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**Statement**

**by**

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**Executive Secretary**

**of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe**

**at**

**the Budapest Water Summit**

**Budapest,**

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Excellencies,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, I would like to express my gratitude to Hungary, not only for hosting and organizing this important Summit – also with the fantastic water concert yesterday evening - but also for its political leadership and the promotion of transboundary cooperation, demonstrated also by its current chairmanship of the Water Convention hosted in UNECE. And I am honoured to be here on the panel with the two distinguished ministers from Senegal and Tajikistan – two countries, and two ministers who lead global water diplomacy.

We are in the right place, here in Budapest, for this summit with the motto “water connects”, which is located on the Danube river basin, the most international river basin in the world, bringing together 14 countries from the entire continent in one of the most advanced river basin organizations in the world. The success of the Danube Convention is also a great testimony of the usefulness and impact of the UNECE Water Convention, as the Danube Convention is based on the Water Convention. And the Water convention is based on and integrates the principles of Integrated Water Resource Management and stress it must be done at the level of the basin – working across borders – as it was stressed by both Ministers.

As you probably know, more than 50% of all freshwater flow worldwide is in transboundary basins, like the Danube. 151 countries and 2.8 billion people share 286 transboundary river basins.

This underlines the extreme political, economic, social and environmental importance of transboundary water cooperation and for an integrated approach – also across borders – for water management.

However, there are numerous challenges for these shared waters as demonstrated for example by the recently published report of the

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Transboundary Waters Assessment Programme (TWAP). 218 out of 286 basins are at high risk of overuse or pollution, due to lack of waste water treatment, poor agriculture practices or industrial accidents. In addition, the construction of dams and water diversions is in progress or planned, often without adequate consultation and international water cooperation instruments. Nearly 900 million people or 30% of the population living in transboundary basins are highly exposed to floods and droughts.

The lack of cooperation is a major obstacle to preventing or dealing with the above issues. 60 per cent of international watercourses lack cooperative management arrangements. Many transboundary agreements are negotiated but not in force, or not implemented properly.

The good news is that awareness is growing not least with the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with a target calling for transboundary cooperation. This is an important breakthrough on the topic. For more than 20 years the words “transboundary cooperation” had been banned from any UN negotiated document. Now it is there. And it is important.

But target 6.5 alone is not enough. Progress on transboundary cooperation needs to be measured and monitored. Therefore the adoption of a dedicated indicator on transboundary water cooperation, so-called indicator 6.5.2 by the United Nations Statistical Commission in March 2016 is a second good news.

The indicator, for which UNECE and UNESCO are the custodian agencies, will allow establishing a baseline, tracking progress at the basin, regional and global level and fostering action. The indicator will only be included in the global report for the High-Level Political Forum in 2018 if a sufficient number of countries from all continents submit their national reports by March 2017. **I therefore call upon all countries present here, which share transboundary waters, to contribute to the reporting exercise.** The request to report will reach you in the coming days.

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Another important political recognition of the importance of transboundary cooperation came last week, when the United Nations Security Council discussed in an open debate, at the initiative of Senegal, water, peace and security. The debate highlighted the high political awareness on the risk of conflict over transboundary waters as well as the potential of water as a tool for peace-building.

Furthermore, the High-Level Panel on Water and Peace, co-convened by Switzerland and 14 other countries, is debating the linkages between water and peace, including the role of international water law and the global Conventions. And it is good to see that also the High-Level Panel on Water, convened by the World Bank and the United Nations Secretary General, is addressing transboundary water cooperation.

This is not a surprise: The stakes are high and the risks immense.

One risk Hungary knows unfortunately very well is the risk of industrial accidents, which can have devastating effects on transboundary water resources. Since the Baia Mare accident in 2000, significant progress has been made in the European region to reduce such accidents, by reducing their frequency and severity and by mitigating their effects. The Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents has played a key role in this respect, promoting active international cooperation between countries, before, during and after an industrial accident. It is expected that soon all United Nations Member countries will be able to benefit from the Convention due to its global opening. We hope many countries will join.

We also saw strong focus on transboundary water cooperation at the recent UNFCCC Conference of the Parties in Marrakech (COP22), Morocco. The Paris Pact for Adaptation to Climate Change in the basins of rivers, lakes and groundwaters has nearly 380 signatories and this underlines the increasing awareness of the need for basin-wide adaptation and the key role that river basin organizations.

