



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

BUREAU/2013/6

BUREAU OF THE MEETING OF THE PARTIES

Eighteenth meeting

Geneva, 26 September 2013

REPORT OF THE EIGHTEENTH MEETING

Prepared by the secretariat

The eighteenth meeting of the Bureau took place on 26 September 2013, back-to-back with the eighth meeting of the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) on 25–26 September 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), Ms. Heide Jekel (Germany), Mr. Serik Akhmetov (Kazakhstan), Mr. Vladimir Ivlev (Russian Federation), Ms. Sibylle Vermont (Switzerland), Mr. Fabien Dupuis (France, representing Mr. Philipp Meunier), Mr. Massimo Cozzone (Italy), Chair of the Bureau of the Water Convention chaired the meeting. Mr Niels Vlaanderen (Netherlands), representing one of the lead Parties for the work on climate change under the Convention, was invited to participate in the meeting as an observer.

The Bureau adopted the agenda as contained in document BUREAU/2013/5.

1. Opening of the Water Convention beyond the UNECE region and establishment of strategic partnerships

In view of the amendments' entry into force on 6 February 2013 the Bureau discussed how to ensure ratification of the amendments by all Parties by end of 2013, as foreseen in the decision on accession by non-UNECE countries adopted at the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties. Mr. Akhmetov informed that Kazakhstan would finalize the procedure by end of November 2013. The Bureau considered that Albania and Ukraine would need most attention to move forward the ratification.

Ms. Jekel informed that she had contacted the German embassies in the two countries, and that the German embassy in Albania would send a letter to the Government. Switzerland was also doing a diplomatic demarche in Albania. It was suggested to link the ratification as much as possible to politically important processes and to organize, if needed, a mission by Bureau members to the concerned countries, Albania and Ukraine, to advance the amendment ratification.

Subsequently, the Bureau discussed how to promote the Convention outside the UNECE region, including the draft roadmap for the opening of the Convention as well as its implementation. Several comments were made on the draft roadmap, for example that the short title of the Convention was often negatively perceived and should thus be further discussed. Bureau members were invited to send comments within a month after the meeting, i.e. by end of October 2013.

It was highlighted that all Bureau members are ambassadors of the Convention and that for this purpose more information sharing and networking were needed. The Bureau therefore suggested to share calendars and mobile telephone numbers and to create a wiki website where presentations on

the Convention could be stored. It was agreed that the secretariat should send an updated calendar of meetings to the Bureau monthly, including names of staff members of the secretariat travelling to the event. Such a list could include events for promoting the Convention such as the Budapest Water Summit (8–11 October 2013), the General Assembly of the Sahara and Sahel Observatory (OSS) in spring 2014, the African Water Week on 26–31 May 2014 and the World Water Week in September 2014.

The Bureau considered crucial to translate the Convention text, the Guide on Implementing the Convention and other guidance documents produced under the Convention into Arabic and Spanish. Since this could not be done through regular budget resources, as these languages are not among the official UNECE languages, Germany and Switzerland offered to provide extrabudgetary resources for such translations. The secretariat would try to find a way so to have these translations as officially approved United Nations translations, if possible. The secretariat also informed that, as of 2018, there might not be any printing of publications at the United Nations Office at Geneva due to the possible closure of the print-shop.

The Bureau subsequently discussed resource needs for the opening of the Convention. For example, criteria for financial support for delegates from non-UNECE countries might need to be considered, for example following the Official Development Assistance List, updated regularly by OECD. Resources from development agencies should be sought for financing the Convention's opening, such as the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC) and the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ). Mr. Dupuis suggested to consider the French Global Environment Facility (FFEM) as a potential donor and Ms. Kauppi offered to ask whether Finland's foreign or development cooperation ministry could provide targeted funds for the opening. Bureau members proposed that specific projects on transboundary cooperation funded by their countries in basins outside the UNECE region could possibly include activities to promote the Convention. In this regard, Ms. Jekel mentioned the mapping prepared by the European Commission on development cooperation in the field of water provided by EU member States.

The Bureau also suggested that the EU Foreign Ministers Council Conclusions on water diplomacy should be used to promote the Convention and as arguments for additional financing for the Convention's opening. Ms. Jekel mentioned that the network of embassies of engaged EU countries as well as the relevant EU delegations could help with the promotion of the Convention(s)¹ and might also provide some small funds for supporting participants.

