



# FOREWORD

**W**ater is everyone's business. The issues involved range from those of basic human well-being (health and food security), to those of economic development (industry and energy), to the essential preservation of natural ecosystems on which we all depend. These issues are all inter-related and need to be addressed in a holistic way. Water that crosses national borders takes on an even more complex and strategic importance.

Transboundary waters play a significant role in the UNECE region. From the 56 countries in the region, all but the three island states share water resources with one or more other countries. Transboundary basins cover more than 40 per cent of the European and Asian parts of UNECE. Sometimes, these basins extend outside the region. They link populations of different countries, are a major source of income for millions of people, and create hydrological, social and economic interdependencies between countries.

The reasonable and equitable use of transboundary waters is therefore a major challenge in the entire region, and inter-state distribution of water presents a particular challenge to those countries with arid or semi-arid climates in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia and in South-Eastern Europe.

The 1992 UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) promotes cooperation on transboundary surface waters and groundwaters, and strengthens their protection and sustainable management. It is therefore a unique framework for sustainable development and security in the UNECE region.

*Our waters: joining hands across borders - first assessment of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters*, carried out under the Water Convention, is the first ever in-depth report produced on transboundary rivers and lakes in the entire UNECE region (with the exception of Northern America and Israel) and on transboundary groundwaters in South-Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia.

There are many reasons for being proud of achievements made in reducing transboundary impact and for being optimistic about the future state of our shared

water resources. Joint efforts towards environmental sustainability at the national and regional levels are bearing fruit. As the links between water, related ecosystems and human well-being become clearer, many Governments are taking action to move water protection centre-stage.

However, despite hard work, "old" problems still persist and new issues have to be tackled: risks of upstream-downstream conflicts attached to water sharing among riparian countries; overuse of groundwater resulting from increasing abstraction for agricultural purposes and drinking water supply; contamination of drinking water supplies by pollution from point sources such as municipal sewage treatment and old industrial installations in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia and in South-Eastern Europe; pollution from diffuse sources (e.g. agriculture, urban areas) in Western and Central Europe; as well as the effects of climate change on the water resources.

The assessment brings together the knowledge and understanding necessary for further action, and is thus designed for decision-makers. It identifies situations of water crisis and provides guidance for donor agencies.

UNECE is, more than ever, aware of its responsibility to keep the state of our shared water resources under scrutiny and to bring positive changes to their management. We hope that the assessment will support all actors involved, at the national, transboundary and regional levels, to promote such changes throughout the UNECE region.



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