



Third meeting of the Parties to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, Madrid, 26-28 November 2003

Statement by Helmut BLOECH, European Commission

Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin with thanking the Government of Spain for hosting this Meeting of the Parties, and for Iberian hospitality.

Since the 2nd Meeting of the Parties, there have been major developments on ‘water’, on which the EU Delegation would like to draw your attention, firstly, the coming-into-force of the EU Water Framework Directive, and secondly the enlargement of the European Union as per 1 May 2004.

The UNECE Water Convention has been a milestone towards integrated river basin management, towards thinking, planning and acting across administrative and political borders. The EU Water Framework Directive takes up the same principles (and more), and makes them even more operational in terms of objectives and deadlines. Consequently, compliance with the EU Water Framework Directive will necessarily provide compliance with the commitments taken under the UNECE Water Convention.

The EU Water Framework Directive will cover all the European Union’s territory; from Estonia to Portugal and from Ireland to Cyprus and Malta. At the same time, the European Union will share a range of river basins in Eastern Europe and the Balkans with its neighbours.

Against this background of developments, our future joint work within the UNECE Water Convention should focus on what earlier today Carel de Villeneuve called “added value”. A very positive example to report in this context is the political commitment by Ministers of the Danube basin, within the Danube Protection Convention, to implement the Water Framework Directive and use the Convention bodies as the organisational platform for such work, well beyond the current and the future boundaries of the European Union.

Initiatives and work plan should therefore be targeted and operational

- Making more lively existing Conventions, or where appropriate shaping new river Conventions in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe.
- Focusing technical work in a way that serves the purposes of protecting our waters by integrated transboundary water management, not least to establish a sound common basis for financial support mechanisms (again the Danube basin and the International Danube Commission provide a very positive example for targeted action and priority setting).
- Finally, the EU delegation welcomes foreseen activity on flood prevention and flood protection. Countries across the UNECE region have in recent years suffered from flood disasters, with enormous damage as well as loss of human life. Floods do not respect borders. Coordinated action on flood prevention and flood protection will deliver considerable benefits, reducing damage and providing all levels of responsibility a sound basis for technical, financial and political decisions.