



**Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary
Watercourses and International Lakes**

**FOURTH MEETING OF THE PARTIES
Bonn, 20–22 November 2006**

Opening remarks by Mr. Marek Belka, Executive Secretary,
United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to address this fourth meeting of the Parties to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes here in Bonn.

This meeting marks a milestone in the history of the Water Convention: the tenth anniversary of its entry into force. In these 10 years, much has happened. The adoption of the Protocol on Water and Health in 1999, and its entry into force last year, and the adoption of the Protocol on Civil Liability in 2003 were important accomplishments.

Since its adoption, the Convention has been a key driving force for international cooperation on transboundary waters in the UNECE region and has inspired other parts of the world. This meeting will undoubtedly provide an opportunity to reflect on the achievements of the past years and to move the Convention forward.

With 35 Parties to the Convention, the countries of our region that are not yet Parties stand out more on the map than those that are. I am glad to hear that soon the Government of Serbia will be able to ratify the Convention, and I also hope to hear positive news from those other missing countries in South-Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia which would certainly benefit from the work carried out under the Convention.

In addition to this quantitative growth, there has also been qualitative evolution, which is reflected in the work of the last three years and in the agenda of this meeting.

Assessment of the status of transboundary waters and of the Convention's implementation

A fundamental decision you took at your last meeting was to undertake an assessment of the status of transboundary waters in the region. This assessment is essential for monitoring implementation of the Convention and the progress made in reducing transboundary impacts, including impacts on human health and safety. By highlighting the challenges faced in operating monitoring systems; examining existing pressure factors on water bodies; and providing information on trends in their ecological and chemical status, the assessment sheds light on the effectiveness of the measures taken and lays the groundwork for future policies. The preliminary assessment you have in front of you contains an impressive body of information, and I would like to praise all Parties and non-Parties, in particular countries in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia, for contributing data.

The preliminary assessment reveals that considerable work remains to be done in many countries, especially those with economies in transition, to fully implement the Convention. I urge you to complete the assessment as planned, in particular by filling the information gaps in Central and Western Europe. The assessment will provide a sound basis for future action on pan-European

waters when brought to the attention of Ministers at the sixth Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe” in Belgrade in October next year.

Emerging issues and payments for ecosystem services

A factor of the success of the Convention has been its capacity to deal with emerging issues and develop innovative products. These last three years have been particularly productive, with the preparation of the *Provisions on Transboundary Flood Management*, the *Safety Guidelines and Good Practices for Pipelines* and the *UNECE Rules on Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES) in Integrated Water Resources Management*.

The work carried out on PES is a particularly good example of the efforts to make the environment part of the development equation, improve the quality of decision making and facilitate the integration of relevant policies at all levels (for example, agriculture and forestry, urban development, water, energy and transport). The UNECE Rules on PES are a pioneering policy instrument, as they are the first example of international guidance for the establishment of PES, not only at the local and national levels, but also at the transboundary level. With the Rules, you are making an important contribution towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals, the targets of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, and more generally the recommendations of Agenda 21. The Rules will also contribute to achieving the goals of other multilateral environmental agreements, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity. Also, their preparation has been a unique process, with the cooperation of all major involved international organizations and NGOs in the framework of the Water Convention. I hope that you will maintain leadership in this field and adopt a programme of activities to foster the Rules’ practical implementation.

Partnerships

The development of strong partnerships is certainly a remarkable trend that has contributed to the Convention’s success. I would like to highlight four successful frameworks of cooperation.

The first is the cooperation with the European Union.

The Water Convention and the EU Water Framework Directive are complementary tools for the integrated management of transboundary waters in the European region. The activities carried out in the last three years have shown the synergies between these two tools as well as the advantages for EU and non-EU countries of sharing experience and jointly implementing the two legal frameworks. The mutual reinforcement between activities under the Convention and the European Union is also shown by the work on flood issues. The future leading role of UNECE in the development of National Policy Dialogues under the EU Water Initiative is another example of this growing cooperation.

The second is cooperation within the Environment and Security Initiative

Water insecurity poses a threat to human development in our region – due to competition over the resource, to environmental stress and to the unpredictability of access to water. Sustainable management of transboundary waters in the region is thus a condition for building shared prosperity and collective security. In this context, the Convention is a cornerstone of the Environment and Security Initiative carried out in cooperation with OSCE, UNEP, UNDP, the REC and NATO. The ENVSEC Initiative is expected to open up significant opportunities to establish projects supporting the Convention’s implementation.

We should also not forget cooperation in South-Eastern Europe.

This region, together with Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia, has become a major focus of activities. The Convention has been able to establish cooperation with other main international actors, such as Phase II of the Petersberg Process, the Athens Declaration Process and bilateral donors working in the region. Future action will benefit from the framework of the Convention to share experience, streamline activities and mutually reinforce initiatives.

Finally, the Convention has benefited from a growing recognition of its role within UN-Water, which is the United Nations inter-agency mechanism for all agencies, departments and programmes involved with water-related issues and responsible for following up on water-related decisions reached at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development and the Millennium Development Goals. This has led to an increasing involvement of the secretariat in implementation projects, including outside the UNECE region.

