



## **UNECE Water Convention celebrates 20 years of transboundary water cooperation as it prepares to go global**

Geneva, 17 March 2012 – The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (UNECE Water Convention), adopted in Helsinki, Finland on 17 March 1992, celebrates its twentieth anniversary today. It is the only international framework agreement in force on transboundary freshwater.

During these past two decades, the pan-European region has become the most advanced in terms of cooperation on transboundary waters. By now, almost all the countries of the region have taken measures to establish cooperation on their shared waters, have entered into bilateral and multilateral agreements and have established joint bodies for transboundary water cooperation. Much of this progress has been driven by the UNECE Water Convention, which has served as a model for transboundary cooperation arrangements. The Convention has also promoted the river basin approach in the region.

Many river basin agreements are based on the Convention, such as the Danube River Protection Convention, the agreements on Lake Peipsi and on the Sava, Meuse, Rhine and Scheldt Rivers, or, further to the East, the bilateral agreements between countries in Eastern Europe established since the mid-1990s, among them the Kazakh-Russian, Russian-Ukrainian and Moldovan-Ukrainian agreements, just to mention a few.

The Convention has also provided an invaluable framework to support the step-by-step approximation of the Central and Eastern European countries that acceded to the European Union (EU) in the 2004 and 2007 enlargements. The challenge facing those countries was to bring their legislation and regulations up to EU environmental standards. Most recently, the Convention has been central to promoting transboundary cooperation on the ground, especially in the Balkans, Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, where conflicting interests in water and shortcomings of the institutional frameworks are constant challenges. Thanks to the guidance developed and support mobilized under the Water Convention, dam safety has improved in Central Asia, cooperation in joint monitoring and assessment has increased and experience has accumulated on topics such as adaptation to climate change and managing flood risk in transboundary basins.

Today, 37 UNECE countries and the European Union are participating in the Convention. Among these States Parties there is increased awareness of the necessity for transboundary cooperation to ensure that transboundary waters are used reasonably and equitably, and that transboundary impacts from pollution and development are prevented or at least reduced.

Over these past 20 years, the work under the Convention has continuously evolved to respond to the needs and challenges typical of transboundary cooperation. Building on the successes

achieved, the Parties to the Convention amended it in 2003 to open it up to non-UNECE countries, thereby making the Convention and its intergovernmental framework available to all regions of the world. With the likely entry into force of the amendment later in 2012, it is expected that the Convention will be greatly enhanced by this expansion and the sharing of experience and promotion of transboundary water cooperation at the global level.

From 3 to 4 September 2012 in Helsinki, Finland will host a twentieth anniversary seminar to celebrate the achievements under the Water Convention and to consider its future and what opportunities and challenges lie ahead. The event will be an important step in the preparations for the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention (Rome, 28–30 November 2012), which will seek to build on the lessons from the past 20 years to shape the future work under the Convention.

For further information please visit: <http://www.unece.org/env/water/>  
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#### **Note to Editors:**

The UNECE **Water Convention**'s central aim is to strengthen measures at the local, national and transboundary levels to protect and ensure the quantity, quality and sustainable use of transboundary water resources — both surface waters and groundwaters. The Convention takes a holistic approach, based on the understanding that water resources play an integral part in ecosystems as well as in human societies and economies.

The Convention requires countries to fulfil certain obligations, from observing general principles to implementing concrete actions. The Convention requires Riparian Parties (Parties bordering the same transboundary waters) to enter into specific bilateral or multilateral agreements and to create institutions — joint bodies such as river and lake commissions — to meet these responsibilities. Other specific obligations include establishment and implementation of joint programmes for monitoring the conditions of transboundary waters and, at regular intervals, to carry out joint or coordinated assessments of the condition of transboundary waters and the effectiveness of measures taken to prevent, control and reduce transboundary impacts.

At the moment, the Parties to the UNECE Water Convention are Albania, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and the European Union.