

**Opening Statement of the Austrian Delegation at the Fourth Meeting of the
Parties to the Water Convention.
Bonn, 20-22 November 2006**

Mr. Chairman, dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentleman,

In viewing the past 10 years, for Austria the major step - better to say – the step of utmost significance was the **entering into force of the Danube Protection Convention** in October of the year 1998.

The Danube Protection Convention with its long formal name “Convention on Cooperation for the Protection and Sustainable Use of the Danube River” is, as you will be aware, a true child of our UNECE-Helsinki-Water-Convention. It does not comprise only the Danube River. Insofar the naming is misleading. The Danube Protection Convention was designed as a River **Basin** Convention, which has brought together all States holding major shares of the Danube water shed.

This aforementioned date October 1998 marked the starting of cooperation between the Danubian States and the European Commission representing the European Community, with a new and enhanced quality. All legal and administrative papers necessary to rule the practice of cooperation could be finished in a remarkable short time-period. The Permanent Secretariat to the Danube Protection Convention was established in Vienna and started to work 1999.

A further milestone was reached 2000, when all Danubian States, which means not only the then Contracting Parties, agreed to take up the forthcoming EU-Water Framework-Directive as a common goal of the highest priority. Since then all working efforts of the Danubian States were and are directed towards implementation of this goal. The only difference came in, when the last “Danubian State” Bosnia-Herzegovina acceded in July 2005, completing the Danubian state - family under the Danube Protection Convention at that time. The situation has in the meantime changed. By the falling apart of Serbia and Montenegro the total number of Contracting Parties may now rise to 15, subject of a respective effort of the Republic of Montenegro for accession.

The last milestone well worthwhile to mention in the process of Danube Cooperation was the Ministerial Conference in December 2005. It adopted a comprehensive Danube Declaration “The Danube Basin-Rivers in the Hearth of Europe”, adopted the “Danube Basin Analysis” (or first Roof Report in implementing the WFD), which characterizes and assesses all major rivers inside the Danube basin, and lastly adopted “The Action Programme for Sustainable Flood Protection” in order to counteract to this scourge which has hit in the past years nearly every Danubian country also in a joint and coordinated way.

Mr. chairman, ladies and gentlemen,

The horse, which to a large extent pulls the carriage of the cooperation under the Danube Protection Convention, the EU Framework Directive, has in the meantime also proved to be very useful in the ongoing cooperation process under the UNECE Water Convention, which targets states at the south-eastern edge of Europe and states

even outside of the ECE-region. Austria explicitly would like to express once more its high appreciation of all efforts taking place to transfer knowledge on this most important European legal instrument to countries outside of the European region.

In this respect remembrance of the **amendment to the articles 25 and 26**, introduced by the 3rd Meeting of Parties to our Convention is important. Austria has explicitly supported this widening of the scope of accession - possibilities to the Convention and will strive to introduce the ratification process in near future in pace with the European Community and relevant neighboring states. The same holds true with the important legal tool to ensure compensation in case of trans-boundary damages caused by water-related industrial accidents, the **Protocol on Civil Liability**.

As to the envisaged “Rules” or “Recommendations on Payments for Ecosystem Services” Austria would like to express its reluctance for taking over any commitment in this respect.

First we think that even the main idea per se is questionable. Nearly everywhere nearly everything has been commercialized up to date. To place also ecosystems and their intrinsic values in a system where maximization of win is the rule and by this to spread such thinking further in the consciousness of people might be worthwhile to reconsider once more.

Second we think that scaling the benefits of Ecosystems in terms of money will be a very difficult and insecure task, giving room to endless quarrels whether evaluations have been done equitable. Besides an obligation to evaluate the service of e.g. conserving or reintroducing a certain habitat or species of plant or animal will most probably prove impossible to obey.

Thirdly the benefit or, as it is named, the “service”, which a certain Ecosystem exerts, will essentially never be one-dimensional. Most probably several benefits hitting different beneficiaries will exist. This means enlargement of the insecurity in the evaluation of the range of specific single values which may need to be compensated. Further deliberations in this subject may reveal that ultimately society as a whole is beneficiary of Ecosystems which makes it legitimate and obvious to use tax means to compensate those human efforts, which lead to sustainable ecosystem services.

In closing these remarks on the “Payment for Ecosystem Services” we would not like to misjudge a possible advantage of the PES-concept. It may prove to be valuable, even powerful tool with the right name, when offered specifically to enterprises to pay for certain benefits which they draw from their environment. It may well happen that these offers would be voluntarily accepted; however to make this procedure successful may require cases with simple and clear relationship between the ecosystem service and the gained use and may require cases where economic evaluation of the benefit will not be too difficult and questionable. Finally application of this concept in general may have the precondition that a dense network of stringent protection regulations for Ecosystems yet does not exist or yet cannot be enforced in the environment concerned.

In concluding this chapter it is to remark, that Austria will finally not oppose plans to further investigate the applicability of the PES - concept but oppose formulations introducing a commitment in the PES - context.

Mr. chairman, dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen!

The implementation of the EU – Water Framework - Directive on national and international level has got the absolute priority inside the water-administration in Austria. It binds its capacity and resources to the largest extent. Therefore we would like to recall a demand expressed since ever namely to avoid any duplication of work between International Institutions, specifically as regards deliverance of data. To achieve this goal may require a harmonization process in structuring the data, which should take place between representatives of this Convention and the European Environmental Agency. Ultimately the EEA should structure its data also in such a way that demands from International Organizations like the UNECE can be satisfied, where the EU is member of.

Finally allow me to mention that Lake Constance is most probably one of the best monitored and investigated lakes of the world. The adjacent countries of Switzerland, Germany and Austria are proud on the success which international cooperation for the protection of Lake Constance has achieved. The Results of annual investigations and monitoring of Lake Constance and its tributaries are published and easily accessible for the public. Nevertheless it seems that it was impossible to incorporate some sentences on the properties and status of this important central European lake in the respective preliminary UNECE documentation. It is my pleasure to hint to a presentation of the International Commission for the Protection of Lake Constance in the framework of the Poster Session, which may compensate the aforementioned deficit, but which also is part of the celebration of the tenth birthday of ECE Water Convention.

Mr. chairman, dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen!

Austria wishes the Convention, its Protocols and its Secretariat Happy Birthday and further fruitful years in contributing to peace and better living circumstances around the world.

Thank you for your attention.

RS 18.11.2006