

An aerial photograph of a river with several large, meandering loops. The river is light-colored, possibly due to sand or silt, and flows through a lush green landscape. The surrounding area includes dense forests and open fields. The text is overlaid on the upper and lower portions of the image.

# **The UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes**

**Advancing transboundary cooperation for the management of shared water bodies through the UNECE Water Convention**

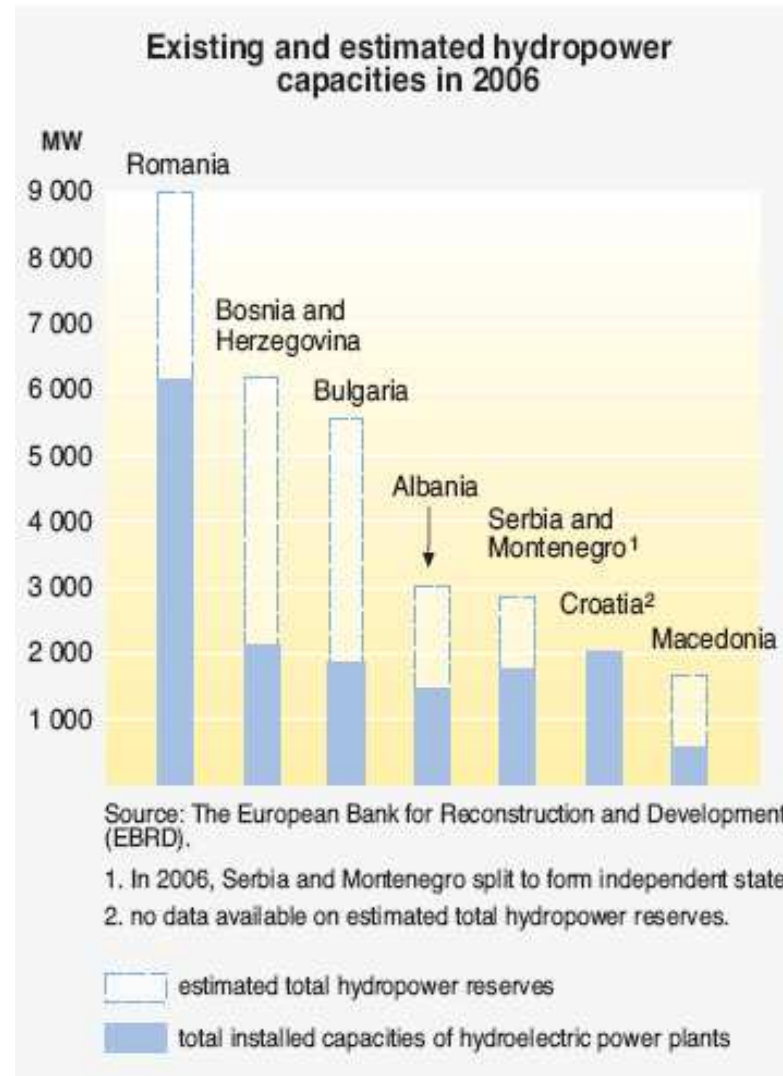
**Francesca Bernardini, Secretary, UNECE**

