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

Ninth session

Geneva, 29 September–1 October 2021

Item 15 of the provisional agenda

**Formalizing the procedure for proposing
to host future sessions of the Meeting of the Parties**

Draft decision on the procedure for proposing to host future sessions of the Meeting of the Parties

Prepared by the secretariat in consultation with the Bureau



Summary

At its eighth session (Nur-Sultan, 10–12 October 2018), the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) 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 and to disseminate this on time at the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties.^a

A first draft of such a procedure (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2019/INF.10)^b was prepared and presented at the fourteenth meeting (Geneva, 22–24 October 2019) of the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management. The Working Group commented on the document and requested the secretariat to disseminate 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. It also requested 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 and subsequent adoption by the Meeting of the Parties at its ninth session.^c

At its fifteenth meeting (Geneva, 30 September–2 October 2020), the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management discussed the revised document on the possible procedure for proposing to host future sessions of the Meeting of the Parties (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2020/4), which described the existing practice for selecting a host country, the obligations of and benefits for the host country and the applicable rules of the United Nations, and also included possible elements of the draft decision of the Meeting of the Parties. The document took into account the experience with the call for proposals to host the tenth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention in 2024 (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2020/INF.9),^d which had been disseminated to Parties on 11 June 2020. The Working Group invited participants to provide comments on the procedure for proposing to host future sessions of the Meeting of the Parties to the secretariat by 30 November 2020.^e

At their third joint meeting (Geneva, 26–28 April 2021), the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management and the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment were informed that no comments had been received by the secretariat. The Working Groups decided to submit the draft decision on the procedure for proposing the hosting of sessions of the Meeting of the Parties, as contained in document ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2020/4, to the Meeting of the Parties for adoption at its ninth session (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2021/2-ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2021/2, forthcoming).

The Meeting of the Parties is therefore invited to consider the draft decision on the procedure for proposing to host future sessions of the Meeting of the Parties with a view to its adoption.

^a See ECE/MP.WAT/54, para. 105 (c).

^b Available at <https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/fourteenth-meeting-working-group-iwrm>.

^c See ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2019/2, para. 102 (a) and (d).

^d Available at <https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/fifteenth-meeting-working-group-integrated-water-resources-management>.

^e See ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2020/2, para. 86 (a).

I. Background and explanatory information

A. Existing practice under the Convention

1. According to article 17 (1) 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 (ECE), meetings of the Parties are held every three years.

2. According to rule 3 of the Rules of procedure of the Meetings of the Parties to the Water Convention (ECE/MP.WAT/54/Add.2), 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.

3. To date, most sessions of the Meeting of the Parties have been held outside Geneva. The previous sessions took place in: Helsinki, 2–4 July 1997; The Hague, Netherlands, 23–25 March 2000; Madrid, 26–28 November 2003; Bonn, Germany, 20–22 November 2006; Geneva, 10–12 November 2009 (at the invitation of the Government of Switzerland); Rome, 28–30 November 2012; Budapest, 17–19 November 2015; and Nur-Sultan, 10–12 October 2018. Due to infection control measures and travel restrictions related to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties – initially scheduled to take place in Tallinn, from 29 September to 1 October 2021 – will be organized in cooperation with the Government of Estonia, in a hybrid format, at the United Nations Office at Geneva on the same dates.

4. Locations of the sessions of the Meeting of the Parties have always been decided at the preceding session of the Meeting of the Parties, i.e. three years in advance. This time is important to enable proper preparation of the meeting by the host country and the secretariat. Among other things, it allows the host country to reserve, in a timely manner, the budget for organization of the meeting. It also allows sufficient time for the host country agreement to be agreed and signed between the secretariat and the host country.

5. It is also established practice under the Water Convention for 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. In order to prepare for the chairmanship and to gain experience in the work of the Bureau, host countries are usually elected as Vice-Chairs of the Bureau in the preceding intersessional period. This practice is common in many United Nations forums and has numerous benefits: the host country has time to prepare for its chairmanship and can benefit from high-level political support; it also allows the current Chair and future Chair to work together to enhance continuity and efficiency. Furthermore, as hosting the Meeting of the Parties entails costs and efforts, for many countries it is important that such efforts be rewarded by political attention and high international visibility linked to the chairmanship. It is therefore expected that this practice will continue in the future.

B. Role and benefits for the host country

6. The role of the host country extends far beyond the practical arrangements for the meeting, as its leadership is fundamental for the success of the Meeting of the Parties. The political support and leadership provided by the host country throughout the entire preparatory process is important for:

(a) Facilitating the outcomes of the meeting, building consensus and support to the different decisions to be adopted at the Meeting of the Parties;

(b) Ensuring the visibility and impact of the event, including by promoting high-level participation and by disseminating and promoting its results in relevant international forums.

