



## **Economic and Social Council**

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### **Economic Commission for Europe**

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

#### **Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management**

Sixteenth meeting\*

#### **Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment**

Sixteenth meeting\*

Geneva, 26–28 April 2021

### **Report of the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management and the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment on their third joint meeting**

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\* Third joint meeting of the two Working Groups.

## I. Introduction

1. The third joint meeting of the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management and the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment under the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) was held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, from 26 to 28 April 2021.<sup>1</sup>

### A. Attendance

2. The meeting was attended by delegations from the following countries: Afghanistan, Albania, Angola, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burkina Faso, Congo, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Czechia, Egypt, Estonia, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Gambia, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, Guinea-Bissau, Hungary, Iraq, Italy, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Liberia, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Mexico, Montenegro, Morocco, Myanmar, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Panama, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Senegal, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, State of Palestine, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

3. The European Union was also represented.

4. Also attending the meeting were representatives of the following international organizations: the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD); the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF); the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA); the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); UN-Water; and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

5. Representatives of the following intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private sector and academic institutions were present: the African Union; the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS); Brandenburg Technical University (Germany); the Central European University (Hungary); Chongqing University (China); the Central American Commission on Environment and Development (CCAD); the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat; the Council of Europe Development Bank; Ecopotamie (France); the Environmental Peacebuilding Association; the Geneva Water Hub/University of Geneva (Switzerland); the German Agency for International Cooperation; the German Jordanian University (Jordan); the Global Environment Facility (GEF); the Global Water Partnership (GWP); the Green Climate Fund (GCF); Human Right 2 Water (Switzerland); the International Groundwater Resources Assessment Centre (IGRAC); India Water Partnership; the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB); the International Network of Liberal Women (Netherlands); the International Meuse Commission; the International Network of Basin Organizations (INBO); the International Water Assessment Centre (IWAC); Kasdi Merbach University (Algeria); the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC); the Mekong River Commission (MRC); the Mono Basin Authority (ABM); the National University of La Plata (Argentina); the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE); the Sahara and Sahel Observatory (OSS); the Permanent Okavango River Basin Water Commission (OKACOM); the Scientific-Information Centre of the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination of Central Asia; Treasure of Permanent Values (Serbia); Tufts University (United States of America); the Turkish Water Institute; the Union for the Mediterranean secretariat; the University of Bologna (Italy); the University of East Anglia (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland); the Russian State Hydrometeorological University (Russian Federation); the University of Northumbria (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern

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<sup>1</sup> All relevant documentation for the meeting is available on a dedicated page of the Water Convention website (<https://unece.org/environmental-policy/water/events/3rd-Joint-meeting-WGIWRM-and-WGMA>).

Ireland); the Water Diplomacy Centre of the Jordan University of Science and Technology (Jordan); Women for Water Partnership (Netherlands); and the World Bank.

## **B. Organizational matters**

6. Ms. Heide Jekel (Germany), Co-Chair of the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management, Ms. Lea Kauppi (Finland), Co-Chair of both the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management and the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment, and Mr. Niokhor Ndour (Senegal), Co-Chair of the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment, co-chaired the third joint meeting.

7. Members of both Working Groups adopted the agenda (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2021/1–ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2021/1). The Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management adopted the report on its fifteenth meeting (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2020/2). The Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment adopted the report on its fifteenth meeting (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2019/2).

## **II. Recent developments related to transboundary water cooperation at the global level and under the Convention**

8. Ms. Kauppi explained that major global developments related to transboundary water cooperation needed to be taken into account in the Convention activities and future work programme.

9. The representative of UN-Water provided information about the organization of the United Nations Conference on the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Decade for Action, “Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018–2028 (New York, 22–24 March 2023), which would be preceded by a 1-day preparatory meeting in November 2022 in New York, regional preparatory processes to be facilitated by United Nations regional commissions, as well as a number of other preparatory meetings. He also reported on the outcomes of the high-level meeting on water convened by the President of the General Assembly (New York, 18 March 2021) and the developments regarding the Sustainable Development Goal 6 Global Acceleration Framework.

10. A representative of Finland reported on positive developments in transboundary water cooperation with the recognition of the importance of accelerating transboundary actions in support of Sustainable Development Goal 6 in the joint statement for the high-level meeting on water convened by the President of the General Assembly, co-signed by 161 countries.

11. A representative of Senegal reported on progress in the preparatory process of the Ninth World Water Forum (Dakar, Senegal, 21–26 March 2022) on water security for peace and development. He thanked the secretariat for coordinating action group 3B on implementing transboundary cooperation to foster peace and prevent conflicts.

12. The secretariat presented the preparatory process for developing the draft programme of work for 2022–2024 (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2021/4–ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2021/4) and detailed the outcomes of the survey carried out among focal points and partners for that purpose and general considerations that were taken into account for its development. She described the timeline for its finalization.

13. Ms. Kauppi explained developments related to the organization of the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention. Due to uncertainties related to coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic control measures, and according to the decision taken by the Bureau of the Convention, the meeting would be held from 29 September to 1 October 2021 in a hybrid format in Geneva, instead of in Tallinn as initially planned.