# Transboundary waters in SEE





# Threat - Growing hydropower



# General perspective



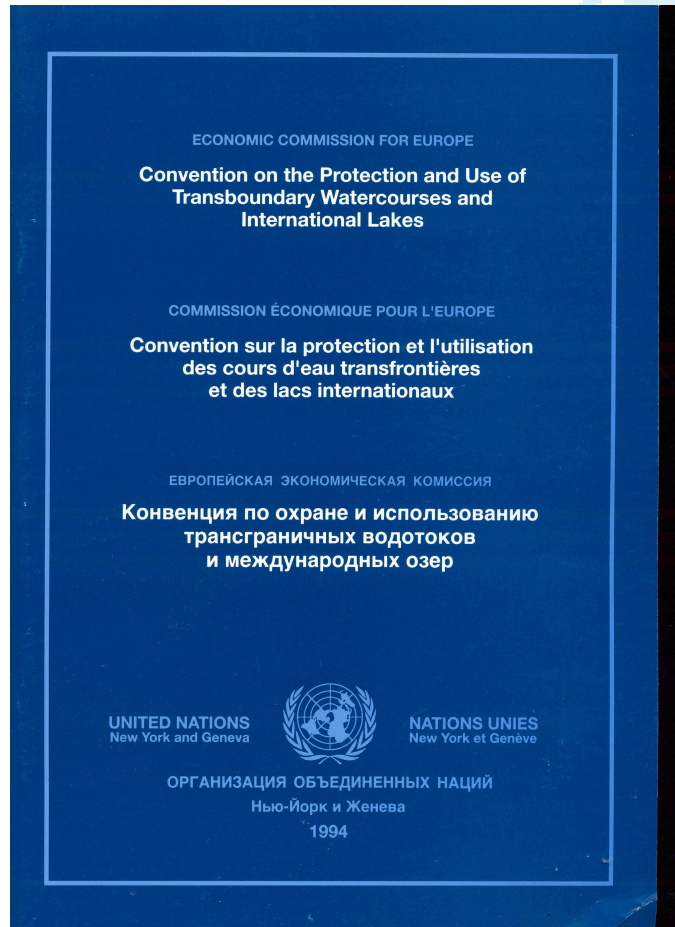
A changing world with many drivers/stressors:

- International politics
- Climate change
- Food
- Energy
- Population and migration
- Interrelations of all the above and impacts on water

# Advantage of cooperative framework

- Optimal utilization
- Prevent unsustainable use = worse off for all parties involved
- Predictability vs. uncertainty
- International credibility

# The Water Convention



- Signed on 17 March 1992
- Entered into force on 6 October 1996
- Protocol on Water and Health adopted in 1999, entered into force in 2005
- Protocol on Civil Liability adopted in 2003

