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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

Tenth meeting

Geneva, 24 and 25 June 2015

Report of the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management on its tenth meeting

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I. Introduction

1. The tenth meeting of the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management was held on 24 and 25 June 2015 in Geneva, Switzerland. All relevant documentation is available on a dedicated page of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) website for the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention).¹

A. Attendance

2. The tenth meeting was attended by delegations from the following ECE countries: Albania, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Montenegro, Netherlands, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. The European Union was also represented.

3. Delegations from the following States not members of ECE took part in the meeting: Algeria, Bangladesh, Chad, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Honduras, Iraq, Jordan, Mexico, Mongolia, Myanmar, Thailand, and Tunisia.

4. Also attending the meeting were representatives of: the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention); the Economic Community of Central African States; the Global Environment Facility (GEF) International Waters Learning Exchange and Research Network (IW:LEARN); the Global Water Partnership Mediterranean; the Intergovernmental Authority on Development; the International Commission for the Congo-Oubangui-Sangha Basin (CICOS); the International Union for Conservation of Nature; the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD); the Permanent Okavango River Basin Water Commission; the Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe; the Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia; the Regional Environmental Centre for the Caucasus; the Scientific Information Centre of the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination in Central Asia; the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP); UN-Water; and the Water Convention's Implementation Committee.

5. Representatives of the following non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and academic institutions were present: the German Agency for International Cooperation; the International Network of Basin Organizations (INBO); the Stockholm International Water Institute; the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF); and Zoi Environment Network.

B. Organizational matters

6. The Working Group adopted the agenda for its tenth meeting, as set out in document ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2015/1, as well as the report of its ninth meeting (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2014/2). The co-Chairs explained that the main objective of the tenth meeting was to review the implementation of the Convention's programme of work for 2013–2015 (ECE/MP.WAT/37/Add.1) and to prepare the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties (Budapest, 17–19 November 2015), in particular the draft

¹ See www.unece.org/env/water/10th_wgiwrm_2015.html.

programme of work for the Convention for 2016–2018, which Parties were expected to adopt in Budapest.

II. Progress in the ratification process, including ratification of the amendments to open the Convention to countries outside the region

7. The secretariat reported on the status of ratification of the Water Convention and its Protocols and amendments. A representative of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia said that the country's law on accession to the Convention had been approved by the Government recently and would now be submitted to parliament. The process should be finalized in advance of the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties. He thanked the secretariat for the support provided, including the organization of two national workshops.

8. A representative of Kazakhstan announced that the country had completed the process of accession to the amendments to articles 25 and 26. A representative of Ukraine reconfirmed his country's support to the global opening of the Convention. Ukraine had nearly completed the amendment ratification process in 2014, and had submitted the draft law to parliament, but then, because of the elections, had had to restart the process again. Ukraine would do everything possible to finalize the process before the next session of the Meeting of the Parties. The co-Chairs underlined the importance of early accession to the amendments and offered help in that process.

9. The representative of Costa Rica mentioned that the country's possible accession to the Convention would be discussed once problems with neighbouring Nicaragua were resolved, and thanked the secretariat for the support provided, such as a presentation on the Convention in November 2014.

10. The representative of Chad said that the Government was in the process of studying the possibility of acceding to the Convention. The representative of Egypt expressed the hope that the Convention's opening would soon be operational, and said that Egypt would then consider accession.

11. The representative of Côte d'Ivoire reported that his country was very interested in the Convention, and requested an information workshop on the Convention as well as the translation and publishing of the *Guide to Implementing the the Water Convention* in French.

12. The representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo said that the country was also interested in the Convention. In that regard, a workshop or presentation on the Convention would facilitate the decision-making on possible accession. The delegate of Bangladesh said that his country was not yet considering accession, but was already trying to implement the Convention's provisions in its cooperation with India.

13. The representative of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development expressed interest in learning more about the Convention. Finally, the representative of the Ramsar Convention conveyed the Ramsar Convention's support for the opening of the Convention, and hoped for a fully synergistic and cooperative relationship in the future.

14. Owing to the overwhelming interest in the Convention expressed at the meeting, the Bureau Chair suggested preparing a strong decision on the global opening for adoption at the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties. The Working Group:

(a) Expressed concern that the delay in ratifying the amendment to articles 25 and 26 of the Convention by several Parties had meant that the deadline set by the Meeting of the Parties in its decision VI/3 had not been met, i.e., for the amendment to be ratified by the end of 2013;

(b) Called upon Belgium and Ukraine to ratify the amendments by the end of August 2015, so that by the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties the amendments would be in force for all Parties that had adopted them in 2003;

(c) Reconfirmed that the global opening of the Convention remained a high priority, and requested the Bureau to prepare a strong and ambitious draft decision on that issue for adoption at the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties.