14. The Working Groups:

(a) Welcomed the organization of the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties from 29 September to 1 October 2021 in a hybrid format in Geneva and entrusted the secretariat, in cooperation with the Bureau, to make all necessary arrangements;

(b) Expressed deep gratitude to Estonia for all preparatory arrangements already made for hosting the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties;

(c) Invited Estonia to host a major Convention event in 2022 in Tallinn, such as the celebration of the Convention's thirtieth anniversary, possibly back-to-back with the Convention's meeting of the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management;

(d) Invited Estonia to continue to play a leading role in the preparations of the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties;

(e) Welcomed the Sustainable Development Goal 6 Global Acceleration Framework and encouraged countries and organizations to contribute to its implementation;

(f) Underlined the need to highlight the importance and benefits of transboundary water cooperation in the global water processes such as the United Nations Conference on the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Decade for Action, and requested the secretariat to contribute to those processes and to organize a preparatory regional/thematic event.

### III. Status of ratification

15. The secretariat informed the participants that, as of April 2021, the Convention had 44 Parties.

16. The representative of Iraq reported that a draft law on accession to the Convention was at the final stage of adoption, having passed its second reading in parliament. It was hoped that the accession process would be finalized before the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties. He underscored the complementarity of the Water Convention and the Convention on the Law of the Non-navigational Uses of International Watercourses Convention (Watercourses Convention) to guide transboundary water cooperation. He indicated that a national committee had established a list of needs for technical support to improve transboundary water cooperation, which would be shared with the secretariat in the near future.

17. The representative of Togo stated that accession had been approved by the ministerial cabinet and shared with the parliamentary commission for review and adoption. The accession process was expected to be finalized in September 2021.

18. The representative of Guinea-Bissau<sup>2</sup> reported that, based on previous efforts made in 2010 to accede to the Convention (which had not, at the time, been a global instrument), a new instrument of accession to the Convention had been prepared in December 2020, and Guinea-Bissau would proceed with the deposit of the accession instrument with the Secretary-General in the near future.

19. The representative of ESCWA congratulated Iraq on the progress made in the process of accession to the Convention, underlining that such a meticulous participative process could serve as a good practice example for other countries interested in the Convention. He confirmed the continuous commitment of ESCWA to supporting transboundary water cooperation and the Convention in the region and Iraq in its implementation. He reported on various actions taken by ESCWA supporting transboundary water cooperation, including supporting the development of the Arab Ministerial Water Council guiding principles for Arab cooperation in exploiting shared water resources, facilitating the exchange of experience in transboundary water cooperation, support to reporting on indicator 6.5.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals and the translation into Arabic of several publications.

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<sup>2</sup> Statement read out by the secretariat due to connection issues.

20. The representative of Switzerland, speaking on behalf of the Bureau, congratulated countries close to accession for their efforts and encouraged other interested countries to voice their needs for technical and legal assistance to the secretariat. She confirmed the continuous readiness of Switzerland to support the globalization of the Convention.

21. The representative of Women for Water Partnership encouraged the simultaneous promotion of both the Water Convention and the Watercourses Convention.

22. The Working Groups:

(a) Welcomed the significant progress in accession by Guinea-Bissau, Iraq and Togo, and encouraged the countries close to accession to finalize the process as soon as possible, in order to participate to the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties as Parties, if possible;

(b) Encouraged other countries to start or progress in their national processes of accession.

## **IV. Increasing awareness of and accession to the Convention and application of its principles drawing on the benefits of cooperation**

### **A. Increasing capacity for implementation of the Convention and supporting national processes towards accession**

23. The secretariat reported on activities carried out, together with Parties and partners, to build capacity and raise awareness of the Convention, such as:

- Contribution to online training sessions and support to courses focusing on transboundary water cooperation and international water law
- Support to regional initiatives (with regional organizations and river basin organizations) to promote transboundary water cooperation and raise capacity for accession to and implementation of the Convention
- Support to national processes of accession to the Convention
- The launch event of the publication *Frequently Asked Questions on the 1992 Water Convention with the Road map to facilitate accession processes*<sup>3</sup> (17 November 2020)

24. The secretariat introduced the UN-Water policy brief on “The United Nations global water conventions: Fostering sustainable development and peace”,<sup>4</sup> and presented future activities in that area to be carried out in 2021 and beyond.

25. The representative of ABM reported on the endorsement of a resolution on the accession of ABM member countries to the Water Convention by the ABM Council of Ministers at its third ordinary session (videoconference, 15 January 2021), inviting ABM member States to continue the process of accession to the Water Convention. That had prompted further efforts in Benin and Togo.

26. The representative of CCAD reported that transboundary water cooperation was one of the priorities in the Regional Environmental Framework Strategy for the period 2021–2025. CCAD was working with GWP-Central America, ECE and other partners to assist countries in Central America in realizing the benefits of transboundary water cooperation.

27. The representative of the ECOWAS Commission reported on the interest of several ECOWAS member States in accession to the United Nations global water conventions and expressed the hope that more countries would accede thereto. He mentioned plans to

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<sup>3</sup> United Nations publication, Sales No. E.20.II.E.34.

<sup>4</sup> UN-Water (Geneva, 2020).

cooperate with the secretariat on the organization of various events and to support accession processes in 2021–2022.

28. The representative of the Water Diplomacy Centre at Jordan University of Science and Technology reported on training sessions organized by the Centre, expressed appreciation for support by the secretariat and invited continued support for capacity-building on transboundary cooperation in the region.

