



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

BUREAU/2013/2

**BUREAU OF THE MEETING OF THE PARTIES**

Seventeenth meeting  
Geneva, 10 April 2013

**REPORT OF THE SEVENTEENTH MEETING**

Prepared by the secretariat

The seventeenth meeting of the Bureau took place on 10 April 2013, back-to-back with the first meeting of the Task Force on the Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystems Nexus on 8–9 April 2013. The following members of the Water Convention Bureau were present: Mr. Rafiq Verdiyev (Azerbaijan), Ms. Dragana Milovanovic (Serbia), Mr. Harry Liiv (Estonia), Ms. Lea Kauppi (Finland), Ms. Maria Galambos (Hungary), Mr. Serik Akhmetov (Kazakhstan), Mr. Vladimir Ivlev (Russian Federation), Mr. Fabien Dupuis (France, representing Mr. Philipp Meunier). Mr. Massimo Cozzone (Italy), Chair of the Bureau of the Water Convention chaired the meeting. Ms. Sibylle Vermont (Switzerland) participated in parts of the meeting by telephone. Ms. Heide Jekel (Germany) had informed the secretariat in advance that she would not be able to attend and had provided her input in writing.

Mr. Andrea Bianchini attended the meeting as a representative of Italy.

The Bureau adopted the agenda as contained in document BUREAU/2013/1.

**1. Opening of the Water Convention beyond the region of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe**

In view of the amendments' entry into force on 6 February 2013 the Bureau discussed how to ensure ratification of the amendments by all the remaining six Parties by the end of 2013 (see updated table of amendment ratification and responsibilities in this regard). The secretariat informed that Mr. Alkalaj would meet the ambassadors of all these Parties in the coming weeks. The Bureau decided that the chair should send a letter to all six Parties on behalf of the Bureau asking for speeding up the ratification, to make it a political priority.

In Albania, the amendment ratification process was just at the beginning. Therefore, Ms. Vermont agreed to activate her embassy again and also suggested to contact parliamentarians. Also for Kazakhstan, Switzerland would ask the Swiss ambassador to meet the Kazakh Minister of Foreign Affairs. In addition, the Finnish President and accompanying ministers could raise this issue during their visit at the end of April. Further, Mr. Cozzone could get in touch with his contacts in Kazakhstan.

The Bureau expressed concern about the situation in Ukraine where delays with official translation of the amendments had blocked progress in their ratification. High-level pressure from United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) management was considered most useful in this situation. Ms. Milovanovic proposed that Serbia could contact the Ukrainian ICPDR (International

Commission for the Protection of the Danube River) head of delegation, which Hungary had already done.

For the European Union (EU), the process was currently in inter-service consultations; it was considered necessary to stay in close contact with EC/EEAS.

Mr. Liiv agreed to follow up on including the amendment ratification in the agenda of the EU water directors' meeting at the end of May; he would contact the European Commission in this regard.

Mr. Dupuis informed that the French Minister of Foreign Affairs had sent letter to the five remaining countries (not the EU) asking them to ratify as soon as possible.

The Bureau then discussed how to promote the Convention outside the ECE region, by targeting specific countries and through regional workshops. The Bureau decided to develop a strategy on the opening to be prepared by France, Switzerland and Italy as leaders of this area of work, in cooperation with the secretariat. As a first step, by 15 May 2013, Bureau members should inform about their entry points and water-related activities in non-ECE countries, such as bilateral agreements in the field of environment or water, development cooperation projects, etc. Examples mentioned included the memorandum of understanding on climate change between Italy and Iraq, and a Finnish project in the Andean region. The suggestion by Ms. Jekel, sent by e-mail, that Bureau members could contact their ministries of foreign affairs and the embassies in the respective countries was welcomed.

The secretariat informed about the Latin American workshop to be organized on 11–12 June 2013 in cooperation with the Economic Commission for Latin American and the Caribbean, UNESCO, GEF: IW-Learn, IUCN and the University of Buenos Aires. Bureau members were invited to attend; some would be contacted to nominate experts.

It was highlighted that targeted promotional material for non-ECE countries was necessary, such as presentations. The secretariat informed that a new brochure on the Convention's opening was under development and the draft would be shared with the Bureau soon. The Bureau suggested making available presentations on different issues regarding the Convention, and in different languages, for use by Bureau members and others.