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Moreover, more than 90% of all submitted Nationally Determined Contributions refer to water. However, only about ten of them also mention the need for transboundary cooperation in adaptation. I hope this number will increase in the future since transboundary water cooperation in adaptation is more effective and can prevent mal-adaptation.

The good news is that water is usually not a cause of conflict, but rather a source of cooperation, also under a changing climate. In some basins, climate change and climate variability have triggered transboundary cooperation. For example, the Rhine and Danube Conventions and also the Meuse agreement have flood risk reduction as one of their aims. The Mekong agreement has a similar origin and goal. All these basins have already or are now working on developing climate change adaptation strategies. Even basins with tensions such as the Nile, Dniester and Neman have developed basin-wide adaptation strategies, and in some basins, adaptation measures of transboundary importance are being implemented. In the Neman basin, cooperation on climate change has even led to a revival of transboundary cooperation more generally.

However, this does not happen automatically, but requires institutions, commitment, support and, as a foundation, a sound legal framework. And here we have seen good progress with the opening of the Water Convention in early 2016 to all UN member states and the entry into force of the Watercourses Convention in 2014. The two Conventions are fully compatible and harmonized and are based on the same principles. Many countries are Parties to both Conventions or are considering acceding to both. However, if we count the number of Parties to both Conventions, there are only 60 countries that have committed to abide by their principles. This is not enough. **We need to join forces if we want to build the needed critical mass. We cannot afford fragmentation or duplication of efforts.**

Many here are stressing the need for an intergovernmental platform for discussing SDG6. From the experience of the Water Convention I can testify the value of having an intergovernmental platform. Much of the

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progress in transboundary cooperation in the 140 transboundary rivers, 25 transboundary lakes, about 200 transboundary groundwaters in the UNECE region can be linked to the Convention's intergovernmental platform, which includes the Meeting of the Parties, subsidiary bodies, Task Forces and a secretariat located at UNECE. The Convention's bodies have allowed to operationalized cooperation on the ground, have fostered the strengthening of institutions and promoted good practices. With the opening of the Convention, and with already 110 countries contributing to this process, the impacts can be astounding.

In fact, I am convinced that the Water Convention can provide many responses to the challenges of transboundary cooperation.

1. **We need to ensure long term political commitment to cooperation:** encourage countries to opt for cooperation in basins where this is lacking and sustain efforts where cooperation is existing. The Convention can offer a global intergovernmental platform to track progress, identify hot spots, discuss emerging issues and exchange good practices. It can provide a global forum — a home in the United Nations system, as the Deputy Secretary-General called it —to position transboundary water issues high on the political agenda.

2. **We need to ensure adequate financing for transboundary cooperation.** At the moment, financial resources, including from donors, are lacking in some basins, and abundant in others. There are few mechanisms available to finance projects in transboundary basins. Due to the long term nature of cooperation, to sustain progress there is a need for long term interventions. The Convention can offer a global platform for coordination of activities and interventions, promoting synergies, joining forces, avoiding duplications of initiatives and ensuring continuity of efforts. The Convention's framework can provide easier access to financial resources by bringing together bilateral and multilateral donors. The Convention can ensure a higher sustainability of cooperation projects and reduce investment risks.

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3. Finally, **we need to strengthen capacity for cooperation, at the legal, diplomatic and technical levels.** The Convention offers a platform for the continuous, long term exchange of knowledge and good practices, where actors can tap from existing experience and access available tools, and at the same time upscale the impacts of their efforts by promoting them worldwide. The Convention focuses its work on key aspects of transboundary cooperation: for example it promotes climate change adaptation in transboundary basins, it supports inter-sectoral cooperation by addressing the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus, and it fosters buy-in to cooperation processes by assessing the benefits.

If you want to know more about the Water Convention, please come to the dedicated side event which will celebrate the Convention's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. It will take place at lunchtime today, from 13.45 in room Duna. In addition, the Secretary to the Water Convention, Ms. Francesca Bernardini, will give more details in the plenary tomorrow.

Jointly, we can create a global coalition to address transboundary water resources management problems and promoting Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM). Only by uniting forces between countries, international organizations, financing institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academia and the private sector will we be able to broaden the exchange of experience and mobilize the needed political support and funding for transboundary water cooperation.

The UN Secretary-General has often advised us Under-Secretary-Generals, based on Chinese Confucianism, to be like water. If you meet a small stone pass by it, if you meet a large stone you must have the force to push it away. We are facing great challenges, great stones in the future management of water. We must work together to push away the stones, obstacles and we must work together across borders to do so.

Thank you.

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