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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

Implementation Committee

Thirteenth meeting

Geneva, 20 and 21 May 2021

Report of the Implementation Committee on its thirteenth meeting

I. Attendance and organizational matters

1. Due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the thirteenth meeting of the Implementation Committee under the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention), originally scheduled to take place in Geneva, on 11 and 12 March 2021, was held on 20 and 21 May 2021 through videoconference.

2. The following members of the Implementation Committee took part in the meeting: Mr. Kari Kinnunen; Mr. Johan Lammers; Mr. Stephen McCaffrey; Mr. Martins Paparinskis; Ms. Anne Schulte-Wülwer-Leidig; Mr. Pedro Cunha Serra; Mr. Attila Tanzi (Chair); Mr. Ivan Zavadsky; and Ms. Dinara Ziganshina.

3. The Implementation Committee adopted its agenda as set out in document ECE/MP.WAT/IC/2021/2, with adjustments indicated in the provisional time schedule.¹

4. The Chair recalled that the Committee had approved the report of its twelfth meeting (ECE/MP.WAT/IC/2021/1) through electronic means on 3 March 2021.

II. Requests for advice, submissions and Committee initiatives

Advisory procedure WAT/IC/AP/1 (Montenegro and Albania) (closed)

5. The Committee decided to hold the discussions under the item in a closed session.

6. The Chair recalled that, at its twelfth meeting (Geneva, 4 and 5 February 2021), the Committee had held a joint consultation session with the participation of Montenegro and Albania and had provided them with its legal and technical advice under advisory procedure WAT/IC/AP/1. The Chair reported that he had sent letters to the countries on 12 February

¹ Documents for the meeting are available on a dedicated web page of the Convention's website (<https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/thirteenth-meeting-implementation-committee>).



2021, summarizing the Committee's advice and inviting them to update the Committee on developments in implementing the Committee's advice at the thirteenth meeting.

7. On 20 May 2021, the Water Convention focal points from Montenegro and Albania briefed the Committee on progress made with the implementation of the Committee's advice:

(a) Both countries reported that the meeting of the bilateral commission established under the intergovernmental Framework Agreement on Mutual Relations in the Field of Management of Transboundary Waters (2018) had taken place on 15 April 2021. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it had been held in an online format. Implementation of the Committee's advice with regard to cooperation in the Cijevna/Cem River basin had been among the agenda items of the commission's meeting. The bilateral commission had decided that both countries should nominate their experts to the joint technical working group tasked to put in place a monitoring and assessment regime and to report on its activities to the bilateral commission. Both countries expected that the process of nomination would be completed quickly. According to Albania, it had been agreed to organize a joint meeting to define specific tasks in June 2021;

(b) Montenegro additionally informed the Committee that the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management had prepared information for the Government suggesting that the Government should nominate experts to the joint technical working group. Montenegro also communicated the intention of the countries to consult the Committee on the terms of references of the joint technical working group once experts had been nominated. With regard to the scope and extent of joint monitoring activities, according to Montenegro, the reports of the joint technical working group should be prepared jointly and be available to both countries. Those reports could also be shared with the Committee;

(c) Albania additionally informed the Committee that it was in the process of identifying experts for the joint technical working group. Experts were expected to come from the National Environment Agency, the Water Resources Management Agency, the Geological Service and the National Agency of Natural Resources under the Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy;

(d) Albania also reported that the bilateral commission had decided on the continuous exchange of information regarding the project "Design and testing of a multipurpose (transboundary) groundwater monitoring network (Albania and Montenegro)" supported by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The bilateral commission had also agreed on the establishment of technical groups for implementation of the Adaptation Fund/United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) project "Integrated climate-resilient transboundary flood risk management in the Drin River basin in the Western Balkans". In addition, at the commission's meeting, the countries had discussed possibilities to apply for joint projects for the promotion of tourism and water resources management for Lake Skadar/Shkodra and the Buna River basin;

(e) Furthermore, Albania reported that, during the bilateral commission's meeting, Montenegro had requested information about all investments in the vicinity of transboundary rivers and Lake Skadar/Shkodra from Albania and that Albania had informed the relevant institutions regarding that request.

8. The Committee expressed appreciation for positive developments that had taken place in the cooperation of Montenegro and Albania in conformity with the Committee's advice since its twelfth meeting. The Committee members emphasized the importance of regular meetings to establish a dialogue and gradually progress towards higher levels of cooperation. It was also stressed that the meetings of the bilateral commission should be used to exchange information, in particular on planned measures.

9. Following the information on the departure of the Montenegrin focal point under the Water Convention at the end of May 2021, the Committee decided to send a letter to the Permanent Mission of Montenegro to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva to highlight the importance of the timely nomination of a new focal point to ensure continuity and effectiveness of the implementation of the Committee's advice.