29. The Working Groups:

(a) Reaffirmed their commitment to support accession processes through the provision of technical and legal assistance, including by sharing Parties' expertise in implementation;

(b) Expressed appreciation for the assistance provided by existing Parties to support accession;

(c) Thanked donors, who had provided resources to support activities promoting the Convention, and lead Parties and the Bureau for providing political leadership;

(d) Expressed appreciation for the support by global and regional organizations and river basin organizations, including the United Nations system, contributing to awareness-raising and increasing capacity for accession to and implementation of the Convention;

(e) Invited countries and partners to use and promote the UN-Water policy brief on "The United Nations global water conventions: Fostering sustainable development and peace" to build a better understanding of the usefulness and complementarity of both conventions;

(f) Decided to include "Increasing capacity for implementation of the Convention and supporting national processes towards accession" in the draft future programme of work for 2022–2024.

## **B. Promoting and communicating the benefits of transboundary cooperation, and supporting the development of agreements and the establishment of joint bodies**

30. The secretariat provided an update on activities implemented to support the development of agreements and the establishment of joint bodies, through: (a) basin-level projects supporting the development of agreements and strengthening of institutions in Eastern Europe and West Africa and activities supporting regional cooperation in Central Asia and Central Africa; and (b) the elaboration of a draft checklist on the development of agreements or other arrangements for transboundary water cooperation (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2021/INF.3–ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2021/INF.3), which had been made available for comments. Proposed future activities in that area of work beyond 2021 were also presented.

31. The representative of Guinea-Bissau<sup>5</sup> reported on the progress of the work in the Senegalo-Mauritanian Aquifer basin, with the creation and meetings of a Regional Working Group, the development of knowledge on the aquifer and the definition of a joint vision for transboundary cooperation in the basin. The representative of the Republic of Moldova highlighted significant progress in the Dniester River basin, where a joint Strategic Action Programme had been endorsed by riparian countries in March 2021, with the aim of restoring the river ecosystem and ensuring sustainable development in the basin.

32. The Working Groups:

(a) Invited countries and organizations to provide written comments on the draft checklist on the development of legal frameworks for transboundary water cooperation to the Water Convention secretariat by no later than 15 May 2021;

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<sup>5</sup> The presentation was made by the representative of Senegal, due to connection issues.

(b) Entrusted the secretariat, in cooperation with the lead Party and the Drafting Group, with the task of finalizing the publication, integrating the comments received, for adoption by the Meeting of the Parties at its ninth session, and of translating it and printing it in Arabic, English, French, Russian and Spanish;

(c) Decided to include “Promoting and communicating the benefits of transboundary cooperation” and “Supporting the development of agreements and the establishment of joint bodies” in the draft future programme of work for 2022–2024.

### C. Implementation Committee

33. The Chair of the Implementation Committee, Mr. Attila Tanzi, informed the Working Groups of the activities of the Committee to provide assistance to Montenegro and Albania in the framework of advisory procedure WAT/IC/AP/1.

34. The advisory procedure had been initiated by the Committee in early 2020 in response to a request from Montenegro related to its concerns about the possible transboundary impact of the planned construction of additional small hydropower plants on the Cijevna/Cem River in Albania. Albania had consented to participate in the procedure. The Committee had engaged in information gathering and held several separate online consultation sessions with Montenegro and Albania to provide them with legal and technical advice. At a joint session during the twelfth meeting of the Committee (Geneva, 4 and 5 February 2021), both countries had accepted and committed to implementing the advice of the Committee. Among other things, the Committee had advised the countries to: establish a joint technical working group on monitoring and assessment; develop and implement an information exchange protocol; and use the existing bilateral commission to exchange information on planned measures. Further to consultations with the countries concerned, the Committee had designated one member to assist the two countries on the technical aspects of its advice, as needed.<sup>6</sup>

35. Mr. Tanzi thanked Montenegro and Albania for their exemplary cooperation with the Committee. He emphasized that advisory procedure WAT/IC/AP/1 – the first of its kind – demonstrated the usefulness of the procedure as a tool of assistance and facilitation. He stressed that the Committee’s composition, including both lawyers and water experts, enabled it to deal with complex transboundary issues, and encouraged Parties to use the Committee and the advisory procedure.

36. The representative of Montenegro thanked the Committee for its commitment to assist both countries to overcome the issues related to the management of the transboundary Cijevna/Cem River basin and its help to both countries to better understand how to implement their obligations under the Convention.

37. The secretariat reminded the Working Groups of the procedure for nomination and election of candidates to the Committee in accordance with decision VI/1 on support to implementation and compliance.<sup>7</sup> The secretariat recalled that the term of office of four members of the Committee would come to an end at the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties. Parties were invited to nominate candidates for the Committee by 7 July 2021. The secretariat further recalled that members of the Committee should serve in their personal capacity and that, in the election of members, consideration should be given to the geographical distribution of membership and to the diversity of experience and expertise. Parties were encouraged to nominate female candidates.

38. The Working Groups:

(a) Welcomed the outcomes of the first advisory procedure carried out by the Implementation Committee and encouraged other Parties to make use of that useful mechanism;

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<sup>6</sup> ECE/MP.WAT/IC/2021/1, paras. 5–17.

<sup>7</sup> ECE/MP.WAT/37/Add.2, annex I.

(b) Recalled decision VI/1 on support to implementation and compliance, in particular the provisions related to the election of Committee members,<sup>8</sup> and the deadline of 7 July 2021 for the submission of candidates by Parties for election at the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties.