III. Support to implementation and accession

A. Assistance supporting accession to and implementation of the Convention through projects on the ground and capacity-building

15. The ECE Regional Adviser on Environment informed the Working Group about the progress achieved in different projects supporting implementation of the Convention in countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

16. Representatives of the concerned countries underlined the usefulness and importance of such projects to support implementation of the Convention. The representative of Georgia reported that the draft bilateral agreement with Azerbaijan on the Kura River Basin was currently undergoing interministerial consultations, and requested support for an additional high-level meeting to discuss the agreement.

B. Implementation Committee

17. A representative of the Implementation Committee reported on the results of the Committee's fourth and fifth meetings, held on 4 December 2014 in London and on 5 and 6 May 2015 in Vienna, respectively, as well as the preparation of the Committee's report to the Meeting of the Parties. The Committee regretted that, following a submission by an NGO from Kazakhstan, and the Committee's subsequent request for information from Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation on the matter, the Committee had not received any reply from Kazakhstan and had only had a general response from the Russian Federation. The Committee still hoped that adequate information would be submitted by those countries. The representative of Germany also expressed concerns about the lack of response by some countries and suggested that Parties be encouraged to cooperate with the Committee through a decision by the Meeting of the Parties.

18. The secretariat recalled that four members of the Implementation Committee had to be elected at the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties, following the procedure outlined in the Committee's rules of procedure (see ECE/MP.WAT/37/Add.2, decision VI/1, annex, paras. 3–8). Nominations should be submitted by no later than 25 August 2015 and should take due account of the legal and technical expertise required (see *ibid.*, para. 4). Representatives of Germany and Italy announced that their countries intended to renominate their current members.

C. Exchange of experience of joint bodies

19. Representatives of the lead Parties for the work on the exchange of experience of joint bodies, Germany and Finland, presented the draft principles for effective joint bodies for transboundary water cooperation (WG.1/2015/INF.2), which had been revised to take account of comments received following the Working Group's previous meeting. The representatives of Switzerland, Romania and INBO welcomed the draft principles and supported their submission to the Meeting of the Parties for adoption. The representative of

Georgia said that the draft principles would be used in preparing the regulations for the joint commission to be created after signing the agreement with Azerbaijan. Georgia also intended to start negotiations with Armenia on transboundary water management, and would use the principles in that context.

20. A delegate from Italy suggested that the draft decision on the principles to be adopted by the Meeting of the Parties should reflect the fact that countries and joint bodies from outside the ECE region had participated in its preparation. The Bureau was requested to prepare such a draft decision.

21. The Working Group:

(a) Expressed appreciation for the Draft principles for effective joint bodies for transboundary water cooperation and invited Parties, non-Parties and other stakeholders to submit any additional comments on the revised text by 15 July 2015;

(b) Entrusted the Bureau and the lead Parties with the finalization of the draft principles, taking into account the comments received, and requested the secretariat to submit them as an official document for adoption by the Meeting of the Parties at its seventh session.

D. Consideration of the need for reporting under the Convention

22. At its ninth meeting (Geneva, 25–26 June 2014), the Working Group had decided to create a core group to elaborate, with the help of the Bureau and the secretariat, a proposal for a possible reporting mechanism under the Water Convention. The core group had met twice (Geneva, 15–16 December 2014 and 30–31 March 2015). The Chair of the core group presented the core group’s proposal.

23. The representative of Germany welcomed the template for reporting and the fact that it closely followed the wording in the Convention. The representative of the Implementation Committee said that the Committee considered a reporting system to be crucial for it to carry out its functions

24. The representative of UNESCO welcomed the proposal to introduce a reporting mechanism under the Convention, and in particular that groundwater was explicitly included. However, it should be clarified that groundwater is included in the term “basin” throughout the document or at the very beginning of section II (e.g., question 5). It was also necessary to distinguish clearly between connected and non-connected groundwaters.

25. The representative of the Czech Republic welcomed the reporting template and the introduction of such a mechanism. Following a question by the delegate of Italy on how to coordinate responses between riparian countries in shared basins, the core group Chair responded that, in the Core Group’s view, reports should be submitted by the countries individually, although they could be coordinated with riparian countries, if appropriate and possible.

26. Delegates from Luxembourg, Sweden, the Netherlands and Hungary reported that, while their countries had initially been hesitant about the introduction of a reporting mechanism, they were now satisfied with the current draft template, and advocated for a pilot reporting exercise. The representative of Sweden asked what should be the minimum size of a transboundary basin for reporting purposes, and recommended including a note on how to determine that in the reporting template itself, for example at the beginning or under the comments section. The representative of the Netherlands suggested aligning the reporting with the OECD Water Governance Initiative and with the possible future reporting on the new Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) on water.

27. The representative of Greece highlighted that in many basins countries do not conclude official transboundary agreements, but had less formal arrangements, and that the template should include the possibility of reporting on such arrangements. That argument was supported by the Working Group. It was stated that, in line with the Convention, that was the intention in the template.

