

SPEECH BY DR. SÁNDOR PINTÉR, MINISTER OF INTERIOR OF HUNGARY AT THE SEVENTH SESSION OF  
THE MEETING OF THE PARTIES TO THE UNECE WATER CONVENTION

Mister President,

Mister Secretary General,

Honourable Governmental Delegations,

Participants of the Conference!

As the minister responsible for water management in Hungary, I am delighted to welcome you in Budapest on behalf of the Hungarian Government at the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties to the UNECE Water Convention. We highly appreciate all the results achieved by the Water Convention. That is why we host the Meeting of the Parties.

Nowadays, water has become one of the key factors of sustainable development. Since water is a strategic resource – also with social, environmental and economic relevance – the importance of water resource management has substantially increased all over the world. Illustrating the water-related responsibility of our Government, the Basic Law of Hungary says: *“the reserves of water shall form the common heritage of the nation; it shall be the obligation of the State and everyone to protect and maintain them, and to preserve them for future generations.”*

In the heart of the Carpathian basin, Hungary has considerable freshwater resources even in worldwide comparison. However, the spatial and temporal distribution of these resources is extremely irregular. Our experts are facing the challenge of “too much” or even the “lack of” water. Nevertheless, 95 percent of our surface waters come from abroad and flow to other countries; furthermore the majority of our groundwater resources are divided by national borders. Consequently, transboundary water cooperation for Hungary is not only a possibility, but obligatory. To protect the quality and quantity of our waters, and to meet the needs of water demand, transboundary cooperation is required.

Preserving our water resources is a basic duty of our everyday life; water secures the clean and liveable environment, conserves natural habitats and contributes to healthy economy and safe food production. Clean drinking water and sanitation are pivotal for healthy life and curbing diseases. The access to safe drinking water is indeed a basic human right. In order to safeguard it, everyone has to join forces and work together.

In Hungary the population is supplied with drinking water overall in practice, while the sanitation rate is 75 %, but we are progressing in accordance with EU directives and national regulations.

Due to our geographic location and to our continental climate we had to deal with periodic floods and droughts posing challenges for our water management experts even in the past. The increasing frequency of extreme weather conditions caused by climate change requires more attention and preparedness than before.

Hungary also has to face floods and droughts with increased frequency. These extreme weather conditions often occur in the same year, the same area with slight time difference.

Hungary has century-long traditions and gained immense experience and knowledge in water management, irrigation, aquaculture and flood control. The latter was proven by the successful coordinated efforts of the authorities and citizens to protect people and property in the course of the record flood of 2013. We were even able to provide assistance to our neighbouring countries in their efforts to fight the flood.

It is evidential that we can only tackle environmental challenges jointly, exclusively through international cooperation. Hungary has been playing an active and proactive role in international water cooperation for decades. Our bilateral transboundary cooperation have been in place for several decades and the Danube river basin cooperation has also more than 20 years of history. Hungary has played a key role in recognising water as a unique, stand-alone topic among the Sustainable Development Goals.

A significant new development in the international water arena is the global opening of the UNECE “Helsinki” Water Convention since February 2013 allowing the accession of states from outside ECE region. Hungary contributed as far as possible to the success of the 20 years old Transboundary Convention. In the meantime the New York Convention also has come into force. The joint and rational force of these two international legal instruments will definitely globally support water issues in many ways.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Budapest, the host city of this conference stretches along the most international river of the world. The Danube flows through nine countries and 19 countries share its catchment area. So, what could be a better location to discuss about transboundary cooperation and international integrated river basin management tasks?

Hungary would significantly like to support the execution of the UNECE Conventions Programme of Work in the next three years – with special focus on the practical implementation of global opening. I wish, that there will be as many as possible Countries recognising the opportunities of being a contracting party to the Convention, which may contribute to successful transboundary cooperation.

Finally, I wish you a fruitful conference.