The Bureau also discussed the additional needs for funding due to the Convention's globalization.

The Deputy Director of the ECE Environment Division highlighted that the opening of the Convention implied an expansion of the mandate of the ECE and the Water Convention. It was therefore decided to communicate the change of mandate to the United Nations secretariat in New York in order to ask for more regular budget resources. For this, a short paper, with arguments on why more resources were needed due to the Convention's globalization, should be prepared by the secretariat and the chair, stressing that such additional resources were needed for the secretariat to service other regions of the world. Bureau countries were urged to contact their missions in New York to bring forward this view in the negotiations on the budget in the General Assembly's fifth committee.

This issue should also be included on the agenda of the next Bureau meeting, following consultations with the secretariats of other units in the Environment Division that are expanding such as the Aarhus Convention and the Environmental Performance Review programme.

Bureau members recognized the limited chance of success of this proposal and made alternative proposals, such as raising additional resources through development cooperation agencies, public-private partnerships, the GEF, etc.

Finally, the Bureau discussed the relationship with the United Nations Watercourses Convention, which is expected to enter into force in 2013 or 2014, and how to achieve synergies, in particular in relation to the institutional framework, also in view of the upcoming Water Diplomacy Seminar “The Helsinki and New York Water Conventions” organized on 24 and 25 April 2013 in the Hague by the Dutch government for all those European countries that are Party to both Conventions.

Mr. Ivlev and Ms. Vermont recalled the currently ongoing process of joining the three secretariats of the UNEP chemical conventions, which showed the overall tendency to strengthen synergies. Ms. Vermont informed that the Swiss government would start the ratification process of the United Nations Watercourses Convention soon. She argued for a step-wise approach with a view to establishing a single freshwater lighthouse or hub in the longer term. It was important to keep in mind the perception of non-ECE countries. A study (so far in French) prepared by Switzerland had reconfirmed the complementarity of the Conventions.

Mr. Dupuis informed that France was currently discussing its national position on this issue, and that the French Minister of Development had sent letters to some African French-speaking countries to suggest them to ratify the United Nations Watercourses Convention. Ms. Kauppi informed that Finland had prepared a discussion paper with questions for the Hague seminar.

It was argued that the Bureau should strive to develop a common view and political vision on this issue before asking the Office of Legal Affairs in New York for legal advice.

Subsequently, the Secretary presented her vision of the future interaction of and institutional framework for the two conventions. She warned of the risk of duplication and fragmentation underlining the need for a common message and effort given that transboundary water management was not yet globally accepted. She put forward the idea of a single global lighthouse for transboundary cooperation, with different components, partners, etc. which would strengthen the ratification and implementation of both instruments.

## **2. Establishment of strategic partnerships and contribution to global processes**

### **(a) Cooperation with the Global Environment Fund (GEF)**

The Chair and the secretariat informed the Bureau that, since their meeting with GEF in January, the Convention had been included in the draft GEF strategy and the letter to be sent from Italy to the GEF CEO was under preparation. An informal document would be prepared for the GEF Council meeting in November. Cooperation was especially fruitful with IW:LEARN which was sponsoring participants to come to ECE meetings such as the climate change workshop at the end of June, the workshop on transboundary water management in Latin America, etc. Preparations had started for the seventh GEF International Waters Conference in Barbados in October 2013. Bureau members were encouraged to attend this Conference which could also provide an opportunity to meet the GEF CEO, Ms. Naoko Ishii.

The Chair reminded Bureau members to contact their national GEF focal points for promoting the Convention ensuring their support to the proposed cooperation between GEF and the Convention.

## **(b) Cooperation with UNESCO**

Discussions on cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) had started and were already ongoing, but a formal strategy of cooperation still had to be prepared.

## **(c) International Year of Water Cooperation (IYWC)**

The secretariat introduced the events during the year, in particular the Dushanbe conference to be held on 20-21 August. ECE had been asked to co-organize the panel on water for peace. Other bureau members were asked to express their interest to contribute to this panel. Mr. Ivlev suggested that the Russian water agency contributes and also informed that Russian Federation was organizing several events in the IYWC 2013. Bureau members agreed to share information on their events organized in the framework of the IYWC and to submit them also to the UN-Water website.