28. A representative of WWF suggested referring to the Ramsar Convention as well as other multilateral environmental agreements in relevant questions. There should also be a question on national monitoring in the first part. Additionally, in her view flooding was not addressed in section I, question 1 (f), but only water quality issues.

29. In response to a question from the delegation of Romania, the secretariat observed that, as foreseen in the programme of work, the secretariat would prepare the overall implementation report based on national reports.

30. The representative of Uzbekistan encouraged non-Parties to also fill out the template and suggested including that issue in the draft decision on reporting. The representative of the Scientific Information Centre of the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination in Central Asia argued that reporting could also be useful for non-Parties, e.g., to prepare for accession, as it constituted a sort of checklist on the Convention.

31. The delegate of Switzerland expressed support for the introduction of reporting, for a pilot reporting exercise and for a three-yearly reporting frequency. Introducing a reporting scheme would add value to the Convention as it would both show the status of implementation as well as uncover challenges to be considered in future work programmes.

32. The representative of the Ramsar Convention suggested that the reporting results be passed on to the GEF secretariat for their future funding decisions, and also highlighted the importance of links to reporting under other related multilateral environmental agreements, such as the Ramsar Convention. However, he regretted that the current draft template did not contain enough questions on information- and data-sharing, transparency and availability of information to the public, in line with the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters.

33. The representative of CICOS suggested that river basin commissions could play a role in the coordination of responses. The delegate of France underlined the need for a simple reporting scheme, for a pilot reporting exercise and for ensuring a close linkage to the SDG process. Representatives of Finland, Serbia, Romania and Turkmenistan supported reporting every three years, starting with a pilot reporting exercise.

34. The Working Group:

(a) Expressed appreciation for the work accomplished by the core group on reporting;

(b) Decided to submit a draft decision on the introduction of a reporting mechanism, starting with a pilot reporting exercise, to the Meeting of the Parties at its seventh session;

(c) Entrusted the Bureau and the Chair of the core group, with the support of the secretariat, to prepare such a draft decision and to revise the template for reporting in accordance with the comments received.

E. Promoting ratification of the Protocol on Civil Liability and Compensation for Damage Caused by the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents on Transboundary Waters

35. The secretariat informed the Working Group that there had been no progress with regard to the Protocol on Civil Liability and Compensation for Damage Caused by the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents on Transboundary Waters to the Water Convention and the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents (Industrial Accidents Convention).

IV. Water in the post-2015 development agenda

36. A representative of Ireland presented the latest developments regarding the negotiations on the post-2015 development agenda and the SDGs. The chief technical adviser of UN-Water reported on how UN-Water had contributed to that process and to raising the importance of water on the agenda. Of particular concern was the fact that the discussions on indicators, which were currently ongoing, were mainly in the hands of statisticians, and that the indicators being proposed might change the nature of the SDG on water. There should therefore be closer contacts between water experts and statisticians. UN-Water was setting up a possible approach for monitoring and reporting on the water SDG.

37. The Working Group:

(a) Welcomed the current prominent place dedicated to water in general and transboundary cooperation in particular in the draft targets of the future SDGs, and called upon Parties, non-Parties and other stakeholders to advocate for maintaining that important role for water and transboundary cooperation also in the indicators;

(b) Underlined the relevance of the Water Convention as an intergovernmental framework to support the implementation of the expected SDG on water, in particular for the transboundary dimension. The Water Convention's work programme should reflect the universal and comprehensive nature of the SDGs, which was already the case for the proposed future activities on the nexus and the National Policy Dialogues, as well as for activities on water and climate change adaptation.

V. European Union Water Initiative and National Policy Dialogues

38. The Working Group was informed about recent developments under the European Union Water Initiative National Policy Dialogues on Integrated Water Resources Management (facilitated by ECE) and Water Supply and Sanitation (facilitated by OECD). The importance of political leadership and political support was underlined, as well as the need for a tailor-made approach for each region and country. Tailored approaches and political leadership and support had led to new expressions of interest in NPDs from countries, such as Belarus, Ukraine and possibly Uzbekistan.

39. The representative of Georgia reported that the National Policy Dialogue in her country was also addressing transboundary cooperation. In addition, it had resulted in the preparation of draft targets for the Protocol on Water and Health and had provided support for starting the ratification process of the Protocol, including the preparation of the draft law and by-laws. The Dialogues also covered issues of the European Union Association agreement and provided a platform for coordinating the work of different groups or

stakeholders on water in the country. A representative of Kyrgyzstan also expressed appreciation for the National Policy Dialogue process.

40. The representative of the European Union confirmed that the EU would continue to support and provide funding to the National Policy Dialogues. There was, however, a need to build on lessons learned, such as the importance of donor coordination.