## **D. Implementation of the Strategy for the implementation of the Convention at the global level**

39. The secretariat presented progress in the implementation of the Strategy for the implementation of the Convention at the global level.<sup>9</sup> The representative of Slovenia reported on actions taken by Slovenia to support the implementation of the Strategy, including through promoting the Convention in events and mobilizing its diplomatic network to encourage countries accede to and implement the Convention.

40. The Working Groups:

(a) Welcomed the actions taken to date by the Bureau, Parties, partners and the secretariat to implement the Strategy for the implementation of the Convention at the global level;

(b) Encouraged the Bureau, Parties, partners and the secretariat to accelerate efforts in the implementation of the Strategy for a better management of transboundary waters worldwide.

## **V. Promoting an integrated and intersectoral approach to water management at all levels**

### **A. Water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus in transboundary basins**

41. The secretariat reported on progress achieved in applying the nexus approach in transboundary basins, notably the Drina and Drin River basins. The Chair of the Task Force on the Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystems Nexus, Mr. Seppo Rekolainen (Finland), reported on progress in the elaboration of the publication “Solutions and investments in the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus: A synthesis of experiences in transboundary basins” (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2021/INF.4–ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2021/INF.4), for the development of which the preliminary findings from a global questionnaire survey had been discussed at the sixth meeting of the Task Force (Geneva, 22 and 23 October 2020).<sup>10</sup> Mr. Rekolainen presented proposed future activities in that area of work beyond 2021.

42. The representative of Serbia requested ECE assistance to make better use of the Green Climate Fund to support joint actions on nexus issues and recommendations and to achieve transboundary benefits with Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro in the Drina River basin, promoting an intersectoral approach and connecting to climate change action.

43. The representative of North Macedonia underlined the importance of support to operationalize cross-sectoral regional strategies, through the implementation of the nexus road map for the Drin River Basin and the Drin Strategic Action Programme. He confirmed his country’s interest in continuing nexus activities in the Drin River basin.

44. The representative of GWP-Mediterranean highlighted that identification of concrete interventions of transboundary relevance, using the ECE framework for nexus solutions, was foreseen in the Drin and Drina River basins, to be followed by the preparation of project documents for priority interventions. He recalled that the nexus assessment in the North-Western Sahara Aquifer System had helped to identify the key resource interlinkages and

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, paras. 3–12.

<sup>9</sup> See ECE/MP.WAT/54/Add.2.

<sup>10</sup> See “Taking stock of nexus solutions and investments in transboundary basins: A synthesis”, under the “Presentations” tab, item 3. Available at <https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/task-force-water-food-energy-ecosystems-nexus>.



potential solutions to improve management, as well as to enhance transboundary cooperation and spur national actions.

45. The representative of the German Agency for International Cooperation reported on the Regional Nexus Dialogue Programme, which included a transboundary component. She explained that the second phase would focus on operationalizing a multisectoral approach, identifying and financing nexus solutions and showcasing their added value, including with the support of a nexus impact assessment toolkit that was to be produced. She indicated the Agency's intention to continue to work closely with ECE, including by contributing best practices.

46. The representative of IDB expressed appreciation for cooperation with the Convention, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, other partners and countries in Latin America on a regional webinar on nexus solutions and investments (Santiago, 26 February 2021). He underlined the need to upscale and mainstream the nexus approach into countries' programming and welcomed future cooperation for a nexus project in the Amazon River basin.

47. The Working Groups:

(a) Encouraged countries participating in nexus projects to make use of the nexus assessment results in developing policies and interventions and to explore operationalizing nexus and investments and mobilizing resources for their implementation, in collaboration with other sectors;

(b) Encouraged partners to apply and further develop the questionnaire on nexus solutions and investments;<sup>11</sup>

(c) Invited countries and organizations to provide written comments on the draft publication "Solutions and investments in the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus: A synthesis of experiences in transboundary basins" to the Water Convention secretariat by no later than 15 May 2021;

(d) Entrusted the secretariat, in cooperation with the lead Party and partners, to finalize the publication "Solutions and investments in the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus: A synthesis of experiences in transboundary basins" based on the comments received, and publish and print it in English, French, Russian and Spanish, with the English version available by the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties;

(e) Decided to include "Supporting intersectoral dialogues and assessments through the application of the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus approach" in the draft future programme of work for 2022–2024.

## **B. Supporting equitable and sustainable water allocation in a transboundary context**

48. The representative of Hungary, lead Party, presented an overview of the status of preparation of the full draft of the handbook on water allocation in a transboundary context (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2021/INF.5–ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2021/INF.5), and its main messages (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2021/7–ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2021/7). He detailed the role of the Expert Group on the Transboundary Water Allocation Handbook and partners in guiding the handbook's development and presented the outcomes of the third Expert Group meeting (Geneva, 20 and 21 October 2020). He reported on the timeline for the handbook's finalization for adoption by the Meeting of the Parties at the ninth session.

49. The representative of Finland expressed appreciation for the progress in the handbook's development and indicated availability to co-lead the water allocation work under the future programme of work for 2022–2024.

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<sup>11</sup> See [https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-08/Questionnaire%20on%20nexus%20solutions%20and%20investments\\_ENG.pdf](https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-08/Questionnaire%20on%20nexus%20solutions%20and%20investments_ENG.pdf).