Hungary informed about the Budapest Water Summit, to be held on 8–11 October. This high-level event with expected 1,000–2,000 participants aimed to provide a meaningful input to the post-2015 development agenda and sustainable development goal (SDG) discussion by bringing together results of ongoing processes and trying to elaborate concrete proposals for an SDG on water. The topics to be covered were broad, not directly focused on transboundary cooperation, such as universal access to water and sanitation, integrated water resources management (IWRM), water governance, financing implementation of SDGs, water and health, sustainable development, etc. The United Nations Secretary-General as well as the World Water Council had confirmed attendance. Stakeholder, civil society, youth forums as well as a meeting of the EU-China platform will take place the same week.

The Bureau suggested that the Convention could be presented by a minister, for example from Italy. Hungary was asked to discuss internally and inform whether this was possible.

Furthermore, it was suggested to organize a side event in New York during the General Assembly in the autumn to raise awareness on the Convention, also in the context of water SDGs. Such an event should be proposed and organized by Parties, e.g. the friends of water group, and have an attractive well-defined theme, e.g. the water-energy-food-ecosystems nexus. Bureau members (especially those from Finland, France, Hungary and Serbia) committed to consult internally within two weeks as a basis for taking a decision on this proposal, including the best time, date and topic.

## **(d) Water in the post-2015 Development Agenda**

The secretariat informed on the discussions about water in the post-2015 development agenda and the potential future SDGs. The thematic consultations on water concluded at the end of March 2013 for all 11 themes. However, much work remained to be done to achieve an appropriate recognition and inclusion of water in the post-2015 development agenda and future SDGs; this work is now in the hands of Member States in the Open Working Group under the General Assembly where water and sanitation will be discussed on 23-24 May 2013. In the consultations, water cooperation had been identified as a priority. Bureau members were encouraged to continue lobbying for a water SDG.

#### **(e) Other global and regional processes**

The Bureau discussed the involvement in other global and regional processes, such as the World Water Week in Stockholm. For the latter, the secretariat would share a table with the Bureau listing information on all events in which the Convention is involved.

Italy proposed to strengthen the cooperation between the Water Convention and the Alpine Convention, for example by organizing jointly in September 2014 the fifth Alpine Water Conference. This conference is aimed to share and spread good practices and main findings of the Water Platform of the Alpine Convention on the management of transboundary mountain basins. The results of the Task Force on Water and Climate, as well the results of the Task Force on the Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystems Nexus, could, for example, be shared at the conference. Either the whole conference or a session could be organized jointly. It was also proposed to hold the meeting of the Task Force on Water and Climate back-to-back with the 5th Alpine Water Conference. Such options for cooperation will be further discussed in the coming months, including with the Task Force co-chairs. Mr. Ivlev suggested including also examples from the Caucasus into the conference agenda. Ms. Galambos asked about a possible involvement of the Carpathian Convention.

#### **4. International Water Assessment Centre (IWAC)**

The Director of the ECE Environment Division informed about the latest developments regarding IWAC. A letter from the mission of Slovakia in Geneva had been received detailing financial needs of IWAC for continuing its work in 2013. ECE had committed to share this information with the Bureau and potential donors.

The Bureau expressed concern about the relatively low amount of own resources which Slovakia was willing to provide, 20,400 EUR, while asking for 145,000 EUR from donors. The Bureau did not see any concrete possibilities for fundraising, given that IWAC should be seen in the framework of the Convention's overall programme of work which still required funding. The question was also raised whether this was a temporary problem and in 2014 the Slovak Government could again cover IWAC costs. The secretariat was asked to report back to the Slovak authorities about the outcomes of the discussions and at the same time to explore other potential host countries for IWAC.

Mr. Ivlev informed that he had discussed with Russian institutes (Institute of Water Problems, Institute of Limnology in St. Petersburg) about hosting IWAC and requested more information about it.

The secretariat explained that the original idea for IWAC had been that the Convention could have several institutes or collaborative centres from different countries supporting the Convention. These centres would network, cooperate, inform each other and contribute to the implementation of the Convention's work programme.

#### **5. Implementation of the programme of work for 2013-2015, status of funding and resources needed**

**Area 1: Promoting implementation and accession:** The Bureau urged the secretariat to publish the Guide to Implementing the Convention as soon as possible. Within a few days it would be sent to the Bureau and all contributors. The secretariat informed that funding was still needed for several projects on the ground. Finland suggested that the Afghan-Tajik project and maybe also the dam safety project could be included in the Finnish proposal.