41. The Working Group:

(a) Welcomed progress achieved by the countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia with regard to developing and reforming policies, plans and programmes for integrated water resources management;

(b) Reconfirmed the importance of the National Policy Dialogues in that regard, including their contribution to the application of the Convention and its Protocol, the progressive approximation to European Union legislation and the enhancement of transboundary cooperation;

(c) Expressed appreciation for the fact that National Policy Dialogues had been a powerful tool for developing activities in other programme areas of the Water Convention on the ground and for strengthening their impacts and sustainability;

(d) Thanked Romania and the European Commission for their leadership and support to that area of work, and also thanked other donors supporting the implementation of the National Policy Dialogues and the secretariat for its facilitative role;

(e) Entrusted the secretariat to submit a progress report on the National Policy Dialogues to the Meeting of the Parties.

VI. Quantifying the benefits of transboundary cooperation

42. Opening the discussion on activities to quantify the benefits of transboundary cooperation, a representative of Estonia, the lead Party for that work area, presented the outcomes of the workshop, “Beyond water: regional economic integration and geopolitical benefits of transboundary water cooperation (Tallinn, Estonia, 28–29 January 2015). The secretariat then introduced the latest draft of the policy guidance note on identifying, assessing and communicating the benefits of transboundary water cooperation (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2015/4).

43. The Working Group expressed satisfaction with the content of the policy guidance note and highlighted the value of its collaborative development process. Participants also provided specific comments on the text. The representative of Greece highlighted the need to clarify the meaning of “security” in the guidance note, which should not be exclusively assimilated to situations of tension. The representative of the Netherlands suggested the addition of a case study on the benefits of cooperation for climate change adaptation measures as well as adding more links and references. The Chair observed that the executive summary could be used for the purpose of communication with high-level decision makers.

44. Several participants expressed interest in possible future activities to assess the benefits of transboundary cooperation, including the undertaking of a comprehensive benefit assessment of the Okavango River Basin, following up on a preliminary study, by the Permanent Okavango River Basin Water Commission and the use of the guidance note to assess the benefits of regional integration by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development. The representative of the Stockholm International Water Institute, speaking also on behalf of the UNDP Shared Waters Partnership, confirmed the Institute’s willingness to support the promotion and application of the guidance note in the future. The

representative of UNESCO enquired about the possibility of developing a similar document focusing on the benefits of cooperation on transboundary groundwaters.

45. The Working Group:

(a) Endorsed the policy guidance note in terms of general content, taking into account also the comments at the meeting, and invited Parties, non-Parties and other stakeholders to submit any other final comments by 15 July 2015;

(b) Decided to submit the policy guidance note to the Meeting of the Parties as a printed publication instead of as an official document in order to increase its impact and to promote its early dissemination and application;

(c) Entrusted the lead Party for the activity, Estonia, and the Bureau, with the support of the secretariat, to finalize the text of the policy guidance note, and requested the secretariat to arrange for its publishing and printing before the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties.

VII. Adapting to climate change in transboundary basins

46. The co-Chairs of the Task Force on Water and Climate, the Netherlands and Switzerland, reported on progress on water and climate activities, in particular the outcomes of the seventh meeting of the Task Force on Water and Climate (Geneva, 13 October 2014) and the fifth workshop on adaptation to climate change in transboundary basins (Geneva, 14–15 October 2014). They also presented the new publication, *Water and Climate Change Adaptation in Transboundary Basins: Lessons Learned and Good Practices* (ECE/MP.WAT/45), developed in cooperation with INBO and launched at the Seventh World Water Forum in April 2015 in the Republic of Korea. The secretariat then briefed participants on the outcomes of the Second Workshop on Transboundary Flood Risk Management (Geneva, 19–20 March 2015) organized by Germany, the Netherlands, ECE and the World Meteorological Organization.

47. A representative of the Republic of Moldova presented the pilot project “Climate Change and Security in the Dniester River Basin” as a good example of transboundary cooperation since it contains implementation of concrete measures on the ground, and hoped that the Water Convention would further support project activities. A representative of Ukraine said that Ukraine had taken into consideration the lessons and recommendations from the Strategic Framework for Adaptation to Climate Change for the Dniester Basin. Ukraine was very interested in developing a river basin management plan for the Ukrainian part of the Dniester River Basin, as had already been done for the Moldovan part of the Basin; however, Ukraine would need support from donors and international organizations to prepare the plan.

48. A delegate of Azerbaijan reiterated the country’s request to the Water Convention for a similar project on transboundary climate change adaptation in the Alazani Basin, shared by Azerbaijan and Georgia, which had been under discussion by several donors, but had so far not materialized.

49. A representative of Belarus briefed participants on a pilot project on river basin management and climate change adaptation in the Neman River Basin, underlined the importance of the strategic framework for basin adaptation developed under the project and expressed the hope for a follow-up project to continue transboundary cooperation in the basin. A representative of Lithuania emphasized that through that project Belarus had provided inputs into the Basin Management Plan for the Lithuanian part of the Basin and a draft bilateral technical protocol had been developed, including the foreseen establishment of a river basin commission. He requested further assistance from the Water Convention.

50. The representative of CICOS invited the Water Convention secretariat to a meeting to be organized by CICOS in January 2016 in order to raise stakeholders' awareness of climate change issues at the local and regional level.

