

**Opening speech by Mr Tõnis Mölder, Minister of the Environment of Estonia
at the 9th session of the Meeting of Parties to the Convention on the Protection and Use
of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes
Hybrid (Geneva and virtual), 29 September 2021**

Excellencies, ministers, delegations
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Firstly, I would like to begin my speech by thanking Kazakhstan and Mr Ardak Zebeshev for the immense work done during the chairmanship of the Water Convention over the last 3 years. We are grateful for efforts made in the implementation of integrated and intersectoral approach to water management at all levels, and the integration of climate change adaptation into river basin management planning, among others.

Furthermore, we can't leave unmentioned the significant progress made in the accession of countries to the Convention. Hence, my warmest welcome goes to Ghana and Guinea-Bissau, the new parties to the Water Convention. I think we all know how demanding but rewarding the process of accession can be. However, we can manage shared water resources effectively and in a sustainable manner only if we work together as a community.

We take water for granted and only realize its value and importance when problems start to occur – polluted drinking water, no water for irrigation and farming, water pollution contaminating seafood, just to mention a few. Water is also a potential driver of conflict, a potential cause of disaster and an essential precondition for development.

Water stress threatens communities directly and can contribute to the instability among the communities. As the last IPCC report warned us, we will also continue to see an increase in the frequency and intensity of extreme heatwaves, droughts and compound flooding – something many of us may have encountered this year. Adapting to climate change is not up to one country but requires redoubled efforts, enhanced cooperation and better financing to face the global challenges in different levels and across borders.

Such transboundary water cooperation on climate change adaptation is not only useful in preventing the negative impacts but can also make adaptation more effective and efficient. To respond effectively to these challenges, we need to have globally comparable, accessible and interoperable data.

It is hard to manage joint water resources if the related data on them is insufficient. Joint monitoring and assessment of transboundary waters, information and data exchange and its comparability are among the key pillars of cooperation. Decision-making needs comparable and harmonized methods of monitoring and assessing the transboundary basins.

We all should ensure that we actively exchange information on the shared information systems. We are thankful that the Water Convention is already providing guidance on this matter, and are hopeful they will continue to do so with all of our contributions.

As we also know, it is important to foster the achievement of SDG target 6.5.2 on transboundary water cooperation. I am impressed that 129 countries out of 153 sharing transboundary rivers, lakes or aquifers submitted their national SDG indicator 6.5.2 report for the second monitoring exercise. That is thirty more countries compared to the first exercise!

I am glad that the overall quality of national reports has improved and that the results have been made broadly available. This helps us to understand our current situation and continue our global discussion.

However, as demonstrated by the reports, cooperation in many transboundary basins is not adequate to tackle the existing and emerging challenges. So far, only 24 out of the 153 countries sharing transboundary waters have achieved target 6.5.2. Significant progress is therefore urgently required in order to ensure that all transboundary rivers, lakes and aquifers are covered by operational arrangements.

In addition, to make improvements, we should develop a digital solution for the SDG 6.5.2 reporting for more efficient data gathering and management. This solution should also align with the global environmental data strategy.

In order to achieve these goals and successful cooperation on transboundary water management I would like to stress that we must ensure proper funding for transboundary water cooperation. Furthermore, we must ensure proper financing of the Water Convention for the years to come.

The coming year marks the 30th anniversary since the adoption of the Water Convention and over these 30 years the Convention has proven effective. It has fostered the development of international agreements and establishment of joint bodies for transboundary water management as well as strengthening the cooperation on both political and technical levels. I would like to thank the Water Convention for promoting the sustainable management of shared water resources, the implementation of the SDGs, the prevention of conflicts and the promotion of peace and regional integration.

I am also very thankful for the transboundary water cooperation community for all the hard work done so far. However, as mentioned, we have a lot of challenges ahead. Estonia is pleased to continue working closely with the Water Convention, and to provide support in moving closer to the solutions needed. I wish you all a nice meeting, active discussions and adoption of valuable decisions to help tackle the challenges.

Thank you!