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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

REPORT ON THE FIRST MEETING

Introduction

1. The first meeting of the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management, established by the Parties to the 1992 Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) at their third meeting in November 2003, took place in Geneva on 15 December 2004.
2. It was attended by delegations from the following Parties to the Convention: Azerbaijan, Belarus, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Switzerland and the European Community.
3. The following countries not Parties to the Convention also attended: Armenia, Georgia, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Serbia and Montenegro, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.
4. A representative of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) attended the meeting.
5. Representatives of the following organizations also participated: secretariat of the 1971 Ramsar Convention on Wetlands; Interstate Coordination Water Commission (Uzbekistan); Ecores (Azerbaijan); Ecoterra (Russian Federation); Global Water Partnership

for Central and Eastern Europe (Slovakia); International Rainwater Harvesting Alliance (Switzerland); IWRM.org (Switzerland); Regional Environmental Centre (Republic of Moldova); Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia (Kazakhstan); Union for the Defence of the Aral Sea and Amudarya (Uzbekistan); University of Dundee (United Kingdom); Ural Ecological Union (Russian Federation).

I. OPENING AND ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

6. Mrs. Sibylle Vermont (Switzerland), Chairperson, opened the meeting and addressed the participants.

7. The Working Group adopted its agenda as contained in document MP.WAT/WG.1/2004/1.

II. PROGRESS IN THE RATIFICATION PROCESS

8. The Working Group noted the progress in the ratification process:

(a) By December 2004, 34 countries and the European Community were Parties to the Convention and Georgia had started its ratification procedure;

(b) In 2004 Sweden had submitted its instrument of acceptance of the amendments to articles 25 and 26 of the Convention. The Netherlands, Poland and Romania were about to do so.¹

(c) Fourteen countries had submitted their instruments of ratification of the Protocol on Water and Health: Albania, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Norway, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia and Ukraine. Six more countries were expected to do so in 2005;

(d) Hungary had submitted its instrument of ratification of the Protocol on Civil Liability and Compensation for Damage Caused by the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents on Transboundary Waters (Civil Liability Protocol). Slovakia was preparing its ratification procedure.

9. Some countries in transition requested assistance in the further ratification process. This should include: (a) guidance material and training sessions on the Civil Liability Protocol; (b) explanations of certain provisions of the Convention and the Protocol on Water and Health, such as the polluter-pays principle and transboundary water allocation; and (c) country missions. During such missions, the secretariat and the Bureau should brief senior ministerial staff about the Convention and its protocols and highlight the benefits of accession to the UNECE environmental legal instruments. It was also suggested that Parties should take advantage of international ministerial and other high-level meetings to promote the Convention and its ratification.

¹ Poland ratified the amendments in January 2005.

10. The Working Group took note of these proposals and invited the Bureau, the Legal Board and the secretariat to undertake appropriate actions.

III. ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE WORKING GROUP AND FURTHER ACTIVITIES

A. Task force and Seminar on flood protection, prevention and mitigation

11. The secretariat informed the Working Group about the activities of the task force on flood prevention, protection and mitigation, led by Germany, and the outcome of the Seminar on flood protection, prevention and mitigation, held in Berlin on 21-22 June 2004. The Working Group underlined the importance of activities on flood prevention under the Convention and the further cooperation with the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, the World Meteorological Organization, the World Health Organization, the European Commission and the Ramsar Convention's secretariat. It approved the proposals by the task force and the Seminar to draw up a common framework for flood protection, prevention and mitigation (MP.WAT/SEM.3/2004/3), and invited the countries which had not yet participated in the task force to join in the future activities.

12. The common framework would consist of: (a) a legal component, developed by the task force members from Germany and Greece with the assistance of the Legal Board; (b) a soft-law component developed by the task force member from Germany and the European Commission; and (c) a capacity-building component developed by the task force member from Hungary. Draft versions of all three components would be drawn up in early 2005 and submitted for consideration by the Working Group at its second meeting.

13. The Working Group also noted the information by the delegation of the European Community about the "Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on flood risk management" of 12 July 2004, which was based, inter alia, on the outcome of the Seminar. The Working Group invited the European Community to continue its cooperation with the task force on the above three components

B. Seminar on the role of ecosystems as water suppliers

14. The Chairperson informed the Working Group about the outcome of the Seminar on the role of ecosystems as water suppliers, held in Geneva on 13-14 December 2004.

15. The Working Group: (a) approved the major findings of the Seminar; (b) entrusted the secretariat with preparing a brochure on the Seminar for submission to the Commission on Sustainable Development at its 13th session (CSD-13) for information; and (c) invited the lead country, Switzerland, with the assistance of the secretariat to prepare the second seminar, focusing on the environmental services of water-related ecosystems (forests and wetlands) and financing for their protection and sustainable use (for details, see the report of the Seminar MP.WAT/SEM.4/2004/3).