51. Representatives of France and INBO shared information on a new initiative under the Lima-Paris Action Agenda — the “Global Pact on climate change and basins” — which would draw on the main messages of the recently published ECE/INBO publication, *Water and Climate Change Adaptation in Transboundary Basins: Lessons Learned and Good Practices*. At the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (Paris, 30 November–11 December 2015), basin organizations, countries and donors would be invited to sign that Pact and to speak about their current and planned future initiatives on climate change adaptation. The Pact would be presented during the action day on resilience, when half a day would be dedicated to water with attention to transboundary issues. The Working Group stressed the importance of showcasing the work of the Task Force on Water and Climate at that meeting.

52. The representative of Switzerland welcomed the Global Pact initiative, which would make it possible to disseminate information on the work of the Task Force on Water and Climate, but underscored that the process should be transparent and the draft Pact should be shared as soon as possible. The secretariat announced that it would support the initiative of France and INBO through existing mechanisms, namely the global network of basins working on climate change adaptation.

53. A representative of Honduras reported on initiatives between El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua for providing water to vulnerable groups in transboundary basins, and said she would disseminate information on the Convention upon her return to her country.

54. The co-Chairs of the Task Force on Water and Climate presented the proposal for future work for 2016–2018 and the draft vision for future work on climate change adaptation under the Water Convention (WG.1/2015/INF.3), which had been prepared at the request of the Bureau. The Working Group:

(a) Welcomed the publication *Water and Climate Change Adaptation in Transboundary Basins: Lessons Learned and Good Practices* and recommended it for further use;

(b) Expressed its appreciation to all countries, experts and donors, which had provided input to the publication;

(c) Requested the secretariat to translate and print the publication in the French, Russian and Spanish languages;

(d) Invited comments on the draft vision for future work on climate change adaptation under the Water Convention by 15 July 2015;

(e) Requested the secretariat and the lead countries to revise the draft strategy for future work in line with the comments received and to submit it to the Meeting of the Parties at its seventh session for information. The Meeting of the Parties would then entrust the Task Force on Water and Climate with the finalization of the document and its possible submission for adoption at the next Working Group Meeting in 2016.

VIII. Thematic assessment of the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus

55. The Chair of the Task Force on the Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystems Nexus from Finland provided an update on the development of the nexus assessment in transboundary

basins, presenting the main results and lessons learned and outlining the plans in that area of work for 2016–2018.

56. The secretariat reported on the findings from the basin assessments of the Alazani/Ganykh (shared by Azerbaijan and Georgia), the Sava (shared by Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia), the Syr Darya (shared by Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) and the ongoing assessment of the Isonzo/Soča Basin (shared by Italy and Slovenia). Representatives of the countries concerned by the basin assessments commented.

57. The representative of Kyrgyzstan appreciated the Syr Darya assessment, as it promoted a shared understanding about the most important challenges in the Central Asia region. He underlined, in particular, the importance of hydropower for development. The report needed further editing and the official comments of Kyrgyzstan would be sent after the meeting. The representative of Uzbekistan stated that his country had not participated in the assessment and could not agree on some points of the Syr Darya assessment. In his view, the report should reflect the need to ensure river flow despite the construction of hydropower facilities, and that increased efficiency and small-scale hydropower would provide useful alternative energy sources. The representative of Kazakhstan expressed support for the nexus assessment, but highlighted that the following aspects should be covered in more detail: water quality; environment; management of regional waters; increasing cooperation and trust; and improving economic links between countries. He also expressed a wish that Uzbekistan would cooperate in the assessment of the Syr Darya, making the analysis more complete.

58. Regarding the nexus assessment of the Sava Basin, the representative of Serbia welcomed the whole process, saying it had been very useful and the communication had been good, but regretted the insufficient participation from other sectors, especially from agriculture and energy, due to, for example, the specific competence of the International Sava River Basin Commission and capacity constraints in the national administration. She called for the organization of an additional national workshop to discuss the findings also with the involvement of the energy sector.

59. The representative of Georgia recalled that many lessons had been learned from assessing the pilot basin, the Alazani/Ganykh, and that the work had been limited by data constraints, and therefore requested a continuation of the nexus assessment, namely the completion of the analysis and the development of solid recommendations for the future.

60. The Italian delegation to the Convention on the Protection of the Alps confirmed that Italy would continue to support the process of assessing the Isonzo/Soča Basin and reported having involved various sectors in providing information to the assessment questionnaire after the assessment workshop had been held.

61. Concerning proposed future assessments, the representative of Tunisia emphasized the importance of assessing the water-food-energy nexus to support transboundary cooperation on the North West Sahara Aquifer System, where energy and water demands were increasing. Highlighting the challenges posed to the aquifer system by heavy groundwater abstraction and the consequent decline in groundwater levels, as well as pollution and rural exodus, the representative of Algeria also expressed interest in the nexus approach. That could contribute to furthering cooperation. The representative of the Global Water Partnership Mediterranean confirmed that a nexus assessment of the North West Sahara Aquifer System would be undertaken, financed by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency.