The importance of partners for the opening was underlined and a suggestion was made to include into the roadmap a general list of partners as well as one for each region. The World Water Council was considered as an important partner organization due to the seventh World Water Forum in 2015; in this regard, Mr. Dupuis, Mr. Vlaanderen and Mr. Ivlev agreed to talk to the World Water Council to reinforce the cooperation with the Convention.

The importance of strengthening the cooperation with the Global Environment Facility (GEF) was underlined, including in the light of the decision on this topic adopted by the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties in 2012. Once the Convention would be fully open to non-UNECE countries, a decision on cooperation or at least an information document should be tabled to the GEF Council, for example in spring 2015. However, this would need to be well prepared. All GEF Council members from Convention Parties should be well informed, so that they could be in a position to promote the Convention in advance of as well as at the GEF Council meeting. Bureau members were encouraged to be in regular contact with their national GEF Council members. Other

¹ The UNECE Water Convention and the United Nations Watercourses Convention (New York).

opportunities for strengthening the cooperation could be the side event on the Conventions at the Budapest Water Summit and the 7th GEF International Waters Conference, to be held at the end of October 2013 in Barbados. It was understood that the GEF management considered it very important not to favour one of the two Conventions, but to cooperate equally with both. It was also understood that the future host location of the GEF IW:LEARN project was currently still under consideration, with Stockholm and Washington DC among the possible options (Geneva had also been considered an option at some point).

Taking into account the discussions at the Water Diplomacy Seminar “The Helsinki and New York Water Conventions” on 24 and 25 April 2013 in the Hague, as well as two other informal meetings, the Bureau shortly discussed the relationship with the United Nations Watercourses Convention, which is expected to enter into force in 2014, and how to achieve synergies, in particular in relation to the institutional framework. Mr. Dupuis and Ms. Hekel informed the Bureau about the conclusions of the Hague meeting: a step-wise approach should be followed in order to check slowly and carefully what the United Nations Watercourses Convention Parties want. France had offered to host an informal gathering of Parties upon entry into force of the United Nations Watercourses Convention, which would promote both conventions.

In this regard, the Bureau decided to organize a special event on the opening of the UNECE Water Convention once all Parties, which were Parties in 2003, had ratified the amendments. Depending on the date that this would be achieved, such an event could be organized either on 24–25 March 2014 in Geneva or back-to-back with the joint bodies workshop on 9–10 April.

2. International Water Assessment Centre (IWAC)

One Bureau member informed the Bureau that their Government was considering hosting IWAC and asked for an estimate of resource needs, but more time was needed before any decision would be taken.

3. Implementation of the programme of work for 2013–2015, status of funding and resources needed

In the light of the discussion on the same topic at the eighth meeting of the Working Group on IWRM, the Bureau discussed the implementation of the programme of work for 2013–2015 focusing only on areas requiring special attention. The secretariat informed that the Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI) had withdrawn from leading the programme area “Quantifying the benefits of transboundary cooperation”. Mr. Liiv informed the Bureau that Estonia was considering co-leading this area of work. Regarding the preparation of a checklist on contingency planning by the Joint Expert Group not much progress had been made. Germany offered to provide some funds for the required consultancy to finalize the product.

The secretariat presented an updated overview of contributions and expenditures, pledges and expected contributions (BUREAU/2013/8) and highlighted that some programme areas, such as on quantifying benefits of transboundary cooperation, the thematic assessment on the water-energy-food-ecosystems nexus and the opening and promotion of the Convention, urgently required additional resources. In addition, the secretariat described challenges in managing the extrabudgetary funds that were split between three trust funds, and the requirement to always have enough funds at the end of the year to enable staff members’ extensions for the entire following year.

4. Calendar of meetings

The secretariat presented the revised draft calendar of meetings for 2013 and 2014 (BUREAU/2013/9).

The Chair mentioned the nineteenth session of the Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) (22–25 October 2013), where he would be asked to report about cooperation with the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS). Ms. Kauppi offered to contact the European Environment Agency to discuss options for cooperation between the Water Convention and the SEIS in advance of the CEP session.

In advance of the CEP session, on 21 October 2013, the chairs of the UNECE multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) would meet. In this regard, the Chair requested Bureau members to check the paper on possible synergies between conventions, which was to be considered by the chairs, at the latest by mid-October 2013. He also asked for opinions on the suggestion to organize a high-level segment on the UNECE MEAs at the next Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference in 2016. Ms. Vermont and Mr. Ivlev expressed their support to this proposal.
