

It gives me great pleasure to introduce *Our waters: joining hands across borders - first assessment of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters*, which is a major undertaking by Parties and non-Parties to the Water Convention under the auspices of the Convention's Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment.

Under the Water Convention, the Parties shall take all appropriate measures to prevent, control and reduce pollution of waters causing or likely to cause transboundary impact. They shall also ensure that transboundary waters are used with the aim of ecologically sound and rational water management, conservation of water resources, and environmental protection. Moreover, Parties are obliged to ensure that transboundary waters are used in a reasonable and equitable way, and also to ensure the conservation of and, where necessary, the 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.

The assessment of resources is of fundamental importance, as it forms the basis for rational decision-making. The need for this kind of assessment was brought up more than five years ago. There was general consensus among Parties that in order to be able to assess compliance with the obligations of the Convention and to evaluate progress achieved in improving the status of transboundary waters in the region, we needed information on pressures, status and trends. Hence at their third meeting (Madrid, 26-28 November 2003), the Parties to the Water Convention mandated its Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment with the assessment of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters in the UNECE region, under the leadership of Finland.

Following the Convention's obligations, the Assessment aims to provide a clear overview of transboundary water resources. It highlights the achievements and challenges that countries still face in operating adequate monitoring systems, examines existing pressure factors on transbound-

ary water bodies, and provides information on trends in their ecological and chemical status. 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.

The Assessment is the first comprehensive analysis of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters in the UNECE region. Special attention was given to countries in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia and in South-Eastern Europe, as these countries face the biggest challenges to reducing transboundary impact. This first Assessment has been prepared for the Sixth Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe" (Belgrade, 10-12 October 2007), and it supplements and specifies other reports prepared for this Conference by the European Environment Agency and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Working closely with Parties and non-Parties, the Assessment monitors water problems and lays out challenges for the future to promote informed decision-making on the management of shared water resources. It identifies the most urgent actions needed to improve the status of transboundary waters in different parts of the UNECE region. It thus helps to focus activities under the Water Convention and other process in the region (e.g. the European Union Water Initiative) to the priority needs of transboundary water management, particularly in countries with economies in transition.

This first Assessment has been a major undertaking by UNECE countries - both Parties and non-Parties - and the secretariat of the Water Convention. More than 150 experts on rivers, lakes and groundwaters have been involved in the assessment, either by providing information or peer-reviewing pre-assessments.

I want to express my sincere thanks to Rainer Enderlein for his deep commitment to this work, first working in the UNECE secretariat and later on for the Finnish Environment Institute. The dedication and resolute work of Pertti Heinonen, Mari Heinonen and Olli-Pekka Pietiläinen of the Finnish Environment Institute, of John Chilton (British Geological Survey) and Peter Rončák (Slovak Hydrometeorological Institute), and of Ella Behlyarova and Francesca Bernardini (UNECE secretariat) have also been fundamental to achieving this ambitious task.

This first Assessment should be seen as a pioneering work initiating a long-term process. The future assessments should provide a periodic review, continuously updated, designed to give an authoritative picture of the state of the transboundary water resources in the UNECE region and to provide the basis for continuous bilateral and multilateral cooperation under the Water Convention. The second Assessment is scheduled for production in five years, and preparations will have to start very soon to allow enough time for data collection and synthesis.

I wish that the examples of these achievements, based on good cooperation among riparian countries, encourage all Parties and non-Parties to join their forces for the sustainable use of their waters.



**Lea Kauppi**

Chairperson of the Water Convention's  
Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment



## PREFACE