62. The CICOS delegate said that the nexus assessment had led to the recognition that agriculture and food security measures should be reflected in their framework for water management. He was interested to learn more about the experience in the Sava Basin. The

representative of Switzerland observed that a nexus assessment could be a means of implementing several targets of the proposed SDG on water, and encouraged countries to embark on such an exercise.

63. The Chair of the Task Force noted that it could be valuable to prepare a survey of ongoing nexus activities. He welcomed the suggestions for further nexus work put forward by several countries, such as Kazakhstan and Georgia, which would, however, require additional resources. In response to a question he also clarified that the assessment methodology could be easily adapted to small basins and transboundary aquifers. Finally, he expressed regret that Uzbekistan had not participated in the Syr Darya assessment despite the many efforts made to involve the country.

64. The Working Group:

(a) Welcomed the progress in the preparation of the thematic assessment of the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus, noting that it was an innovative programme area, attracting a lot of interest internationally;

(b) Reviewed and endorsed in terms of general content the outline of the final publication on the nexus assessment (WG.1/2015/INF.10), the assessment methodology (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2015/8), the chapters on selected aspects of the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2015/6) and the major findings of the basin-level assessments (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2015/7), as well as took note of the basin assessments for the Alazani/Ganykh, Sava and Syr Darya (WG.1/2015/INF.4, WG.1/2015/INF.5 and WG.1/2015/INF.6);

(c) Took note of the preliminary findings from the assessment of the Isonzo/Soča Basin, invited Italy and Slovenia as well as other concerned stakeholders to provide the necessary input for completion of the assessment, and entrusted the secretariat to submit the draft assessment to the Meeting of the Parties as an official document;

(d) Invited Parties, non-Parties and other concerned stakeholders to provide comments on the above documents, in particular any necessary corrections to the basin assessments, by 15 July 2015;

(e) Expressed its appreciation to the authorities and experts from the riparian countries, joint bodies and other members of the Task Force on the Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystem Nexus who had contributed to the assessments;

(f) Expressed its appreciation to the experts from the Central European University, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Kazakh-German University, the Swedish Royal Institute of Technology, the University of Geneva and the Water Convention secretariat for the substantive work done;

(g) Thanked the Governments of Finland, Germany and Switzerland for the funding provided;

(h) Further thanked all the partners, notably FAO, the Global Water Partnership Caucasus and Central Asia, the International Sava River Basin Commission and the UNDP/GEF project “Reducing Transboundary Degradation in the Kura-Aras River Basin”;

(i) Reconfirmed that to facilitate and accelerate improvement of intersectoral coordination and related transboundary cooperation in basins around the world, the thematic assessment would be presented as an official printed publication and not as an official document to the Meeting of the Parties. The English original would be presented to the Meeting of the Parties, with French and Russian translations to follow;

(j) Entrusted the secretariat, in cooperation with the Bureau and the Chair of the Task Force, to address the comments received, if any, integrate the different chapters and

finalize the thematic assessment for publication, including by performing the needed editing and shortening to meet editorial requirements, and subsequently to design, publish and print the assessment for submission to the Meeting of the Parties at its seventh session.

IX. Opening the Convention to countries outside the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe region

A. Building capacity on the Convention outside the region and promoting exchange of experience worldwide

65. The Working Group was informed about the outcomes of events where the opening of the Convention had been promoted, in particular the Ibero-American Water Directors Conference (Panama City, 18–21 November 2014) and the General Assembly of the African Network of Basin Organizations (Addis Ababa, 12–14 February 2015), as well as the two national capacity-building workshops on the Convention in Lebanon (Beirut, 4–5 February 2015) and Jordan (Amman, 10 March 2015) organized at the request of countries. At all the events, which detailed the obligations and benefits of becoming Parties to the Convention and explained the complementarity with the 1997 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Non-navigational Uses of International Watercourses (Watercourses Convention), countries had displayed growing interest in the Water Convention as well as the need for further capacity-building efforts.

66. In a panel discussion, the representatives from Iraq, Jordan and Tunisia confirmed the interest of their countries in considering accession to the Water Convention, and highlighted the usefulness of national workshops on the Convention to support national decision-making processes in that regard. The representatives of Algeria and Cote d'Ivoire expressed interest in having similar national workshops organized in their countries to raise awareness among decision makers on the Convention. The representative of the Economic Community of Central African States suggested promoting the Convention through regional events organized by the regional economic communities in Central Africa.

67. The representative of Mexico noted that a workshop on the general principles of cooperation in transboundary watercourses would be held in Mexico on 31 September and 1 October 2015 to build capacities on the two Water Conventions in Central and Latin America.² Similarly, the representative of Mongolia announced that a workshop on the two Conventions would take place in Mongolia, and that the text of the Water Convention was being translated into Mongolian.