# Status of ratification of the Convention

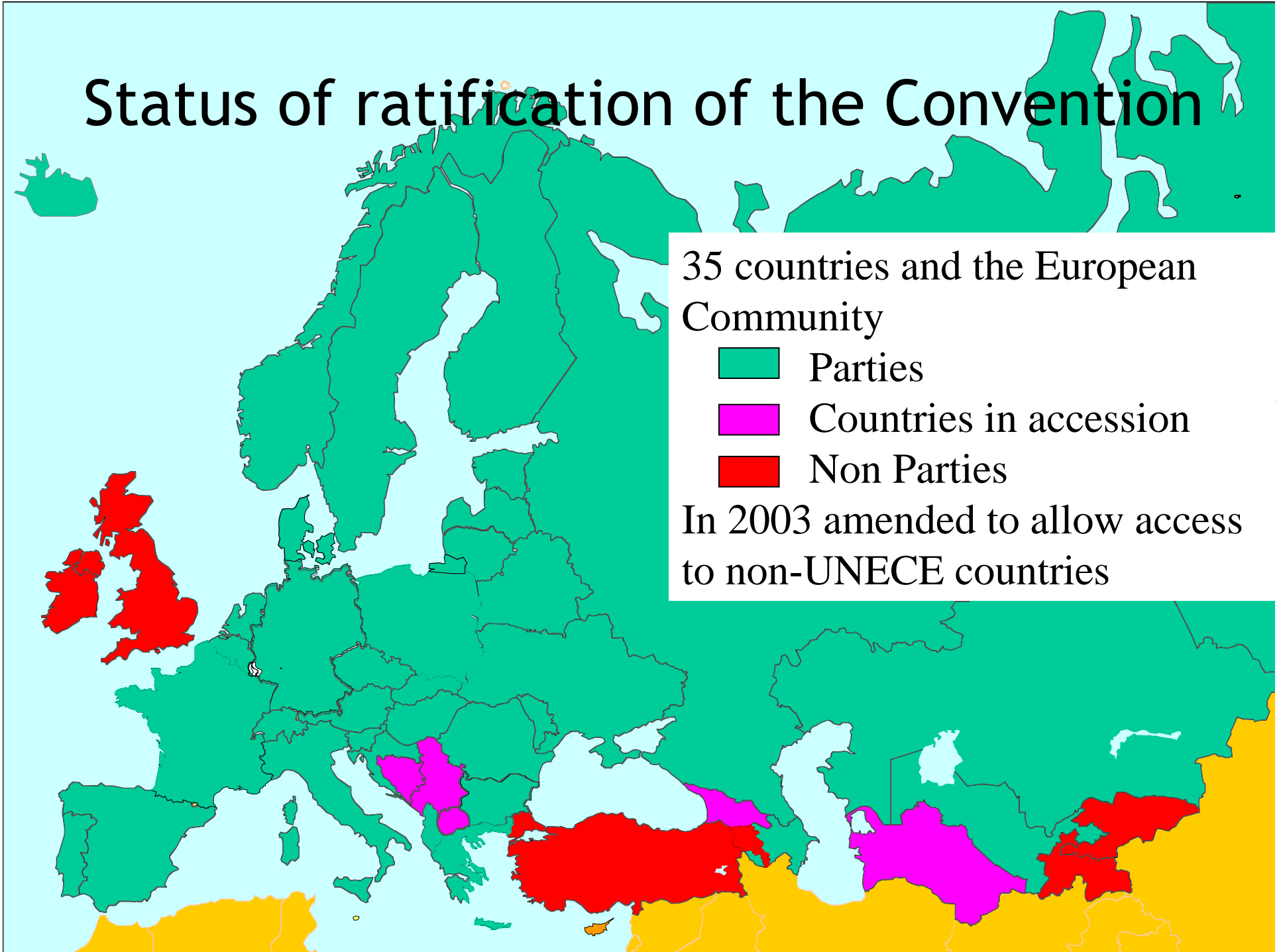
35 countries and the European Community

 Parties

 Countries in accession

 Non Parties

In 2003 amended to allow access to non-UNECE countries



# Aims of the Convention



- Protection of transboundary waters by preventing, controlling and reducing transboundary impacts
- Ecologically sound and rational management of transboundary waters
- Reasonable and equitable use of transboundary waters  $\Rightarrow$  Conflict prevention
- Conservation and restoration of ecosystems

# Obligation for all Parties

**Prevent, control and reduce transboundary impacts**

- **Transboundary impacts are adverse effects on the environment caused by a human activity, including effects on human health and safety, flora, fauna, soil, air, water, climate, landscape and historical monuments or other physical structures or the interaction among these factors**
- **Transboundary waters include surface and groundwaters**

# Provisions relating to Riparian Parties

- Conclusion of bilateral and multilateral agreements
- Establishment of joint bodies (e.g. river commissions)
- Consultation and exchange of information
- Joint monitoring and assessment
- Elaborate joint objectives and concerted action programme for their shared waters

## In practice...

- Played a crucial role in the region in supporting cooperation
- Most of the existing agreements are modelled on the Convention
- Influences the work of river commissions
- “Living agreement”

# Common features of the EU WFD and the UNECE Water Convention

- Apply to all waters (surface waters and groundwaters)
- Aim to achieve a good status for waters and related ecosystems
- Promote a “combined approach” to pollution control
- Promote a participatory approach
- Promote a river basin approach
- Are frameworks for water management

# Cooperation in SEE

- Importance of the Stabilisation and Association / Accession Process
- Wealth of actors supporting cooperation
- Political situation has large implications for transboundary water cooperation
- Except for few cases, cooperation is in general weak but...
- badly needed

# Main challenges



- Weak legal framework
- Weak institutions and low capacity
- Flood prevention and protection
- Cooperation on and sustainability of development plans
- Quality/environmental aspects
- Groundwater protection
- Monitoring and assessment and data exchange
- Continuity and sustainability of funding

# Step-by-step approach

Transboundary water cooperation = long-term, complex process

⇒ step-by-step approach.

⇒ Continuous progress

⇒ Clear objectives (EU WFD)

– From informal to formal

– From specific issues to IWRM

– From surface waters to groundwaters

⇒ **Importance of the process**

⇒ **Importance of the second assessment**

## The way forward

- What are the main obstacles in using the EU WFD and the UNECE Water Convention as basis for transboundary water cooperation?
- What are the possible next steps to improve the legal and institutional frameworks for cooperation?



**Thank you!**

**More information**

including guidelines, publications and information on activities under the Convention can be found at

<http://unece.org/env/water>

[water.convention@unece.org](mailto:water.convention@unece.org)