7. Hosting the Meeting of the Parties brings numerous benefits to the host country. The following aspects can be highlighted in this respect:

(a) As a result of the transformation of the Water Convention from a regional to a global instrument, the Meetings of the Parties to the Convention are nowadays among the largest international events driving the transboundary water cooperation agenda at the global level and attract ever-increasing high-level participation. Hosting such a meeting reaffirms the host country's commitment to transboundary water cooperation on the global stage, provides it with a unique opportunity to bring forward its political priorities for international cooperation and allows it to raise its profile by showcasing its achievements, good practices and efforts to other countries, across the United Nations system more widely and to representatives of the water community from across the world. Moreover, hosting such an event allows the host country to establish new contacts and partnerships and explore new cooperation opportunities, in particular through high-level discussions with delegations participating in the meeting;

(b) Hosting the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention considerably broadens exposure to and understanding of the Convention among national stakeholders. This helps to promote the multisectoral engagement needed at the national level for the implementation of the Convention, for example, between the ministries in charge of water, energy, environment, agriculture, foreign affairs, interior, etc. and facilitates the implementation of the Convention in the long run;

(c) The chairmanship of the Water Convention, which comes with the hosting of the Meeting of the Parties, makes the host country the key actor in international cooperation on water issues at the global level. This is particularly true for such areas of international cooperation as transboundary waters, further development of international water law and cooperation on the implementation and monitoring of Sustainable Development Goal 6. The three-year chairmanship allows sufficient time for the host country to play a key role in international cooperation in these areas at the global level and to achieve tangible results;

(d) Finally, hosting the Meeting of the Parties 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 otherwise travelled to the host country.

C. Rules within the United Nations for hosting intergovernmental meetings

8. The General Assembly, in resolution 40/243 on the pattern of conferences, of 18 December 1985, decided that the 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 (see A/RES/40/243, sect. I, para. 5). This was subsequently reaffirmed by General Assembly resolution 47/202 on the pattern of conferences (see A/RES/47/202, sect. A, para. 17). United Nations administrative instruction ST/AI/342 provides guidelines for the preparation of host country agreements that fall under General Assembly resolution 40/243.

9. The responsibilities of the host country and the secretariat are formally defined through a host country agreement, which is negotiated and agreed upon between the host country and the secretariat. The host country agreement is usually signed about one year before the Meeting of the Parties. Among other matters, the host country agreement describes:

(a) Procedures for invitation to the Meeting of the Parties;

(b) Privileges and immunities;

(c) Facilities to be made available by the host country for the session of the Meeting of the Parties, including meeting and office space, personnel resources, office supplies and equipment, interpretation and related equipment, local transportation, medical facilities for first aid in emergencies, security aspects, etc.;

(d) Visa support for delegates;

(e) Financial implications.

10. Hosting sessions of the Meeting of the Parties entails financial implications in line with General Assembly resolutions 40/243 and 47/202.

11. Some financial implications are linked to local costs (for example, venue, additional interpretation, hospitality, etc.) and cannot be quantified by the secretariat. Other costs are linked to travel expenses and costs held by the secretariat for the preparation of the meeting, etc. While certain minimum requirements exist and are meant to defray the additional costs directly or indirectly involved due to holding the session away from the headquarters, a different degree of financial engagement is expected from prospective host countries depending on their level of economic development.

12. The secretariat works hand-in-hand with the host country on the preparation of the Meeting of the Parties. In particular, the secretariat plays an important role, for example, in the sending of invitations, the preparation of official and unofficial documents, arranging participation, arranging financial support to eligible participants, developing the programme, contacting speakers, coordinating side events, servicing the actual meeting, preparation of its report and other aspects.

D. Implications related to the chairmanship of the Convention

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

14. As the Chair becomes the “face and voice” of the Convention and has a key role in promoting transboundary water cooperation on the basis of the Convention worldwide, it is key that he/she should have an appropriate level of authority to effectively convey political messages. It is also important that he/she should have sufficient time and resources, including financial resources, to be able to attend international events and other meetings. In the case of Chairs from least developed and developing countries, financial resources for the travel of the Chair can be made available from the Convention’s trust fund in accordance with United Nations rules and procedures.