68. The representative of UNESCO reported on activities and efforts undertaken to provide assistance to interested United Nations Member States in implementing the Water Convention in relation to transboundary groundwater, in accordance with decision VI/5 of the Meeting of the Parties.

B. Synergies with the 1997 Convention on the Law of the Non-navigational Uses of International Watercourses

69. The Chair recalled the entry into force of the Watercourses Convention on 17 August 2014, and underlined the need for synergies in implementing the two

² Due to a change in government in Mexico, the workshop was postponed to spring 2016.

Conventions. The representative of WWF presented the progress with ratifications of the Watercourses Convention, in particular in Gambia, Japan, Senegal and Tanzania.

70. The Working Group was then informed about different initiatives undertaken to promote the Conventions, including:

(a) The informal gathering of Parties to the Watercourses Convention, to be held on 15 and 16 September in Paris;

(b) The new publication, *The Economic Commission for Europe Water Convention and the United Nations Watercourses Convention: An analysis of their harmonized contribution to international water law*³ (ECE/MP.WAT/42), by the Chair of the Implementation Committee, which demonstrated the added value of ratifying both Conventions. A short executive summary of the study would be developed and translated. Germany offered support to translate the executive summary in other languages;

(c) The new book, *The UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes: Its Contribution to International Water Cooperation*,⁴ the result of a collaborative effort of legal experts, representatives of Parties to the Convention, secretariat staff and others.

C. Cooperation with the Global Environment Facility

71. The representative of IW:LEARN presented the latest developments in the GEF Strategy for the International Waters area and the start of the next five-year phase of IW:LEARN project (2015–2019), which would include working with ECE. The Working Group:

(a) Encouraged interested non-ECE countries to participate in activities under the Convention, to disseminate the information obtained in their home countries and start a national or subregional discussion on the relevance of and potential accession to the ECE Water Convention;

(b) Invited countries that had already started the national discussion on accession to report on their progress at the Meeting of the Parties;

(c) Encouraged donors to make available additional funding for involving non-ECE countries in the Convention's activities and for promoting the Convention, and expressed appreciation to those donors already providing funds for the opening of the Convention's membership to non-ECE member States;

(d) Encouraged Parties, especially those that were also Party to the Watercourses Convention, to continue discussions on how to ensure synergies between the two Conventions, and underlined the importance of the synergistic implementation of the two global conventions;

(e) Asked the secretariat to arrange, as needed, for translation of official Convention documents into Arabic and Spanish as well as to provide Arabic and Spanish

³ The publication is available from <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=39028&L=0>.

⁴ Attila Tanzi and others, eds., *International Water Law Series*, No. 4 (Leiden, the Netherlands, Brill-Nijhoff Publishers, 2015). More information on the book is available from <http://www.unece.org/info/media/news/environment/2015/new-book-on-the-contribution-of-the-unece-water-convention-to-international-water-cooperation/new-book-on-the-contribution-of-the-unece-water-convention-to-international-water-cooperation.html>.

interpretation during official meetings of the Convention's bodies, subject to availability of extrabudgetary funding.

X. Promotion of the Convention and establishment of strategic partnerships

72. The Working Group was briefly informed about the Water Convention's involvement in international events, such as the World Water Weeks in 2014 and 2015 (Stockholm, 31 August–5 September 2014 and 23–28 August 2015) and the Seventh World Water Forum in April 2015. Subsequently, the Working Group discussed how to improve cooperation with partners, including the Protocol on Water and Health. In that connection, progress achieved under the Protocol was briefly presented, and the Protocol was welcomed as a tool to facilitate implementation of the draft SDG on water.

73. The co-Chair of the Joint Expert Group on Water and Industrial Accidents from Hungary informed participants about the plans and progress achieved by the Group in the development of a checklist for contingency planning (WG.1/2015/INF.7) and its testing in a transboundary case. The checklist had been endorsed by the Conference of the Parties to the Industrial Accidents Convention at its eighth meeting (Geneva, 3–5 December 2014). The Working Group took note of the checklist and entrusted the secretariat to edit it and submit it to the Meeting of the Parties at its seventh session.

74. The secretariat also reported on the contributions of ECE to the activities of UN-Water, and in particular to the UN-Water Thematic Priority Area on Transboundary Waters through the preparation of good practices on that topic. Subsequently, the Working Group was informed about the next and final reporting on the Astana Water Action to take place at the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy's special session in February 2016. The Working Group encouraged all countries and organizations that had submitted actions as part of the Astana Water Action initiative to contribute to the final reporting on the initiative and submit the reports by 15 September 2015 to the secretariat.

XI. International Water Assessment Centre

75. The representative of Kazakhstan announced that the country was preparing an offer for hosting the International Water Assessment Centre, but needed to resolve some internal issues relating to the funding of the centre.

