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**Statement**

**by**

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**of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe**

**at**

**the Virtual EU high-level event ‘Water and beyond – EU transformative approaches for international partnerships**

**18-21 January 2021**

**Session “Water as a catalyst for cooperation: fostering trust and peace”**

**19 January 2021 (11:15–12:45)**

**The role that legal frameworks and the Water Convention plays as catalyst for cooperation and peace**

(7 minutes Speech)

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Covid-19 pandemic has shown the importance of water and sanitation for all. I thank the Government of Slovenia and the European Commission Directorate-General for International Partnerships for co organizing this important event and for the very good cooperation.

Water scarcity is increasing in many parts of the world as a result of the rising economic demands for water, population growth and rapid urbanisation, exacerbated by ecosystem losses and climate change. Water-related risks may aggravate human insecurity, conflict and migration and affect peace. According to the World Humanitarian Data and Trends, in 2017 alone, water was a major factor in conflict in at least 45 countries. The World Economic Forum's Global Risk Report (2019) has listed water crises among the top-five risks in terms of impact for eight consecutive years.

This risk is even higher in the 310 basins worldwide which are shared by two or more countries. Globally, around 40% of the world's population depends on transboundary waters. This makes water cooperation key for the prevention of conflicts, regional integration, prosperity and sustainable development.

The link between water and peace and security has recently become higher on the agenda in the United Nations and for example been debated at the United Nations Security Council. The importance of transboundary cooperation is also clearly recognized in the 2030 Agenda and its target SDG 6.5, which requires countries to implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary water cooperation.

SDG indicator 6.5.2 measures progress on transboundary water cooperation worldwide. In the second reporting cycle of this indicator, jointly managed by UNECE and UNESCO as co-custodian agencies in 2020, it is very encouraging that more than 80% of the 153 countries sharing transboundary waters reported on their status of transboundary cooperation.

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However, so far only 17 out of these 153 countries achieve the SDG target 6.5.2. We therefore urgently need to accelerate progress- therefore, UN-Water launched last year the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework.

Water is often a catalyst for economic development, regional integration, cooperation and peace. It has been crucial in the peacebuilding process in South-Eastern Europe, with the creation of the International Sava River Basin Commission, but also in Africa and elsewhere.

Transboundary water agreements and joint institutions provide indispensable backbones for effective cooperation, enabling the sharing of multiple economic, social and environmental benefits. The EU Council Conclusions on Water Diplomacy (2018) underline the importance of transboundary water cooperation, institutions and governance for peace and stability.

These are the main aims and obligations of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (or the Water Convention for short), as well as the UN Convention on the Law of Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses. These two global Conventions support transboundary water cooperation, water governance, and integrated water resource management at global, regional and basin levels. They ensure predictability between countries, enabling conflict prevention, trust and stability.

The 1992 Water Convention, serviced by UNECE, has a unique intergovernmental framework through which it helps to prevent water crises and supports sustainable development in transboundary basins. This is done by fostering dialogue and the development of agreements, as well as setting up joint bodies. It also supports countries in jointly adapting to climate change, reconciling sectoral demands on energy, food and water and financing transboundary cooperation. More than 90 agreements have been signed in the Pan-European region since its entry into force in 1996. The Convention has also inspired cooperation worldwide, such as the water charters of the Lake Chad and Niger River basins or transboundary agreements between Kazakhstan and China.

Accessions by Chad and Senegal in 2018 and Ghana in 2020 turned the Convention into a

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global intergovernmental platform for transboundary cooperation. Numerous other countries are also progressing towards accession. Overall, more than 120 countries are involved in the Convention's activities, benefit of its many capacity building activities, and use its tools.

I would like to express our gratitude to the European Union for supporting the globalization of the Convention, as well as a project that helps Eastern Partnership countries bring their legislation closer to EU water policy. I also thank all others who support the Convention.

The Convention's globalization offers a unique opportunity to accelerate progress worldwide, and address some of the root challenges to transboundary cooperation. Accessions support development at national and transboundary level, together with other tools such as resources and planning, by providing an enabling environment for investments and supporting water governance. I therefore join the United Nations Secretary General in calling on all countries and partners to promote the full implementation of, and accession to, the Water Convention and to promote transboundary water cooperation.

Today's topics of water and peace will be further discussed at the Ninth Meeting of the Parties of the Convention to be held in Tallinn, Estonia from 29 September - 1 October 2021. I already invite you all to join. I also hope the topic can be discussed at the 2023 United Nations water conference.

The water risks mean that the stakes are high. Yet, even more so are the opportunities from transboundary cooperation for peace and wellbeing. Let us work together to reap them. We need a concerted effort of all actors to accelerate achievement of SDG 6.5. and promote water as a peace-tool.

Thank you.

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