



PART 1: OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE OF THE ASSESSMENT

6	Chapter 1	OBJECTIVES
8	Chapter 2	SCOPE

OBJECTIVES

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6 BACKGROUND

7 THE WATER CONVENTION

BACKGROUND

Transboundary waters play a significant role in the UNECE region. From the 56 countries in the region, all but the three island states (Cyprus, Iceland and Malta) share water resources with one or more other countries. Sometimes, the transboundary river basins extend outside the UNECE region, and include parts of Afghanistan, China, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mongolia and other countries.

According to information provided by Member States, in the UNECE region, about 160 major transboundary rivers form or cross the boundary between two or more States. Approximately 100 of them drain directly into regional seas, lakes or desert sinks. About 40 major transboundary lakes shared by two or three countries, and around 150 important transboundary aquifers, are located in these basins. The actual number of these transboundary rivers, lakes and aquifers is much higher as countries only reported transboundary waters that have essential water management functions (see inventory of transboundary rivers and lakes in annex 1).

Some of the 100 first-order transboundary basins are very small (60 to several hundred km²), as it is the case with several water bodies shared by Ireland and the United Kingdom, Italy and San Marino, Finland and the Russian Federation, and Turkey and Bulgaria. Other basins cover an area of up to and over 2,000,000 km², as is the case with the basins of the Ob, Yenisey and Amur rivers.

In many cases, a country that is upstream of another country in one basin is downstream of that (or a third) country in another basin. This shows the close hydrological interdependency of countries in transboundary basins. The reasonable and equitable use of transboundary waters, and water sharing between countries and among different sectors within the countries, are therefore particular challenges.

THE WATER CONVENTION

The 1992 UNECE *Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes* (Water Convention) was adopted with the aim of fostering sustainable management of shared water resources, creating a framework for stable and predictable cooperation and thus increasing security in the region. Under the Convention, the Parties shall take all appropriate measures to prevent, control and reduce the pollution of waters causing or likely to cause transboundary impact. They shall also ensure that transboundary waters are used with the aims of ecologically sound and rational water management, the conservation of water resources and environmental protection. Moreover, the Parties are obliged to ensure that transboundary waters are used in a reasonable and equitable way, and to ensure the conservation and, where necessary, restoration of ecosystems.

Riparian Parties (Parties bordering the same transboundary waters) have specific obligations. For example, they shall establish and implement joint programmes for monitoring the conditions of transboundary waters, including floods and ice drifts. Moreover, these riparian Parties shall, at regular intervals, carry out joint or coordinated assessments of the conditions of transboundary waters and the effectiveness of measures taken to prevent, control and reduce transboundary impact. The results of these assessments shall be made available to the public.

Accurate assessments of the status of water resources and the magnitude of water problems are essential for preparing proper policy actions at the local, national and transboundary levels. Hence the Parties to the Water Convention decided at their third meeting (Madrid, 26-28 November 2003) to carry out an assessment of the status of transboundary waters with the aim to evaluate compliance with the obligations of the Convention and to assess progress achieved in improving the status of transboundary waters in the region. The Parties to Water Convention mandated its Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment with the preparation of the Assessment, under the leadership of Finland.

At their fourth meeting (Bonn, 20-22 November 2006), the Parties to the Convention undertook a major review of the assessment of rivers and lakes in the EECCA region. The present Assessment was finalized and adopted by the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment at its eight meeting in Helsinki on 26-27 June 2007.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

The Assessment highlights the achievements in integrated water resources management at the transboundary level, and sheds light on the effectiveness of the measures taken to prevent, control and reduce transboundary impact. It develops knowledge and understanding necessary for further action, and is thus designed for decision-makers. It identifies situations of water crisis and provides guidance for strategic investment by prospective donors.

The specific objective of the Assessment is to serve as a point of reference for such measures by Governments, international river basin organizations (joint bodies), other international organizations and relevant non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to improve the status of transboundary waters and agree on joint measures related to integrated water resources management.

The Assessment also underlines the challenges that countries still face in operating adequate monitoring systems, examining and counteracting existing pressure factors on these water bodies, improving the ecological and chemical status of transboundary waters, and providing information on trends. The Assessment also sheds light on the effectiveness of the measures taken and provides the grounds for further measures to prevent, control and reduce transboundary impact.