50. The Working Groups:

(a) Invited countries and organizations to provide written comments on the English version of the draft handbook on water allocation in a transboundary context to the Water Convention secretariat by no later than 21 May 2021, while versions in French and Russian would be made available in June, with a later deadline for comments;

(b) Entrusted the secretariat, in cooperation with the lead Party and the Expert Group, to finalize the water allocation handbook based on the comments received and submit it in English, French, Russian and Spanish to the Meeting of the Parties for adoption at its ninth session and subsequently to publish and print it in those languages;

(c) Decided to include “Supporting equitable and sustainable water allocation in a transboundary context” in the draft future programme of work for 2022–2024.

### **C. Supporting National Policy Dialogues on Integrated Water Resources Management under the European Union Water Initiative**

51. The secretariat, on behalf of the European Union Water Initiative Plus (EUWI+) programme partners (ECE, OECD, Environment Agency Austria and the International Office for Water of France), updated the Working Groups on recent developments under the European Union Water Initiative (EUWI) National Policy Dialogues<sup>12</sup> on Integrated Water Resources Management and on Water Supply and Sanitation (facilitated by ECE and OECD) and in particular on the EUWI+ programme<sup>13</sup> in the Eastern Neighbourhood region and under the European Union-Central Asia Water, Environment and Climate Change Cooperation project.<sup>14</sup>

52. Partners highlighted the results of the Initiative achieved in 2020–2021 despite the current health crisis challenges and associated delays, and outlined planned activities for the project’s final stage. It was noted that current funding for the National Policy Dialogue process in the Eastern Partnership countries would end in 2021.

53. Representatives of Armenia, Kazakhstan, the Republic of Moldova and Tajikistan expressed appreciation for the continued support provided through EUWI+ and outlined recent and future activities supported through the overall framework of the National Policy Dialogues. They shared concrete achievements and results in the areas of strategic planning of water resources management, legal and regulatory reforms, river basin management planning, monitoring, transboundary water cooperation and the revision of targets under the Protocol on Water and Health. They highlighted the need for the continuation of that work and the importance of future support to achieve Sustainable Development Goals and continue approximation of water policies to the standards and principles of the European Union.

54. A representative of the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, European Commission, speaking on behalf of the European Union, expressed appreciation for the good results achieved by the Initiative’s partners and beneficiary countries, especially in ensuring multiple benefits for public health, human well-being, ecosystems and economic resilience. He highlighted the excellent leverage provided by the National Policy Dialogues in coordinating investment support and technical cooperation. He assured the Working Groups that water activities remained a priority for the European Green Deal and the “Building back better” approach and reported on plans for the next stage after EUWI+ finalization. He noted in particular that the European Union had already approved funding the follow-up action.

55. The Working Groups:

(a) Welcomed the progress on the National Policy Dialogues in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, expressed appreciation and gratitude for the support provided

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<sup>12</sup> Detailed information on National Policy Dialogues is available at <http://www.unece.org/env/water/npd/countrydialogues.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Detailed information on the programme is available at <https://euwipluseast.eu/>.

<sup>14</sup> Detailed information on the project is available at <https://wecoop.eu/>.

by the European Union, and encouraged the European Union and other donors to continue supporting financially the work of the National Policy Dialogues in those regions;

(b) Decided to include “Supporting National Policy Dialogues on Integrated Water Resources Management under the European Union Water Initiative” in the draft future programme of work for 2022–2024.

## **VI. Supporting monitoring, assessment and information-sharing in transboundary basins**

56. Ms. Kauppi reported on the outcomes of the Expert Meeting on Monitoring, Assessment and Data Exchange (online, 1 April 2021), including the decision taken not to update the technical transboundary monitoring and assessment guidelines previously developed under the Convention, but rather to focus on the exchange of experiences in data sharing, monitoring and assessment at the global level and to reflect new technological developments in the update of the *Strategies for Monitoring and Assessment of Transboundary Rivers, Lakes and Groundwaters*.<sup>15</sup> Mr. Ndour presented the proposed activities in that area for 2022–2024.

57. The representative of WMO reported on assistance to countries in building efficient and sustainable water information systems, including in transboundary basins. He reiterated the willingness of WMO to continue and reinforce collaboration with the Convention, especially in the framework of the Coalition for Water and Climate.

58. The Working Groups:

(a) Welcomed the outcomes of the Expert Meeting and decided to reflect the slight amendments decided by the Expert Meeting in the draft programme of work for 2022–2024;

(b) Decided to include “Supporting monitoring, assessment and information-sharing in transboundary basins” in the draft future programme of work for 2022–2024.

## **VII. Reporting on Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2 and under the Convention**

59. A representative of UN-Water presented the progress on the Integrated Monitoring Initiative for Sustainable Development Goal 6 (IMI-SDG6),<sup>16</sup> including the results of the 2020 Data Drive<sup>17</sup> and next steps.

60. Representatives of the ECE secretariat and UNESCO presented the initial outcomes of the second reporting exercise on Sustainable Development Goal Indicator 6.5.2 in 2020–2021 and the global reporting to the United Nations. As of 1 April 2021, 129 countries had submitted their national reports, out of the 153 countries sharing transboundary waters. While the rate of reporting and the quality of submitted data had improved, progress had to accelerate to ensure that all transboundary basins would be covered by operational arrangements by 2030. The reporting exercise had highlighted gaps in the knowledge on transboundary aquifers that also had to be addressed. Those data served as inputs to global reports on Sustainable Development Goals, including the “Report of the Secretary-General: Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals” and the United Nations Global Sustainable Development Goal Database.<sup>18</sup> The second report “Progress on Transboundary Water Cooperation – Global status of SDG indicator 6.5.2 and acceleration needs” would be launched in August 2021.

