



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
12 January 2011

Original: English

Economic Commission for Europe

Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes

Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment

Eleventh meeting

Geneva, 6 and 7 July 2010

Report of the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment on its eleventh meeting

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I. Introduction

1. The eleventh meeting of the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment was held from 6 to 7 July 2010 in Geneva. A joint session together with the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) took place on 7 July in the afternoon.

A. Attendance

2. The meeting was attended by representatives of the following member States of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE): Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Kazakhstan, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. Representatives from the Islamic Republic of Iran also attended as observers.

3. The meeting was attended by representatives of the European Environment Agency (EEA), the secretariat of the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention) and the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).

4. The meeting was also attended by representatives of the International Water Assessment Centre (IWAC), the secretariat of the International Sava River Basin Commission, the International Office for Water, the Union for Defence of the Aral Sea and Amudarya River, and the International Groundwater Resources Assessment Centre (IGRAC).

B. Organizational matters

5. The Working Group elected Ms. Lea Kauppi (Finland) as its Chair and Mr. Boris Minarik (Slovakia) as its Vice-Chair. The Chair recalled that the special feature of the meeting — the joint session with the Working Group on IWRM — was linked to preparations for the second Assessment of Transboundary Rivers, Lakes and Groundwaters.

6. The Working Group adopted its agenda as contained in document ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2010/1.

7. The Working Group adopted the report of its tenth meeting (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2009/2).

Session of the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment only

II. Pilot projects on joint monitoring and assessment of transboundary waters, including data management and information exchange

8. A representative of the International Office for Water reported on the progress of the project “Strengthening capacity for data administration and exchange for monitoring and assessment of transboundary water resources in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia”.

9. He informed the Working Group that since its last meeting the project had been presented to the French Global Environment Fund (French GEF), and preliminarily approved in July 2009. After the preliminary approval, a feasibility study had been carried out to finalize the project proposal. The project had also been presented at the fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) and, as a result, had been included in the programme of work for the Convention. The feasibility study had been finalized in February 2010, including the selection of two transboundary basins for pilot areas, the Dniester basin and the Aral Sea basin. The project had finally been approved by the French GEF in April 2010. At the time of the Working Group meeting the contract was under finalization between the main beneficiary (IWAC representing UNECE) and the French GEF.

10. The project aimed to reinforce capacities in data administration and data exchange within the main national and regional authorities concerned to develop the production of information necessary for water resource management. The preliminary results of the project would be presented during a side event of the “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference in September 2011 in Astana, Kazakhstan.

11. The Republic of Moldova reconfirmed the importance of the project from the country perspective and emphasized the need to coordinate with the “Dniester III” project, implemented in the framework of the Environment and Security Initiative, so that the two projects reinforced and mutually supported each other. Ukraine also expressed appreciation for the project. Kazakhstan welcomed the intention to provide a contribution to the Astana Ministerial Conference through the project.

12. Some participants raised the issue of maintenance and sustainability of the metadata database (database that describes and gives information about datasets) after the end of the project, in particular with regard to the associated costs. It was stressed that the long-term sustainability of the metadata database would mostly be linked to its usefulness, and that institutions involved would continue maintaining and updating it after the project if it proved to be a useful tool for their daily work. Thus it was of crucial importance that the final product was designed taking into account user needs, including the need to subject the provision of specific data to certain users for a fee. The project would also need to take into account the confidentiality of data and its accessibility by the broader public.

13. Participants also emphasized the need for the main final project outputs to be translated into local languages; the funds for such translations needed to be foreseen within the project. Moreover, it was suggested to disseminate the results of the project through, for example, a final workshop.

14. The Working Group also discussed the relationship of the project in Central Asia with the existing Central Asia Regional Water Information Base (CAREWIB) database. It was clarified that CAREWIB would be an important source for the metadata database in Central Asia and that cooperation would be sought with the Scientific Information Centre of the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination that managed CAREWIB. As the Executive Committee of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea was the main recipient of the project, the project would be designed to respond to its needs, including the implementation of the Third Aral Sea Basin Programme.

15. Finally, the representative of IWAC informed the Working Group that, in the long term, IWAC would strive to replicate the project in other areas. In that connection, Georgia expressed interest in having a similar project for the Caucasus in future.

16. Acknowledging the very tight time schedule, the Working Group encouraged the countries concerned to support the project. The Working Group entrusted the International

Office for Water and IWAC with the continuation of the project implementation and requested them to report on progress at the next meeting.

III. Sharing of experiences and capacity–building

17. The secretariat recalled the new approach to capacity–building activities within the 2010–2012 programme of work under the Convention. Besides the capacity–building activities in the framework of the projects on the ground, as part of programme area 4 “Sharing of experiences and capacity–building”, two kinds of activities were foreseen: workshops organized directly by the secretariat and others organized directly by countries and partner organizations. The Chair encouraged participants to link events which they would organize at the national level to the Water Convention and to report back to the Working Group, sharing outcomes and results.