Submissions and Committee initiatives

10. The Committee noted that no submissions had been received prior to the meeting and that no Committee initiatives had been undertaken by the Committee.

III. Outcomes of the second reporting exercise under the Convention

11. The secretariat presented the draft of the second progress report on implementation of the Convention. The second progress report was a synthesis report prepared by the secretariat on the basis of national reports submitted by Parties to the Convention in the period 2020–2021 as part of the second reporting cycle on indicator 6.5.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals and under the Convention (for Parties). The secretariat invited the Committee to provide feedback on the draft synthesis report. The national reports submitted by Parties to the Convention had been made available to the Committee at an earlier stage, in March 2021.

12. The Committee discussed the outcomes of the second reporting exercise and the draft synthesis report. It expressed great appreciation for the fact that all Parties to the Convention had submitted their national reports in the second reporting cycle and that the quality and the timeliness of submission of the reports had improved.

13. The Committee also praised the synthesis report for its valuable and comprehensive analysis. It noted that keeping the format of the synthesis report in the second reporting exercise similar to that used in the pilot reporting exercise was useful. It commended the additional chapter on selected basin analysis for reflecting the multiple levels of transboundary water cooperation.

14. The Committee noted the findings of the synthesis report that implementation of the Convention – in particular of article 9 (1), on the conclusion of agreements – with regard to transboundary groundwaters deserved special attention. It also emphasized that, in most cases, groundwater was connected with surface waters – a phenomenon that should not be underestimated in terms of its significance.

15. The Committee recommended including an additional recommendation in the synthesis report to emphasize the importance of participation of local stakeholders (for example, municipalities) in decision-making on transboundary water cooperation.

16. The Committee emphasized that the reporting mechanism was essential for the Committee to carry out its functions, as it provided useful information on the state of implementation of the Convention and challenges faced by the Parties. The Committee agreed that the information presented to it did not justify the Committee engaging, at the current stage, in a Committee initiative in accordance with section VII of annex I to decision VI/1 (ECE/MP.WAT/37/Add.2), and that it remained open to receiving requests for assistance or submissions from Parties facing difficulties in implementing and/or complying with the Convention.

IV. Promotion of the mechanism to facilitate and support implementation and compliance

17. Mr. Paporinskis informed the Committee about the online conference “The Implementation Committee of the Water Convention” hosted by University College London (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) and co-organized with the University of Bologna (Italy), the University of the Pacific (United States of America) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) on 22 April 2021. Over 180 participants from 57 countries had taken part in the conference, which had consisted of two panels. Panel 1 had introduced the participants to the Convention and its Implementation Committee. Panel 2 had debated the role of the Implementation Committee in international dispute settlement. The Committee’s advisory procedure had been praised for allowing for effective approaches to the prevention and effective resolution of water disputes. Mr. Paporinskis thanked Ms. Ziganshina and Mr. Cunha Serra for giving presentations at the

conference and Mr. Tanzi for co-chairing the conference together with him (Mr. Paparinskis). A video recording, presentations of the participants and a bibliography on the Convention were available online.²

18. The Committee thanked Mr. Paparinskis and University College London for the thorough preparation and effective organization of the event.

19. The Committee discussed opportunities for strengthening cooperation with development partners, in particular multilateral and regional development banks, and agreed to explore such opportunities in more detail in the next intersessional period.

V. Report of the Committee to the Meeting of the Parties at its ninth session

20. On the basis of a draft prepared by the Chair and the secretariat, the Committee discussed its report to be submitted to the Meeting of the Parties at its ninth session (Geneva and hybrid, 29 September–1 October 2021) in accordance with decision VI/1, annex I, paragraph 44.

21. The Committee agreed on the content of its report and on the inclusion of a draft decision on general issues of implementation for possible adoption by the Meeting of the Parties. It entrusted the secretariat to prepare and circulate the revised version of the report, which the Committee would subsequently approve through electronic communication means.

VI. Programme of work and calendar for the next meeting(s)

22. The secretariat informed the Committee of the dates provisionally booked for its future meetings: 24 and 25 February 2022 and 1 and 2 December 2022.

23. The Committee decided to include on the agenda of its next meeting an update on advisory procedure WAT/IC/AP/1 and consultations with a representative of a development bank.

VII. Presentation of the main decisions taken, modalities for preparation of the meeting report and closing of the session

24. The Committee entrusted the secretariat to prepare and circulate the draft report on its thirteenth meeting, which the Committee would subsequently approve through electronic communication means.

² See www.ucl.ac.uk/laws/events/2021/apr/implementation-committee-water-convention.