61. A representative of the ECE secretariat presented the outcomes of the second reporting exercise under the Water Convention, highlighting the improved timeliness and rate of

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<sup>15</sup> United Nations publication, Sales No. E.06.II.E.15.

<sup>16</sup> See <https://www.sdg6monitoring.org/about/integrated-monitoring-initiative>.

<sup>17</sup> See <https://www.unwater.org/publications/summary-progress-update-2021-sdg-6-water-and-sanitation-for-all/>.

<sup>18</sup> See <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/database/>.

submission of reports. All Parties had submitted their reports; the average value of indicator 6.5.2 for Parties was 80 per cent compared to the global average of 58 per cent, underscoring the benefits of cooperation under the Convention. The results of the reporting exercise would be presented in the second report on the implementation of the Water Convention, to be launched at the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties.

62. A representative of the ECE secretariat presented the progress in the development of an online reporting system, including the main requirements and desirable characteristics of such a system, together with a proposed timeline. A concept note on that topic would be presented at the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties, and it was expected that the new electronic system would be ready for the third reporting exercise in 2023.

63. The Working Groups:

(a) Welcomed the fact that all Parties had submitted reports under the Water Convention in the second reporting exercise in 2020–2021;

(b) Expressed appreciation and gratitude to the 129 countries out of the 153 sharing transboundary waters that had submitted reports to ECE and UNESCO in the second reporting exercise on Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2;

(c) Called on countries to make use of the reports in order to improve their transboundary cooperation, for example, by setting national or basin-wide targets;

(d) Invited partners, such as regional economic commissions, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations or basin organisations, to capitalize on the reporting on indicator 6.5.2 in order to continue building capacity on indicator 6.5.2 and for possible joint analysis of the reports at the regional level;

(e) Requested the secretariat to finalize and publish, together with UNESCO and in the framework of UN-Water, the second report “Progress on Transboundary Water Cooperation – Global status of SDG indicator 6.5.2 and acceleration needs” in Arabic, English, French, Russian and Spanish;

(f) Invited countries and organizations to provide, by no later than 15 June 2021, written comments on the draft second report on progress on transboundary water cooperation under the Water Convention, to be circulated by the secretariat in May 2021;

(g) Requested the secretariat to finalize the second report on progress on transboundary water cooperation under the Water Convention based on the comments to be received, and publish and print it in English, French and Russian, with at least the English version to be available by the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties;

(h) Entrusted the secretariat with the task of further developing the proposal for an online reporting system for consideration and endorsement at the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties;

(i) Decided to include “Reporting on Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2 and under the Convention” in the draft future programme of work for 2022–2024.

## **VIII. Facilitating financing of transboundary water cooperation**

64. The representatives of the Netherlands and Switzerland, co-lead Parties for the work on facilitating financing of transboundary water cooperation, presented the main outcomes of activities, including:

- The finalization of a background study on financing and funding transboundary water cooperation and basin development, providing a comprehensive overview of costs associated with water cooperation and of various existing financial sources.
- The outcomes of the Virtual workshop on financing transboundary water cooperation and basin development (Geneva, 16 and 17 December 2020).

65. They presented planned activities, including for the finalization of a publication on financing transboundary water cooperation and proposed activities in that area in the draft programme of work for 2022–2024.

66. A representative of GEF insisted on the importance of working on the topic of financing, highlighting the need to reflect regional priorities within national priorities and to foster interministerial coordination. The eighth replenishment cycle of GEF would be an opportunity to continue raising financial resources to support cooperation and development in transboundary basins.

67. The Working Groups:

(a) Entrusted the secretariat, in cooperation with the co-lead Parties and partners, with the task of finalizing the publication on funding and financing of transboundary water cooperation and basin development, and publishing and print it in English, French, Russian and Spanish for the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties;

(b) Decided to include “Facilitating funding and financing of transboundary water cooperation and basin development” in the draft future programme of work for 2022–2024.

## **IX. Adapting to climate change in transboundary basins**

68. The Co-Chairs of the Task Force on Water and Climate, Ms. Sibylle Vermont (Switzerland) and Mr. Niels Vlaanderen (Netherlands), reported on the progress of activities, including:

- The main outcomes of the fifth meeting of the Global Network of Basins Working on Climate Change Adaptation (26 February 2021), the Global workshop on building climate resilience through improving water management and sanitation at national and transboundary levels (29–31 March 2021) and the twelfth meeting of the Task Force on Water and Climate (31 March 2021).
- Contributions to global processes, such as under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), for example, to the meetings and technical documents of the Adaptation Committee, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, as well as to the Water Action Track of the Global Commission on Adaptation, for example, the Climate Adaptation Summit (online, 25 and 26 January 2021).
- Involvement in the GEF Dniester project and preparation for the Bug-Neman project as well as in capacity-building events on financing climate change adaptation.

69. They presented the activities on climate change adaptation proposed for the next programme of work for 2022–2024. The representative of INBO reconfirmed the commitment of INBO to cooperate with the Convention on transboundary climate change adaptation under its programme of work for 2022–2024, including for activities of the Global Network of Basins Working on Climate Change, and under the initiative “100 Water and Climate Projects for Africa”.

70. The representative of the MRC secretariat highlighted the importance of the Global Network for exchanging experience and sharing good practices and lessons learned. He reported that mainstreaming transboundary climate change adaptation into basin development and national climate policies was a priority for MRC.

