

Statement

by

Ms. Olga Algayerova

United Nations Under-Secretary-General

Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

at

9th session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention

High-Level Segment

Item 3: Special session: Water and peace

**Accelerating progress on transboundary water cooperation to achieve sustainable
development**

Progress on transboundary water cooperation (SDG indicator 6.5.2 reporting)

on 29 September 2021 at 15:00 CET

Executive Secretary Draft Speech for the HLS

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Gilbert, I thank you for highlighting the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework and congratulate UN-Water and you personally for efforts to raise the importance of water.

One area, in **drastic need of acceleration**, is transboundary water cooperation, as shown by the 2nd Progress report on SDG indicator 6.5.2 launched a few weeks ago. This report prepared **jointly** by UNECE and UNESCO, on the basis of data submitted by countries from all over the world, **takes stock of progress, highlights data gaps, and offers suggestions** for accelerating transboundary water cooperation.

This morning we heard that transboundary water cooperation contributes to peace and regional stability. However, the second progress report on 6.5.2 shows that **only 24 of the reporting countries achieved the SDG target in 2020**. This means we need to **more than quadruple progress on transboundary water cooperation until 2030**.

From a regional point of view, transboundary cooperation is most advanced in Europe, North America and Sub-Saharan Africa, regions.

In terms of **surface water** coverage, 41 countries report having all their transboundary river and lake basin area covered by operational arrangements, compared to 31 countries in 2017. This shows some progress, but it is not fast enough to meet the SDG target 6.5 by 2030.

Such progress rate may seem impossible to attain. Yet, there are some signs making me hopeful:

Firstly, despite the Covid-19 pandemic, an unprecedented number of countries sent national reports in 2020: 129 out of 153 countries sharing transboundary waters reported, 30 more countries compared to the first exercise in 2017. This represent over **80% of the concerned countries**, a staggering rate of response compared to the majority of other SDG indicators.

I sincerely **thank** all countries and partners that participated and contributed to the success of this second monitoring exercise.

Secondly, the results attract high attention: two weeks ago, the webinar to launch the 2nd Progress report gathered almost **500 participants** from **125 countries**. This interest shows not only that the topic is recognized as important but also that there is an earnest search for solutions.

Third, there has been a marked **improvement in the quality of data submitted through national reports**. Countries have worked closely with the two co-custodian agencies, UNECE and UNESCO, with partners, and, most notably, with their neighbouring countries – and this is already a positive cooperative outcome of the reporting. This exercise has led to **improved understanding** of gaps and needs.

Finally, and most importantly, **the reporting is leading to concrete progress on cooperation**. Some countries indicated that the process of developing SDG indicator 6.5.2 reports has **triggered cooperation at national or basin level**, such as in the Senegalo-Mauritanian Aquifer Basin mentioned by H.E. the Minister of Water and Sanitation from Senegal.

Several countries reported committing to **new arrangements** for transboundary water cooperation with their neighbours or being in the process of negotiating or updating agreements.

So how to upscale these positive developments in line with the acceleration framework?

Where arrangements are not operational, holding regular meetings or exchanging data between the riparian countries, can result in '**quick wins**' that accelerate achievement of SDG target 6.5.

But beyond quick wins, the report also points to the need to **address existing data gaps, upscale capacity development and tackle the bottlenecks in financing transboundary water cooperation**.

The global water conventions provide a key basis for the development of new or re-activation of existing arrangements.

More concretely, the Water Convention serviced by UNECE supports development and implementation of agreements through policy guidance, projects on the ground and capacity-building. The Convention's **global intergovernmental platform is a unique tool** to accelerate cooperation, through the exchange of experience, the review of progress and the realization of activities tailored to countries' needs.

Finally, technical and financial partners from the UN system and beyond all need to work together and **capitalize on the momentum and results of this monitoring exercise**. I thank UNESCO for the very good cooperation as co-custodian agency. I also thank regional partners such as ECA, ESCWA or CODIA for preparing **regional reports**. **I strongly encourage international financial institutions including the GEF and the World Bank to make use of the reports as an accountability system and to identify gaps requiring progress.**

I call upon countries and partners to act upon and **use the data** contained in the national reports. We need to work **together to strengthen transboundary water cooperation.**

I am very happy to be joined here by our partner, UNESCO, and to give the floor to Mr. Qu the Deputy Director General of UNESCO

Thank you