XII. Programme of work for 2013–2015

76. The Working Group reviewed overall progress made in the implementation of the Convention's programme of work for 2013–2015 (ECE/MP.WAT/37/Add.1) and decided that no changes were needed. The secretariat presented lessons learned from the implementation of the current programme of work and informed the Working Group also about the financial situation of the Convention's trust fund, its evolution over recent years and its future perspectives.

XIII. Programme of work for 2016–2018 and preparations for the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties

77. The secretariat presented the draft programme of work for 2016–2018 prepared by the Bureau (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2015/L.1). Participants discussed the programme of

work, including potential lead countries for the various work areas, the resources needed for its implementation and partners. The Working Group also discussed the future institutional structure under the Convention and the mandate of the different subsidiary bodies to guide the implementation of the 2016–2018 programme of work.

78. A representative of Serbia confirmed the country's interest in a project on transboundary groundwater with Hungary and Romania. A delegate of Finland affirmed that Finland was considering leading programme area 1.3, on developing a concept for a possible future comprehensive assessment.

79. Representatives of Finland and Germany asked that the joint bodies' workshops (area 1.4 in the draft work programme) should be more specific and included under other programme areas, in which case Germany and Finland would contribute and possibly lead them.

80. Delegates of Estonia and Serbia expressed interest in co-leading programme area 2 on assessing benefits of transboundary cooperation and Switzerland offered to provide some funding. The representative of WWF said that WWF Danube might be able to provide expert support for the application of the guidance note. Also, representatives of France and the Netherlands expressed interest in supporting or contributing to that area of work, e.g., by hosting a workshop. The representative of the Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia offered to provide good practice experiences from small basins in Central Asia.

81. Regarding the proposed future work on the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus, Finland confirmed its readiness to co-lead and provide partial funding, but encouraged other countries to co-lead. The representative of Switzerland announced that the country would examine whether it could provide funding, e.g., for a nexus assessment in Central Asia, as long as all riparian countries were on board.

82. The representative of the Global Water Partnership Mediterranean said that the Partnership was planning to organize national, regional and transboundary policy dialogues on the nexus in South-Eastern Europe, which could help to disseminate results of the Sava assessment. The Working Group agreed to include that activity in the Convention's new programme of work.

83. The representative of the Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia expressed interest in applying the nexus methodology in small river basins in Central Asia and committed to share the results with the secretariat and Working Group in the future. The staff member from the Ramsar Convention secretariat announced that they would examine how that Convention could cooperate, e.g., in Central Asia, in order to include Ramsar sites in the analysis.

84. Representatives of the Netherlands and Switzerland confirmed the intention of their countries to continue co-chairing the Task Force on Water and Climate. Representatives of France and of Germany expressed their countries' interest in contributing to that area of work. A representative of the Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia expressed interest in cooperation with the Water Convention on increasing awareness on climate change adaptation.

85. Regarding programme area 5, on opening, promotion and partnerships, a representative of UNEP, on behalf of all partner organizations, drew attention to the results of the Transboundary Waters Assessment Programme (TWAP) and invited the Water Convention to use those results in the future. The follow-up activities currently under discussion could also support implementation of the two global Conventions. On behalf of UNEP, she also expressed interest in cooperating in other areas of the draft programme of

work, such as the exchange of experience of joint bodies considering that UNEP would organize its next River Basin Organizations Forum in 2016.

86. Representatives of Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland offered to support activities under work area 5 financially. Representatives of the Green Cross, Dundee University and WWF offered to become partners of for awareness-raising on the two Conventions, and suggested developing a strategy for increasing the number of Parties. The representative of the Regional Environmental Centre offered help promoting the Convention, including through its new project in the Middle East and Northern Africa.

87. The Working Group called on countries and organizations to contribute funding, and to announce their intended contributions before the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties, if possible. The representative of Costa Rica suggested that small-scale projects could help Central American countries to accede to the Convention.

88. A representative of Hungary, host country of the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties, and the secretariat reported on the organizational preparations for the seventh session and the overall agenda, in particular the high-level segment. The meeting would take place from 17 to 19 November 2015 in the Budapest Congress Centre. The high-level segment would focus on the global opening of the Convention and the Convention in the framework of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development. Countries were called upon to send high-level representatives to the session and to inform the secretariat accordingly.

89. The Bureau Chair informed participants about the plans to organize a workshop for countries from Middle East and Northern Africa on 16 November, back to back with the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties, to be organized by the Governments of Italy and Hungary in cooperation with the Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe and ECE.

90. The Working Group:

(a) Endorsed the draft programme of work, invited Parties, non-Parties and other stakeholders to provide any additional comments to the draft programme of work for 2016–2018 by 15 July 2015, and entrusted the Bureau of the Convention, with the support of the secretariat, with the finalization of the draft and its submission to the Meeting of the Parties;

(b) 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 2016–2018;

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

XIV. Date and venue of the next meeting of the Working Group

91. The Working Group decided to hold its eleventh meeting on 18 and 19 October 2016 in Geneva.

92. The co-Chairs closed the meeting at 5:15 p.m. on Thursday, 25 June 2015.