16. The Working Group also supported the lead country's suggestions to organize a special event at CSD-13 on the protection and use of water-related ecosystems and the

experience gained in the UNECE region, unless a substantive discussion could be held at the plenary meeting on UNECE regional activities.

17. The delegation of Switzerland introduced a draft decision on integrated management of water resources prepared by Mexico for consideration at the 23rd session of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Delegations to the Working Group agreed to provide their inputs to the draft decision by the end of December 2004. Some delegations noted that there was a need for referring to the transboundary dimension of integrated water management.

C. Implementation of the Water Framework Directive

18. The delegations of Poland and the European Community reported on the preparations for the first workshop on the implementation of the European Union (EU) Water Framework Directive on the fringe of the enlarged EU, in which Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine would participate together with their neighbouring EU countries. On behalf of Italy, the secretariat provided information about the second workshop, with Italy as lead country, which would focus on non-EU countries in South-Eastern Europe.

19. The Working Group approved the further preparatory steps and recommended coordination and exchange of information between these two activities. In the preparation of the second workshop and the selection of participating countries, the Working Group requested Italy to take into account the activities under the Danube River Protection Convention related to the implementation of the Water Framework Directive in the entire Danube river basin.

D. Water and industrial accidents

20. The secretariat and Mr. Peter Kovacs (Hungary), Co-Chairman of the joint ad hoc expert group on water and industrial accidents, established under the Water Convention and the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents (Industrial Accidents Convention) reported on the outcome of the 5th meeting of the expert group (Budapest, 26 October 2004):

(a) The expert group had finalized work on a questionnaire on the implementation of the recommendations of the Seminar on the prevention of chemical accidents and limitation of their impact on transboundary waters (Hamburg, Germany, 4-6 October 1999) in countries with market economies. In order to facilitate responses by these countries, the questionnaire was being filled in by Hungary, Germany and Switzerland to facilitate the reporting by other countries by 30 June 2005. The expert group would evaluate the replies and report to the Parties to both Conventions in the course of 2006. The Working Group would be kept informed about progress;

(b) Germany and the Netherlands had initiated new activities on the safety of pipelines and the preparation of guidelines or best practice documents. This guidance material would draw on the outcome of two specific workshops: one to be held in Germany on pipeline safety and the protection of transboundary waters (Berlin, 8-9 June 2005); and the other in the Netherlands (mid-2006) on pipeline safety and air pollution prevention;

(c) Germany and Poland would prepare a joint response exercise in the Oder river basin (10-11 June 2005) on the safety of industrial installations in flood-prone areas;

(d) The expert group would start in early 2006 with work on the safety of tailings dams once the International Commission on the Protection of the Danube River, assisted by Germany, had finalized preparatory work on this subject.

21. The Working Group:

(a) Requested EU countries as well as Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland to reply to the questionnaire on the outcome of the Hamburg Seminar by 30 June 2005. Internal arrangements should be made between the appropriate ministries (environment, interior, etc.) to harmonize national responses;

(b) Invited delegations to inform the secretariat by 15 January 2005 about national experts on pipeline safety who could assist the lead countries (Germany and Netherlands) and the secretariat in the further preparations for seminars on pipeline safety and the preparation of a best practice document;

(c) Invited delegations to inform the secretariat by 30 June 2005 about national experts on the safety of tailing dams who could assist the joint ad hoc expert group on water and industrial accidents in the further elaboration of a best practice document.

IV. THE CONVENTION'S "CAPACITY FOR WATER COOPERATION" PROJECT

22. The secretariat reported on the project "Capacity for Water Cooperation" (CWC) in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA), implemented as part of the Convention's work plan by the secretariat together with a number of national and international partners (MP.WAT/WG.1/2004/3).

23. The Working Group took note of the outcome of the first workshop of the project on the legal basis for cooperation (Kiev, 22-24 November 2004). The workshop had: (a) highlighted the general inadequacy of the legal framework for transboundary water cooperation and recommended drafting agreements where they were missing and revision and updating of a number of existing ones; (b) drawn attention to the problem of law implementation and compliance; (c) stressed the need for a tool to interpret the Convention's and its protocols' obligations in order to assist countries in their implementation. The Working Group took note of these proposals and invited the secretariat to follow up on these issues in cooperation with the relevant bodies under the Convention.

24. The Working Group was also informed about the preparations for future workshops under the CWC project, especially the one on access to and exchange of information and public participation to be held in St. Petersburg (Russian Federation) on 8-10 June 2005. It was underlined that one of the assets of the project was its long-term duration, allowing it to take account in future workshops of the lessons learned and recommendations from previous ones as well as to guide the work under the Convention in EECCA.

