

Plenary session, Thursday, 22 September, 10–11 a.m.

Presentation of the Astana Water Action by Ms. Sibylle Vermont (Switzerland), Chair of the Meeting of the Parties to the ECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (up to seven minutes)

- Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,
- Before I start commenting on the Astana Water Action, I would like to thank the drafting team.
- I would like to thank :
- My colleague Mrs Martine Rohn-Brossard for her support
- All the members of the Bureau of the UNECE water convention and its Secretariat, always ready to dive into water work
- All the experts from the UNECE countries and from international organisations and NGOs who joined us enthusiastically.
- The Astana Water Action would be useless if it did not inspire any country.
- We have 20 countries and 4 organisations that have committed to 76 actions
- These are: Austria, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Moldova, Montenegro, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Switzerland, the United States of America, Uzbekistan, the UNECE, the OECD, Eco-Tiras, INBO
- **I would like to invite you to give them a thundering applause.**

Introduction:

- The Astana Water Action is based on the substantive document on sustainable management of water and water-related ecosystems that reported on the progress, challenges as well as gaps of UNECE water policies and measures.
- We did not want to write another policy document but rather a catalogue of very concrete actions that could contribute to improving the management of water and water-related ecosystems in the region.
- What are the trends from the actions?
- Most are national, few are international.
- Almost all possible partners were mentioned: ministries of water, environment, agriculture, forest, health, to local governments, river commissions, rescue services, research, the public, the private sector, the WB, GEF, GWP, NGOs, etc.
- But hardly any finance ministries?

If we follow the subchapters of the document:

Water and water-related ecosystems:

- Most actions fall in that category
- IWRM is implemented increasingly through national water strategies at a macro level and at a lower level by long-term river basin plans.
- The National policy dialogues within the framework of the EU Water initiative, with, the UNECE Water convention and the protocol on water and health and the OECD as lead partners, are important for both recipient and donor countries. While new NPDs are being planned, the older NPDs processes are going on. The NPDs are a success which enables direct and concrete actions at national level which improve, in extenso, transboundary cooperation.
- We have little action on lakes and groundwater.

But there is a red thread through the theme of IWRM:

- In 2000, I was sent to my first global water meeting, the second World Water Forum to raise the importance of ecosystems, especially soils, forests and wetlands in water management. Not only did I get dry glances, and how I did feel lonely. Taps and pipes were so popular!
- In 2011, the number of actions pertaining to ecosystem restoration such as wetlands, restoration of river hydro-morphology, improvement of environmental flows of watercourses, either by improving the rivers themselves or by refurbishing hydropower plants is quite staggering. Thanks to all of you: I do not feel alone anymore.
- Land-use is gaining importance for water management, although PES are rare in the present actions.
- As many countries are implementing the WFD, ecosystem restoration is certainly an area which calls for more attention and reinforcement, not only on the issue of wetlands but also of forests.
- Obviously, the Ramsar convention on wetlands seems to be seen increasingly as a water convention. This is due to the activities of the convention itself but also in the joint venture with the UNECE water convention for the 2nd assessment of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters.

Water and climate change:

- This ecosystem approach is also much reflected in the actions on water and climate change. Only one country is looking into a drought warning management system. All the others have to manage floods, many of them by using non-structural measures such as ecosystems.
- Countries are working on cross-sectoral strategies for adaptation to climate change. Pilot projects are being developed. And 2015 is indicated as the target to get 10 adaptation strategies in transboundary rivers. Do I see any volunteer in the room?

Water and health:

- There is a difference between Western and Eastern Europe: In the West, installations are becoming old and are in need of refurbishment, while in the East, there is a need to extend the

coverage for water supply, sewage networks and construction of new wastewater treatment plants for both cities and industrial sites.

- Little is said about groundwater

Transboundary waters:

- This is an active action part:
- Sign new agreements, upgrade old ones,
- And, it does not stop to signing new agreements: There are plenty of joint monitoring programs and management plans, regional dialogue on transboundary water resources management, handbook on transboundary IWRM...
- Transboundary also means cooperating with non UNECE countries sharing waters with UNECE countries and even beyond at the global level.
- At this stage, on this topic, let me issue a personal advertisement : in my capacity as the chair of the water convention, my personal action for the Astana Water Action, which should be a joint target for all Parties of the convention is to ensure that the amendment to the convention, making this UNECE water convention global, enters into force before the end of my chairmanship, that is, before end of November 2012. So, please, do not let me down!

Water and greening the economy

- It is striking that only 2 countries are reporting actions on water efficiency on water footprint and on water use in a river basin. .
- On economic instruments though, the link is well done with water reforms, decentralization of services and involvement of the private sector.

In conclusion:

- You will be reassured to know that the actions do mirror all the findings of the second assessment on the transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters.
- It shows that the UNECE countries are conscious of the problems and that they are taking concrete actions with precise timetables.
- Maybe, you should have one more partner: that is the finance minister
- Pricing of water is important for the development, maintenance of infrastructure but all the water taxes should really go back to water and not disappear into State budgets for other purposes. Water is too precious.
- I also wish payments for ecosystem services would make a more profiled entry as one tool for greening the economy.
- The Astana Water Action has no expiry date! So I encourage you to go on announcing actions on which you are invited to report at the next CEP conference or before, at the next conference of the meeting of the Parties to the UNECE Water convention in Italy, in November 2012.

I thank you for your attention.