

HIGH LEVEL CONSULTATION

THE WATER CONVENTION – AN OPPORTUNITY FOR LEBANON?

11 APRIL 2019, 8:30 – 14:30

COUNCIL OF MINISTERS, THE GRAND SERAIL, BEIRUT, LEBANON

CONCEPT NOTE

BACKGROUND

Under pressure from a continually increasing demand, Lebanon is and will be faced to challenges in managing its water resources. Integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation, has therefore become imperative. Indeed, the risk of competition for different water uses to fulfil the various needs – water required by the agricultural, domestic, industrial and energy sectors, while preserving ecosystems – is even more complicated by the impact of climate change, including extreme weather events such as floods and droughts. It is increasingly important for Lebanon to ensure efficient transboundary cooperation for the sustainable management of its three major transboundary basins (Assi-Orontes, Nahr el Kabir al-Janoubi River Basins and Hasbani-Wazzani River Basin, which constitutes the upstream of the Jordan River Basin) as well as transboundary aquifers shared between Lebanon and neighbouring countries.

In this perspective, in 1999, Lebanon ratified the United Nations Convention on Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses (UN Watercourses Convention, 1997), which entered into force in 2014. The 2002 amended Agreement between Syria and Lebanon for the sharing of the waters of the Nahr el Kabir River basin was based on the UN Watercourses Convention principles and resulted in a win-win situation for both countries. In addition, to support its efforts in the sustainable management of its transboundary water resources and in promoting hydro-diplomacy, Lebanon has engaged since 2015 in an ongoing process of considering and assessing options for potentially acceding to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (the Water Convention).

The Water Convention is a strong legal framework and institutional platform developed under the auspices of the United Nations to promote the adequate quantity, good quality and sustainable use of transboundary water resources. It is a unique framework to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as conflict prevention and the promotion of peace and regional integration. Originally negotiated as a regional convention, the Water Convention has driven significant improvement in transboundary water cooperation in the pan-European region over the past 20 years. It has then evolved into a universally open multilateral legal framework for transboundary water cooperation, available for all United Nations Member States since 2016.

Several key preliminary steps have already been undertaken by Lebanese authorities in studying and discussing the benefits and obligations of a possible accession by Lebanon to the Water Convention. Most notably, the discussions during the national workshop “The Water Convention: Key aspects and opportunities for Lebanon” – co-organized in February 2015 by the Ministry of Energy and Water, the Secretariat of the Water Convention serviced by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the Global Water Partnership Mediterranean (GWP-Med) and hosted by the Council of Ministers – concluded that the Convention could provide a valuable framework to support the strengthening of cooperation for the management of Lebanese transboundary water resources. In this context, a letter was sent in 2018 by H.E Eng. Cesar Abi Khalil – Minister of Energy and Water - to the UNECE Secretariat expressing the preliminary interest of the Ministry of Energy and Water to accede the UNECE Convention. An inter-ministerial consultation has since then been initiated, clarifying questions related to the interpretation of some of the Convention’s obligations in the specific context of the country.

OBJECTIVES OF THE HIGH-LEVEL CONSULTATION

The national high-level consultation aims to provide a platform for national stakeholders to better understand the implications, benefits and opportunities of joining the Water Convention, given the specific needs and expectations of Lebanon. It will therefore cover legal, political, technical and implementation aspects. It will represent an opportunity for clarifying any question related to the Water Convention, to prompt a concerted national position regarding accession to the Convention.

More specifically, the consultation will:

- Present current status, progress achieved and prevailing challenges for cooperation on transboundary waters in Lebanon;
- Detail the guiding principles and general provisions of the Water Convention, its main obligations and their relevance to the specific situation of Lebanon, considering the outcomes of previous discussion at the 2015 national workshop and subsequent process of studying the Convention;
- Consider the possible future practical implementation of the Water Convention to address water resource management challenges in Lebanon, based on the experience of existing Parties, and how the Convention can support transboundary water cooperation processes;
- Discuss the possible benefits and strategic objectives of Lebanon’s possible accession;
- Agree on the way forward, in particular possible next steps in the national process of accession to the Water Convention.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- The legal and institutional framework of the Water Convention and its implementation are understood by all stakeholders;
- The benefits and obligations of the Water Convention in case of accession are known;
- The next steps in the accession process are jointly defined by the involved stakeholders.

ORGANISATION OF WORK

Introductory high-level speeches, presentations, panel discussion and interactive dialogue will allow for an open exchange of information and encourage a debate on the possible benefits for Lebanon of becoming a Party to the Water Convention.

The high-level consultation will take place from 8.30am till 2:30pm.
Simultaneous interpretation English-Arabic will be available.
Coffee breaks and a light lunch will be provided by the organisers.

EXPECTED PARTICIPANTS

Representatives of institutions and other stakeholders that are involved directly and/or play a relevant role, in transboundary water management, in particular from:

- Ministry of Energy and Water
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants
- Ministry of Justice
- Ministry of Defence
- Ministry of Environment
- Council of Ministers
- Parliamentarians
- Selected NGOs: Medurable, Les Amis de l'eau, etc...
- International experts: from countries Parties to the Water Convention, River Basin Organisations, GWP-Med...
- International organisations: delegation of the European Union to Lebanon, UN country team, AFD, ESCWA, FAO, Italian Agency for Development Cooperation, Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation, USAID, World Bank.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Venue

Presidency of the Council of Ministers premises, Beirut (Grand Serail)

Registration

Participants should confirm participation by Friday the 5th of April by contacting Eng. Mona Fakhri, Director of Water at the Ministry of Energy and Water (Tel. 03 763936, monafakhri@hotmail.com) and Ms. Barbara Tomassini, Senior Programme Officer, GWP-Med, barbara@gwpmmed.org

Partners

The high-level consultation is co-organised by the Ministry of Energy and Water of Lebanon, the Secretariat of the Water Convention serviced by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the Global Water Partnership Mediterranean (GWP-Med), with financial support from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) under the framework of the regional project "Making Water Cooperation Happen in the Mediterranean" (*aka* the Water Matchmaker project).

Website information on the high-level consultation

More information on the high-level consultation can be downloaded from the following webpage:

<https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=51399>, which includes background documents, such as:

- Report of the workshop “The Water Convention: Key aspects and opportunities for Lebanon” (February 2015)
- Brochure *The Global Opening of the 1992 UNECE Water Convention and The Water Convention: Responding to global water challenges*
- Publication *Guide to Implementing the Water Convention*.

Presentations and a brief report will be made available on the above website and on the GWP-Med site (www.gwpmed.org) after the meeting.