71. The representative of GCF highlighted the importance of capacity-building in developing climate-related project proposals and implementing climate projects, as well as on need for a proper elaboration of project data on co-benefits and climate rationale. He emphasized that regional and sectoral linkages should be strengthened through better cooperation with National Designated Authorities, as well as broader cooperation with regional accredited entities.

72. The Working Groups:

(a) Welcomed the conclusions of the global workshop on building climate resilience through improving water management at national and transboundary levels (Geneva, 29–31 March 2021) and requested the secretariat to transmit those conclusions to UNFCCC and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, with a view to presenting them at the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to UNFCCC (Glasgow, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 31 October–12 November 2021);

(b) Appreciated the progress of the Global Network of Basins Working on Climate Change and encouraged more transboundary basins to join the Network;

(c) Encouraged countries to mainstream water and transboundary cooperation into their national climate-related documents such as, for example, Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), and to liaise with colleagues responsible for climate change issues and disaster risk reduction;

(d) Decided to include “Adapting to climate change in transboundary basins” in the draft future programme of work for 2022–2024.

## **X. Partnerships, communication and knowledge management**

### **A. Cooperation with UN-Water, global and regional partners and other multilateral environmental agreements**

73. Partners shared information about their activities related to transboundary water cooperation, including how they supported the implementation of activities of the programme of work of the Convention at the global and regional levels. A representative of the World Bank Group expressed the hope that work on transboundary water cooperation with the Convention would continue.

74. A representative of IDB expressed willingness to further strengthen cooperation with the Convention in many areas, including on activities focusing on bankable projects, nexus solutions and investments and the organization of a regional symposium on transboundary waters to be hosted by Bolivia.

75. A representative of GWP reported on the fruitful cooperation with the Convention on several activities, such as: awareness-raising on the Convention; nexus assessments in transboundary basins in the Mediterranean region; support to reporting on indicator 6.5.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals; and support to global workshops under the Convention.

76. The Chair of the Protocol on Water and Health reported on major developments under the Protocol and cooperation between it and the Convention.

77. Ms. Jekel expressed appreciation for the key added value of partnerships and cooperation with global and regional partners to strengthen transboundary water cooperation worldwide, and to support awareness-raising and implementation of the Convention and its principles.

78. The Working Groups:

(a) Encouraged partners to further identify possible synergies and join efforts with the Convention to support a better understanding and implementation of the Convention and its activities worldwide, including under its future 2022–2024 programme of work;

(b) Entrusted the secretariat, in cooperation with the Bureau, with the task of developing a draft decision on partnerships or more specific partnership decisions with particular organizations for adoption at the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties;

(c) Decided to include “Cooperation with UN-Water, global and regional partners and other multilateral environmental agreements” in the draft future programme of work for 2022–2024.

## **B. Activities of the Joint Ad Hoc Expert Group on Water and Industrial Accidents**

79. The Co-Chair of the Joint Ad Hoc Expert Group on Water and Industrial Accidents presented recent activities of the Group, namely the promotion and translation of guidance developed, communication with river basin organizations on preventing accidental water pollution and support to transboundary exercises.

80. The Working Groups decided to include “Activities of the Joint Ad Hoc Expert Group on Water and Industrial Accidents” in the draft future programme of work for 2022–2024.

## **XI. International Water Assessment Centre**

81. The representative of the International Water Assessment Centre, the Convention’s collaborative centre, reported on progress in implementation of the Centre’s work programme for 2019–2021 and presented main directions for future work in 2022–2024 to focus on: (a) supporting monitoring, assessment and information sharing in transboundary basins; (b) promoting an integrated and cross-sectoral approach to water resources management at all levels; and (c) reporting on indicator 6.5.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals and implementation of the Convention.

82. The Working Groups:

(a) Welcomed the activities carried out by the International Water Assessment Centre in 2019–2021 and thanked Kazakhstan for the support provided to the Centre;

(b) Entrusted Kazakhstan, in consultation with the Bureau and the secretariat, with the task of developing the draft work programme for the Centre for 2022–2024 and submitting it to the Meeting of the Parties for adoption at its ninth session.

## **XII. Financing of the Water Convention**

83. The secretary of the Convention presented the provisional report on contributions and expenditures from January until December 2020 (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2021/5–ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2021/5). The representatives of Germany and Slovenia reported on their countries’ commitment to contribute financially to the Convention. Ms. Kaupi insisted on the need for all Parties to contribute to the Convention’s work, both financially and in-kind.

84. The representative of Estonia presented, on behalf of the Bureau, the draft decision on targets for a more sustainable and predictable funding of the work under the Convention (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2021/8–ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2021/8), which had been developed to answer the request of the Meeting of the Parties, at its eighth session (Nur-Sultan, 10–12 October 2018), to prepare options for a more sustainable and predictable funding of the work under the Convention for discussion at the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties.<sup>19</sup>

85. The Working Groups:

(a) Expressed gratitude to all donors supporting the implementation of the Convention’s programme of work;

(b) Invited Parties, non-Parties and other donors to provide financial resources for the implementation of the programme of work, if possible, unearmarked;

(c) Endorsed the draft decision on targets for a more sustainable and predictable funding of the work under the Convention, and requested the secretariat to submit the draft decision to the Meeting of the Parties for adoption at its ninth session.

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<sup>19</sup> ECE/MP.WAT/54, para. 103 (h).