Finland announced that together with Germany it would fund the joint bodies workshop scheduled for September 2013, for which a contribution had already been received from Estonia. Unfortunately, the dates for the workshop overlapped with the Estonian-Russian commission session. Estonia committed to check with the Russian counterparts the possibility for postponing the meeting of the Estonian-Russian commission.

The secretariat informed of the preparation of the informal document on reporting that will be shared with the Bureau soon.

**Area 2: National Policy Dialogues under the EUWI:** this area was progressing well and mostly funded.

**Area 3: Quantifying benefits of transboundary cooperation:** One third of funding was still needed, but activities could start. The innovative nature and setup of this new area of work were challenging; possibly, the Bureau would need to rediscuss this at a later stage.

**Area 4: Adaptation to climate change:** The work of the global network of basins had started and much of the needed funding for this activity area was available. The representative of France explained that the country was interested in a stronger consideration of water issues under UNFCCC.

**Area 5: Thematic assessment on the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus:** The first meeting of the Task Force on the Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystems nexus on 8–9 April 2013 had shown the high interest, including from non-ECE countries, but also the methodological difficulty of this area of work. The exact methodology would differ between the basins.

The Bureau expressed its concern about the lack of funding for certain areas of work, such as the nexus. Finland promised to try its best to raise resources for this area. In any case, basins included in the assessment would not receive many additional resources and should include the assessment in their usual work.

**Area 6 and 7: Opening, promotion and strategic partnerships:** France and Italy confirmed their donations.

The secretariat presented an updated overview of contributions and expenditures, pledges and expected contributions (document: overview of contributions and expenditures BUREAU/2013/4) explaining that approximately one third of the resources for implementation of the programme of work for 2013–2015 were still missing. Due to the need to fund staff members, approximately 1 million USD were needed as an operating reserve at all times. Bureau members were encouraged to raise additional resources, where possible.

## **6. Cooperation with other ECE MEAs**

The Chair of the Bureau shared the conclusions of the third meeting of the representatives of the ECE multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) and the Chair of the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy (Geneva, 27 February 2013), in particular the joint letter sent on behalf of the MEA chairs to the Executive Secretary of ECE requesting more regular budget resources for the new Protocols, the informal guidance on synergies and the suggestion to organize a high-level session on the ECE MEAs' at the next "Environment for Europe" conference which was scheduled to take place in 2015–2016, but for which no host country had yet been found. Finland supported the idea of using the conference to raise the visibility of the ECE MEAs.

The Bureau was also reminded of the deadline for sending comments on the draft template for reporting on the implementation of the Astana Water Action and endorsed the comments sent so far.

## **7. Cooperation with the Industrial Accidents Convention**

The secretary of the Industrial Accidents Convention updated the Bureau about the concerns of the Industrial Accidents Convention Bureau regarding the contingency guidelines and about the very diverging comments received from focal points.

The representative of the Russian Federation expressed its overall consent with the document which corresponded to the given mandate, but required further work. The Secretary recalled the main problem of the Joint ad hoc Expert Group on Water and Industrial Accidents (JEG), i.e. insufficient expertise to finalize the product. Hungary expressed its deep regret if the JEG work on the contingency guidelines would be terminated and expressed its readiness to host the next JEG meeting.

The Bureau concluded that the contingency guidelines were useful, but required further work. An expert consultant should be hired to do this work (approx. 20,000 USD) to improve the draft.

## **8. Protocol on Water and Health**

The Bureau was informed about the latest developments under the Protocol, in particular the preparations for the third session of the Meeting of the Parties (Oslo, Norway, 25–27 November 2013). The high-level segment would probably focus on water, green economy, growth and social issues.

## **9. Calendar of meetings**

The secretariat presented the draft calendar of meetings for 2013 and 2014 and reminded the Bureau members to note down these dates in order to avoid overlapping. The Bureau decided to hold its next meeting back-to-back with the Working Group on IWRM on 26-27 September 2013.

## **10. Other business**

It was suggested to diversify the locations of the Bureau meetings.

At the end of the meeting, the Chair, on behalf of the entire Bureau, thanked Francesca Bernardini, the outgoing Secretary for her hard work, dedication, strategic view and successful results.

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