperation of 15 very different countries + the EU. It is a good example for illustrating the evolution of a transboundary cooperation starting with network building, data collection and developing further through organisation building, program development cooperation with third parties, etc.

Being an EU member state, the implementation and fulfilment of the EU water legislation requirements is a legal obligation for my country. Since Hungary shares waters with non-EU countries as well the Water Convention is a facilitating tool in that respect too.

What else we gained from the involvement in the elaboration and implementation of the Water Convention?

= it was and still is a great exercise teaching us what networking and international water cooperation means – as a result our partnership has significantly developed

= the spirit of cooperation, its openness, flexibility, “ready to adopt to new challenges” approach

Finally just to underline some “products” of the Convention we found particularly important and useful:

= The guidance documents which gave directions to national developments even if not fully adopted (e.g. monitoring, flood, tailing facilities, groundwaters. as well as the transboundary pilote projects we participated in)

= The assessments which are the indicators of our work since give us information on status of our waters and related cooperation as well as give future directions. We have to express thanks to Finland for supporting this activity for a long time and HU is also proud that could contribute to the 2nd assessment by hosting one of its subregional preparatory meetings

= The Convention guide which facilitates the understanding of the Convention and related requirements – it is useful for those considering joining the convention but supports those who are already parties in the implementation. It is even useful for other frameworks dealing with international waters

= Hungary played particular role in the development of two protocols to the Convention. We think that the Water and Health protocol is a great success (and it has further potential). The second the protocol on Civil Liability which is not in force yet and that shows how sensitive issue was address by it but needs further efforts since the problem is still there and it is one of the crucial issues of transboundary water management.

(b) What direction should the Convention head in for the next 20 years? I.e., what should be done to address the remaining challenges for transboundary water management at the basin, regional and global levels?

In the future we have to focus on the implementation. Further improved cooperation is needs at all levels to reach well functioning transboundary water management. Further efforts needs to properly integrate water aspects into other sectoral policies as well as development policies and financing schemes.

Intersectoral dialog is an important tool for that: “Out of the water box” thinking should be strengthened. The Danube river basin cooperation can be taken as an example where dialog has been organised with such important sectors like agriculture, navigation, detergent industry, hydropower already and more will follow.

At basin level more agreements are expected (at bilateral and basin level) - sound legal and institutional basis is essential for long term sustainability of cooperation

Upgrading of existing agreements is also desirable together with improvement of existing bilateral bodies, making them suitable for coordinatng basin wide transboundary cooperation (in case of EU countries for instance making them suitable for the necessary bilateral harmonisation as required by the Water Framework Directive)

We have to ensure that riparian countries are long term part of cooperation no matter of their level of development and financial resources (development a kind of hydro-solidarity)

We need improved further data collection, enhanced status assessment based on as complex approach as possible (like the next thematic assessment focusing on water-food-energy nexus)

Implementation of projects of on the ground are expected (joint identification of the problems, development of viable projects and fundraising) in order to achieve real improvement in the status of water and water related environment (e.g. EU Danube Strategy; cooperation with development agencies and facilities like GEF, etc.)

We are facing with new challenges, like increased attention to water quantity aspects (especially in the context of climate change), water allocation in transboundary context as well as the increasing role of groundwaters in water supply (e.g.: Tisza River Basin cooperation where these aspects are already given increased attention)

At regional level synergies with the UNECE environmental conventions are expected and has to be further explored. Cooperation and synergies between the activities of different institutions are also expected to be further improved (e.g.: UN ECE – EU relations and cooperation has led to valuable results in some fields (water – climate change; EUWI) and to the efficient use of available capacities and resources.

We have to continue of advisory, capacity development, exchange of experience of activities and continue with the pilot projects – all these can be dealt with at regional level and are of great practical value

One of the success stories of the Convention which has to be continued are the National policy Dialogs – it is probably a good example how the “third party” presence can facilitate the processes of understanding and can lead to cooperation (a similar example from the Danube basin is the Tisza cooperation again where without the presence/chairmanship of the EU we couldn’t have achieved where we are now)

We have a great expectations towards the Implementation committee, the new body of the Convention (advisory facilitative role again) to encourage implementation.

Continuation of assessment related activities is also very important since assessment is a kind of indicator of the success of our work. We agree with the new approach as will be discussed later (overarching comprehensive assessment at a later stage only, thematic, new challenge facing assessment exercise in shorter term, first on water-food-energy nexus)

We wish that the Convention keeps working in the friendly and flexible and “quickly reacting to the new challenges” manner like it has been functioning so far. Special thanks should go for it to the Secretariat, as well as to the Presidents of the convention – they are the main engines of the activities.

At global level the forthcoming globalisation of the Convention opens new dimensions in the cooperation. The reputation of the Convention is growing, increased attention can be experienced towards its activities from outside the ECE region. We are pleased to see lot of representatives at this meeting and Hungary offers cooperation based on her experience in transboundary cooperation on one hand and on already existing relationship/cooperation with countries from outside the region.

The 20 years old and 16 years active UN ECE Water Convention will be a global one in February 2013. It has to have a proper role in the global water governance, it is even suitable for the role of a global water platform. A challenging task is to find a wise and best way of cooperation with the UN watercourses convention ensuring a mutually beneficial and peaceful coexistence for the benefit of the waters of our planets.

The Convention could have a role in the post Rio+20 UN processes as well especially in the development of the global water goal. We are aware water should be among the sustainable development goals and also be properly placed in the post 2015 development framework.

Hungary intends to facilitate it through the Friends of Water process in New York as well as through a stocktaking and forward looking water conference, the “Budapest Water Summit 2013 “ to be held in 8-11 October next year in Budapest. We count on your cooperation and participation.