### **XIII. Future programme of work for 2022–2024**

86. The secretary of the Convention presented overall progress made in the implementation of the programme of work for 2019–2021, as well as related lessons learned. She provided an overview of the draft programme of work for 2022–2024, including its structure, planned activities, potential lead Parties for the various work areas and the resources needed for its implementation.

87. The director of the ECE Environment Division provided an update on the status of the process to create a new P-5 position from the United Nations regular budget as head of the water unit and secretary of the Water Convention, following the request made by the Meeting of the Parties at its eighth session.<sup>20</sup> The process had not been approved by the Economic and Social Council. Therefore, costs corresponding to a P-5 position had been included in the draft programme of work for 2022–2024, as proposed by the Bureau.

88. The Working Groups discussed how to mainstream gender into the future programme of work, with the aim of ensuring the participation of both women and men in transboundary water cooperation and decision-making.

89. The Working Groups commented on planned activities in the draft programme of work for 2022–2024. The representative of Ghana confirmed the willingness of Ghana to co-lead activity 1.1 on increasing capacity for implementation of the Convention and supporting national processes towards accession. The representative of Senegal confirmed the commitment of Senegal to co-chair the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment. Both offered to share experience with new Parties on developing national plans for the Convention's implementation.

90. The representative of the European Commission confirmed the strong support to the Convention, including through promoting it during high-level events and among delegations of the European Union in various countries. The Directorate-General for International Partnerships was considering further supporting the globalization of the Convention through a new project "Increasing awareness of and accession to the Convention". The representative of GWP confirmed the continuous support of GWP for the implementation of activities in various work areas. The representative of Guatemala acknowledged the ability of the draft programme of work to address countries' needs and insisted on the importance of focusing on regional integration approaches.

91. The representatives of Finland and Sweden confirmed the commitment of their countries to supporting the work of the Convention and insisted on the need to highlight the importance of biodiversity conservation and environmental protection in the draft programme of work for 2022–2024.

92. The Working Groups:

(a) Supported the mainstreaming of gender into the future programme of work for 2022–2024;

(b) Encouraged Parties to propose gender balanced nominations of focal points, delegates to meetings and candidates for the Bureau and the Implementation Committee;

(c) Agreed on the future institutional structure under the Convention and the mandate of the different subsidiary bodies to guide the implementation of the programme of work for 2022–2024 of the Water Convention;

(d) Invited countries and organizations to share any additional written comments on the draft programme of work for 2022–2024 to the secretariat by no later than 15 May 2021;

(e) Endorsed the draft programme of work for 2022–2024, and entrusted the Bureau of the Convention, with the support of the secretariat, with the task of integrating comments received and finalizing the draft programme of work for 2022–2024 for its submission to the Meeting of the Parties for adoption at its ninth session;

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., para. 103 (j).



(f) Invited Parties, non-Parties and other donors to provide financial resources for the implementation of the draft programme of work, and to indicate any such pledges at the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties.

#### **XIV. Preparations of the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties**

93. The representative of Estonia recalled the decision of the Bureau to hold the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties in Geneva in a hybrid format, rather than in Estonia as originally planned. He described the preparations for the ninth session undertaken by Estonia, the secretariat and the Bureau. He presented the draft programme of the ninth session, consisting of: (a) a high-level segment on “Water and Peace”; and (b) a general segment that would review progress under the programme of work and discuss future activities. He emphasized the important role of the Meeting of the Parties in setting the priorities for the work under the Convention for the upcoming period 2022–2024. He reported on a briefing for Permanent Missions to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva planned for 21 June 2021 about the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties. He added that Estonia was committed to hosting an in-person event in Tallinn in 2022 to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention.

94. The Working Groups:

(a) Welcomed the preparations for the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties by Estonia, the secretariat and the Bureau;

(b) Encouraged Parties, non-Parties and organizations to participate in the meeting at a high level and to mobilize their Permanent Missions in Geneva for participation, as appropriate;

(c) Entrusted the Bureau, in cooperation with the secretariat, with the task of developing rules for decision-making at the hybrid session.

#### **XV. Possible hosting of the tenth session of the Meeting of the Parties**

95. The secretariat recalled the possible procedure for proposing to host future sessions of the Meeting of the Parties and presented the elements for a draft decision of the Meeting of the Parties on the issue (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2020/4). The secretariat recalled that said document had already been presented to the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management at its fifteenth meeting. Participants had then been then invited to provide comments to the document; no comments had been received.

96. The secretariat also recalled that 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) had been disseminated to Parties on 11 June 2020. Interested Parties had been invited to submit proposals by 30 April 2021. The secretariat reported that no proposals had been received by the secretariat as of 28 April 2021. The representative of Slovenia stated that his country was considering hosting the tenth session of the Meeting of the Parties. The Co-Chair thanked the representative of Slovenia for the positive information.

97. The Working Groups:

(a) 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;

(b) Requested the secretariat to submit, by no later than 6 weeks before the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties, an overview of the proposals received with regard to hosting the tenth session of the Meeting of the Parties, for consideration and decision by the Meeting of the Parties at its ninth session.

## **XVI. Dates and venue of the next meetings of the Working Groups**

98. Ms. Jekel thanked Ms. Kauppi, for whom the current meeting was her last, for co-chairing the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management and the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment for many years.

99. The Co-Chairs closed the meeting at noon on Wednesday, 28 April 2021.

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