15. For an effective chairmanship, the involvement of the host country’s officials beyond the ministry in charge of water and beyond the Chair himself/herself is crucial. Other relevant ministries (foreign affairs, environment, etc.) should support the chairmanship from both the technical and political points of view. A good practice followed by some countries is to establish a small interministerial group for coordinating chairmanship activities. The missions and embassies of the host country throughout the world also have an important role to play.

16. Since the hosting of the future Meeting of the Parties is announced three years ahead and the chairmanship runs three years after the actual hosting of the Meeting of the Parties, the cumulative period of six years ensures sufficient time and a unique opportunity for the host country to achieve its political priorities, ensure buy-in and commitment by national actors and strengthen its contribution to transboundary water cooperation worldwide.

II. Draft decision on the procedure for proposing to host future sessions of the Meeting of the Parties

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

Recalling article 17, paragraph 2, of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention), which describes the role of the meetings of the Parties in keeping under continuous review the implementation of the Convention,

Recalling also article 17, paragraph 1, of the Convention, which provides that the ordinary meetings of the Parties shall be held every three years,

Recalling further that the General Assembly, in its resolution 40/243 of 18 December 1985, decided that the 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,

Taking note of rule 3 of the Rules of Procedure of the Meetings of the Parties, which states that 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,

Emphasizing that hosting of the Meeting of the Parties is an important instrument for the promotion of the Convention and transboundary water cooperation at the national, transboundary/basin, regional and global levels,

Recalling the recent opening of the Convention for accession by all States Members of the United Nations, which makes its Meeting of the Parties a global intergovernmental platform for exchange and debate on transboundary water issues,

Recognizing the many benefits associated with the hosting of the Meeting of the Parties in terms of the political prestige, increased visibility and extensive networking and alliance building opportunities,

Emphasizing that the hosting of the Meeting of the Parties offers a unique opportunity for showcasing the knowledge, practices and experience accumulated by the host country regarding water resources management and transboundary water cooperation and, at the same time, for learning of the knowledge, practices and experience in these areas available in other regions of the world,

Recalling the responsibilities associated with the hosting of the Meeting of the Parties in terms of the practical and logistical arrangements and the associated financial implications,

Emphasizing that the financial implications should be commensurate to the level of economic development of a host country but that the requirements set out in General Assembly resolution 40/243 for holding sessions away from headquarters are to be complied with in all cases,

Recalling also the responsibilities associated with the political leadership expected from the host country in substantive preparations of the session,

Determined to continue the existing practice under the Convention whereby the host country takes over the chairmanship of the Convention for the following intersessional period,

Emphasizing the fundamental role of the chairmanship for promotion of and support to the Convention worldwide and the positioning of transboundary water cooperation on the international agenda,

Recognizing the importance of holding the Meetings of the Parties in different geographic regions of the world, in particular in view of the Convention's globalization,

Committed to harmonizing and formalizing the procedure for proposing to host a session of the Meeting of the Parties in order to allow for improved planning of activities under the Convention and enable timely and effective preparations by the host country, as well as efficient use of the benefits associated with hosting,

1. *Decides* to establish a procedure for proposing the hosting of sessions of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention, as contained in the annex to the present decision;
2. *Urges* all Parties to consider hosting a session of the Meeting of the Parties;
3. *Decides* to review the procedure, in the light of experience gained, at its eleventh session.

Annex**Procedure for proposing the hosting of sessions of the Meeting of the Parties**

1. Twenty months after the last session of the Meeting of the Parties, the secretariat shall disseminate by electronic means to all focal points of Parties a call for proposals to host the following after the next session of the Meeting of the Parties.
 2. The call for proposals should:
 - (a) Recall the benefits for and obligations of the host country and explain the financial implications associated with hosting;
 - (b) Describe the elements to be included in the proposal, such as possible venue, possible level of representation by the host country, motivation of the country to host the session of the Meeting of the Parties, support to be provided and specific ideas, if any, on the organization of the session and relevant side events and back-to-back or side meetings;
 - (c) Encourage potential host countries to consider ways to reduce the environmental footprint of the session.
 3. Any proposal to host the following after the next session of the Meeting of the Parties shall be submitted to the secretariat no later than 30 months after the last session of the Meeting of the Parties.
 4. For any proposal that requires clarifications, the secretariat may get back to the Party concerned with a view to clarifying the essential aspects of the proposal.
 5. The Bureau shall monitor the proposals received on the basis of information provided by the secretariat. Should no proposal be received, the Bureau can decide to reach out to one or more Parties to encourage them to consider hosting.
 6. No later than six weeks before the next session of the Meeting of the Parties, the secretariat shall submit an overview of the proposals received, for consideration and decision by the Meeting of the Parties.
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