V. PARTNERSHIP ON WATER FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND HEALTH-RELATED ASSISTANCE

25. A representative of the European Community reported on the recent developments under the Partnership on Water for Sustainable Development (EECCA component of the EU Water Initiative), in particular the activities related to integrated water resources management, which would fall under the competence of the Working Group. He added that the European Commission had taken over from Denmark the function of lead agency/country (while the Russian Federation continued as the lead EECCA country) and that a work programme for the Initiative was under preparation. The UNECE secretariat would be consulted.

26. Through its Chairperson, the Working Group offered to assist the secretariat and the European Commission in the further elaboration of the Partnership, in particular the preparations for the meetings of the Partnership's working groups.

27. The secretariat reported on the outcome of the Roundtable on Water and Health in Europe, which had been held at the invitation of the Norwegian Government on 28-29 September 2004 near Oslo (see the report of the fourth meeting of the Working Group on Water and Health, MP.WAT/WG.4/2004/5). The Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management also took note of the relevant decisions taken at the latter meeting.

VI. ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS AND OTHER BODIES

A. Commission on Sustainable Development

28. The secretariat reported on the regional activities undertaken to prepare for the 13th session of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD). The Working Group noted that the Water Convention's secretariat, assisted by the Bureau of the Meeting of the Parties, had contributed to the document "Sustainable development in the UNECE region" (E/ECE/1421) for the 60th annual session of UNECE in February 2005, which contained policies, strategies and actions on water and sanitation, based on the European experience and the deliberations at the 12th session of CSD.

29. The Working Group welcomed the secretariat's initiative and invited countries to draw the attention of their national delegations attending the annual session to the relevance of this document to the further implementation of the Convention and its protocols as well as national and international action on water and sanitation.

30. The Working Group also welcomed the publication of a brochure on the Water Convention in English, French, Russian and Spanish and its forthcoming publication in Arabic and Chinese. It suggested that similar publications should be prepared on other specific activities under the Convention and its protocols.

B. UN-Water and the United Nations World Water Development Report

31. The Working Group took note of the report of the secretariat on the role and functions of UN-Water – the United Nations-wide network for collaboration on water issues – and on the progress made in the drafting of the second edition of the World Water Development

Report. In particular, the Working Group appreciated the work done by the Water Convention's International Water Assessment Centre and the secretariat to guide the work of the United Nations organizations on indicators for the water sector. The Working Group noted that the proposed set of indicators was also highly relevant to the activities under the Protocol on Water and Health and could be further used to implement the provisions of its article 7 on review and assessment of progress.

C. Environment and Security Initiative

32. The UNECE Regional Adviser reported on UNECE cooperation with the Environment and Security Initiative, launched by UNEP, the United Nations Development Programme and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe in May 2003 at the fifth Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe", in particular concerning: (a) the development of integrated water resources management in Central Asia; and (b) transboundary cooperation and sustainable development of the Dniester river. It was recognized that the Initiative provided an important opportunity to promote the implementation of the UNECE multilateral environmental agreements in general and of the Water Convention in particular.

D. International Conference on Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM)

33. The Working Group took note of the information provided by Japan on activities of the Japan Water Forum, particularly its International Conference on IWRM (Tokyo, 6-8 December 2004). The Working Group requested its Chairperson and the secretariat to establish close links with this organization for the further implementation of the Water Convention's activities on integrated water resources management.

VII. RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

34. The secretariat informed the Working Group about contributions to the trust fund received in 2004 from Finland, Italy, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland, and about the use of these contributions according to decision III/2 of the Meeting of the Parties (see ECE/MP.WAT/15/Add.1, annex II) to support the Convention's work programme.

35. The Working Group noted alternative forms of contributions in cash and in kind, provided by Germany for the task force and the Seminar on flood prevention, protection and mitigation, by Finland for the fifth meeting of the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment, by Hungary for the third meeting of the Working Group on Water and Health, by Italy for the first meeting of the Legal Board, by Norway for the Oslo Roundtable on Water and Health in Europe, and by Spain for the translation of the Water Convention's brochure into Spanish.

36. The Working Group noted its appreciation for these contributions and invited countries to make contributions to the trust fund for 2005.

VIII. WORK PLAN

37. The Working Group recalled its discussions and decisions on the previous agenda items and agreed that there was no need for a substantial revision of the work plan.

38. Regarding programme element 2.4, the Working Group noted, however, that the text under “Lead Parties” should be replaced by: “Denmark and the Russian Federation for overall coordination of the Partnership’s component on integrated water resources management in 2003-2004 and the European Commission and the Russian Federation in 2005-2006.”

IX. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

39. The Working Group elected Mrs. Sibylle Vermont (Switzerland) as its Chairperson and Mrs. Ana Drapa (Romania) as its Vice-Chairperson.

X. DATE AND VENUE OF THE SECOND MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP

40. The Working Group entrusted the secretariat, in consultation with the Chairperson, to set the dates for its second meeting in autumn 2005, taking into account the progress made on the common framework for flood prevention, protection and mitigation, which would be a major item for consideration.