Let me take this opportunity to express my appreciation for the work of the international and regional organizations engaged in cooperation activities to promote the implementation of the Convention. Beside those already mentioned, important partners have been the other UN Regional Commissions, FAO, UNESCO, WHO, WMO, the Ramsar Convention, the World Conservation Union (IUCN), the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe, the Global Environment Facility and the Regional Environmental Centres. UNECE is committed to continuing and deepening its collaboration with these and other partners.

Future workplan

Capacity-building

This meeting is not only about implementation of the Convention as it stands today. It is also about its further development. The workplan that you are about to adopt is therefore essential. It is indeed ambitious, and I am happy to see that you attach great importance to capacity-building. I strongly urge the donor community to provide the necessary financial support to projects that will assist countries in transition to fully implement the Convention and maximize its benefits. In particular, the Capacity for Water Cooperation (CWC) project, designed and implemented by the secretariat, has become a vital element for the successful implementation of the Convention. The project has not only strengthened transboundary water management in the EECCA region by providing long-term training to water authorities, it has also become a very useful framework for promoting the Convention's products, testing their usefulness, and identifying gaps and needs to be taken into account in future work.

Protocol on Civil Liability

It is encouraging to see that the workplan that you are about to adopt addresses current shortcomings. The ratification of the Civil Liability Protocol is certainly below expectations, with only one ratification – by Hungary – since 2003. The recent oil spill in the Danube, which will certainly not be the last industrial accident with an impact on transboundary waters in our region, reminds us of the importance of the Protocol on Civil Liability and the activities carried out jointly with the UNECE Industrial Accidents Convention. Given the strong focus of the sixth Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe” on implementation of UNECE multilateral agreements, your input concerning the Protocol on Civil Liability is expected to pave the way for its future entry into force.

Pilot projects and IWAC

Another promising development is the generous offer of the Government of Slovakia to take over the leadership of the International Water Assessment Center (IWAC). In the past IWAC has played a fundamental role in the implementation of pilot projects on transboundary waters under the Water Convention. Unfortunately in the last three years its input has considerably decreased because of the reduction of financial support by the Government of the Netherlands. The pilot projects are of crucial importance for the Convention's implementation, as is also recognized in your draft declaration. I therefore hope that under Slovakia's leadership, the IWAC's full role will be restored. For this to happen, it will be crucial that adequate financial and in-kind resources be made available to support IWAC in general and the pilot programme's activities for 2007–2009 in particular. Other countries should consider cooperating with Slovakia in this effort.

Opening of the Convention outside the UNECE region

It is also positive to see that the draft workplan reflects your commitment to the amendment you adopted at your previous meeting opening up the Convention to countries outside the UNECE region. Indeed, these 10 years have proven the soundness and strength of the Convention's approach to transboundary water management, and have shown how useful it could be for other regions in the world which lack an international legal framework for this purpose. UNECE has been at the forefront of the development of transboundary cooperation; we now have a moral responsibility to share our experience with the rest of the world.

Resources

In general, the workplan reflects the political will of UNECE Governments to take an active and forward-looking approach, and I hope that we are all ready to take on responsibilities to make this Convention even more effective.

Distinguished delegates, the success of the Convention to date has been made possible through the high level of commitment by its Parties, as well as by supportive organizations. In particular, I would like to thank all those countries that have led activities and have contributed in kind or in cash to the Trust Fund financing the implementation of the Convention's workplan. The voluntary scheme of contributions that you established at your last meeting relies on the generosity of the Parties, and much has been done on the basis of that scheme. It is a particular challenge for 2007–2009 to secure funding for programme implementation; I therefore urge you to continue to support the Trust Fund. Another need is to involve a broader number of Parties as lead countries for programme implementation. In particular, I call on countries in Western Europe which have not yet been involved in workplan implementation to take leadership of activities or support the workplan financially so that there is a broader basis for the sharing of experience, and so that the burden is more fairly distributed.

I would also like to stress that the decisions you are going to take will put an additional strain on the already stretched resources of the Convention's secretariat. I pledge that UNECE will maintain the present level of human resources to service the Convention. However, the expanded workplan will certainly put additional pressure on secretariat resources. It is therefore essential that Parties make available adequate financial and human resources to support the secretariat. I invite you to consider opportunities to strengthen the secretariat, including the provision of extra-budgetary contributions, secondment of staff and offers of junior professional officers.

Thanks

Finally, allow me to thank Dr. Helge Wendenburg for his statement and the excellent arrangements made to host this event. I also would like to applaud Ms. Heide Jekel and her team for their efforts to make this meeting a success. I, for one, certainly look forward to further active work by German experts and the continued solid support of the Government of Germany for UNECE's environmental efforts.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, your broad and high-level participation underscores the significance of this meeting and of the decisions that are before you. I hope that you will seize this opportunity to move the Water Convention forward. I hope that your deliberations will be fruitful, and that the Convention will continue to go from strength to strength.

Thank you.