

Seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention

17-19 November 2015, Budapest, Hungary

Opening of the meeting by Ambassador Csaba Kőrösi, Director for Environmental Sustainability, Office of the President on behalf of Mr. János Áder, President of the Republic of Hungary

Distinguished Conference,

The Helsinki Convention is close to 25 years old: it is worth revisiting the Preamble to read it again. The first two sentences begin with very important words. “Mindful” and “concerned” are the two opening expressions that define the setting for the spirit of the entire Convention. At the time of signing in 1992, the signatory parties developed common objectives, cognizant that the condition of our waters gave grounds for concern, that protecting them was an urgent task. They understood and stated that cooperation was necessary in light of the increased pressure on our water resources.

Mindfulness and concern: when it comes to sustainable water management these two still go hand in glove today. However, by today we have attained a new level of mindfulness in many ways. It is the realization that the current life style of humanity is not sustainable in its present form because of its fatal impact on the environment and on natural resources. We know what should be changed and also why, and to some extent we know how to do it?

60% of humans live in shared water catchment areas. During the course of history water scarcity, contamination or simple sharing of water resources have on several occasions contributed to conflicts between neighbours. However, it never happened that the conflict produced more water available to those living in the given entire catchment area. Confrontation has never been the productive way to find a durable solution to the problem. There are many more examples for cooperation, which led to much better outcomes.

Sometimes we have the impression that contemporary water related challenges are overwhelming. But if we heed advice of science and we ourselves walk with our eyes open, then we will see that climate change in most cases will not contribute to the solution of water related challenges, but on the way around, it makes them even more severe that we can only solve them together. Thankfully the realization is stronger and stronger that we not only have to share water but also the responsibility.

After 40 years of trying, countries of the world have managed to agree this year on a common vision, which sets out nothing less, but a change of our development trajectory. This entails the idea that sustainable management of our water resources can only be successful through an integrated assessment of environmental, social and economic considerations. That also means that by living on the same river basin, we also share the responsibility for it.

Some of the necessary legal frameworks to implement this paradigm change have already been established, while some others are still in progress. This is why I consider it important that the Helsinki Convention is also opened to non-European countries. It is the archetype of the case when a good decision can be a win-win solution.

If we are to prevent the looming global water crisis, we will need something else beyond the adopted sustainable water management vision and the all-inclusive legal framework: we will have to scrutinize our joint institutional structures. We will have to ask ourselves the question: can our global institutional structures created in previous decades successfully promote the sustainability and integrated transboundary water resource management? I believe the answer to our honest question will motivate us to act.

When we observe the impact of climate change on our water resources, we can see that the extreme is slowly becoming ordinary worldwide. For us here in Hungary, this means that we are confronted more and more frequently with record flood-levels. At the same time we are seeing an increase in the number of drought months. In more than half of the period between 2000 and 2012 drought has affected areas exceeding 50% of the cultivated land of this country. If we look around worldwide, we see signs of even more serious pressure: crises which on the surface manifest themselves as social and economic, but are rooted in climate and water-related challenges.

Thus we have reasons to be concerned. But beyond the threats we need to see the opportunities as well. It tells us that it is still not too late to avert the disaster if we adopt a new, sustainable approach.

Esteemed Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is often said that there is no favourable wind for a sailor without destination. We already know where we want to get to. The time for action is now. We have to assume our national responsibilities, cooperate on the use of our shared water resources in a prudent, sustainable way, in a regulated manner.

It is important that we should regard water as a shared and uniting resource. The necessity of change could turn out to be the “favourable wind”: we have to learn to use it for our benefit. Then mindfulness and concern will also take us in the right direction: towards clearer waters and a truly sustainable development.

It is in this spirit that I warmly greet our guests attending the 7th session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention in Budapest and wish all of you a successful conference.

János Áder,

President of Hungary