18. Working Group members were invited to propose possible activities on joint monitoring and assessment of transboundary waters at the national, subregional, and regional levels. The representative of IWAC recalled that capacity–building was an important part of its mandate, and noted that a number of capacity–building events were planned in its programme of work.

IV. Assistance to Parties to the Protocol on Water and Health on issues related to target setting, indicators and reporting

19. The secretariat informed the Working Group about the preliminary findings of the pilot reporting exercise in accordance with article 7 of the Protocol on Water and Health, about the preparations of the first regional report on the implementation of the Protocol and about the proposed work related to target–setting, indicators and reporting under the Protocol for the period 2011–2013.

20. It was noted that no Parties had set targets at the transboundary level. While it was understandable that, in the first stage of implementation, focus would be on action at the national level, at the same time, in the long–term implementation of the Protocol the transboundary context also should be taken into account — in particular in countries heavily relying on transboundary waters for drinking water as well as bathing and aquaculture. Conversely, transboundary water cooperation should support implementation of the Protocol.

V. Assessment of the status of transboundary waters in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe region

21. The Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment undertook an in–depth review of the preliminary assessments prepared for the subregions of South–Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Eastern and Northern Europe, looking closely at the assessments of all transboundary basins and groundwaters. (The discussions together with the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management instead focused on more general and strategic issues and on the main findings and messages for the different subregional assessments, in particular related to measures and management responses (see paras. 63–78)).

A. Revision of the assessment of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters in South–Eastern Europe

22. The secretariat presented the revisions to the assessment for South–Eastern Europe (SEE) and highlighted the remaining gaps (document ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2010/3–ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2010/4). The International Sava River Basin Commission was thanked for the extensive and very useful assessment. As the amendments were minor, the countries were inferred to have found the information acceptable. The Working Group endorsed the proposed changes but asked the secretariat to consult the other concerned countries not present at the meeting in cases in which their clearance would be required (e.g., modifications to surface area data on the Drava and a proposal from Turkey to remove the table on the Evros/Meriç aquifer).

23. In general, information about impacts of climate change remained limited. Quite a few gaps were noted to remain in the tables, too. In particular, information was missing on a number of transboundary aquifers. The lack of updates to information since the first Assessment on a number of aquifers could indicate an absence of additional information, but the secretariat requested clarification on that. In some cases, the figures on the country share did not add up correctly and the countries were encouraged to check the data.

24. The Working Group regretted that Albania and Montenegro had not provided filled-in datasheets and that Greece had only provided information on one agreement. It also regretted that the assessment of the following basins had not been based on information from all riparian countries: Reservoirs Iron Gates I and II (information from Serbia missing); the Sava (population information missing from Albania and Montenegro); the Krka (information missing from Bosnia and Herzegovina); the Drin (information missing from Albania, Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia); the Mesta/Nestos (information missing from Greece); and the Arda/Ardas (information missing from Greece).

25. The Working Group invited all SEE countries, in particular those which had not submitted any input, to provide the missing data needed for the elaboration of maps and graphs and to revise and comment the inventory of groundwaters by 31 August 2010.

26. The Working Group requested the secretariat to submit the revised and final version of the SEE Assessment (summary and basin assessments) for its endorsement at its twelfth session. The secretariat recalled that, for comments and revisions to be included in the next version of the SEE assessment for the twelfth session of the Working Group, they needed to reach the secretariat by the end of 2010 at the latest. With the advancement of the process, the incorporation of new information became increasingly difficult and it should therefore be in the countries' interest to provide their inputs as early as possible. The countries concerned would be contacted individually about pending issues, including the unclear delineations of transboundary aquifers.

B. Assessment of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters in the Caucasus

27. The secretariat presented an overview of the country response and the input received. The input received mostly focused on technical information (discharges, water quality) and very little information had been provided on the management response. Also, the information about impacts of climate change was very scarce. Some of the information for the second Assessment required inter–agency coordination, thus participants were encouraged to proactively consult other concerned authorities.

28. The secretariat also presented main messages about each transboundary basin in the Caucasus and highlighted the remaining information gaps.

29. Azerbaijan's input was missing on a number of basins. Azerbaijan argued that a constraint to the provision of information was the fact that some data was not available for free but had to be paid for. Other countries noted that there were similar rules requiring fees for data provision by specialized institutions, but at the same time it was still possible for governmental authorities to gather the needed data.

30. The Chair drew attention to inconsistencies in some assessments, namely cases where a country had assessed a pressure as severe but the status of the watercourse as good. Assessments of the status also sometimes differed between riparians; to overcome the difficulty to agree about the status of watercourses where riparian countries used different assessment systems, thresholds and absolute values of pollutants were recommended to be included in the assessment to the degree possible.

31. Participants advocated that the ratification of the Water Convention should be included among the recommendations of the subregional assessment of the Caucasus.

32. Azerbaijan stated that aquifer number 66, Nakhichevan/Larijan and Djebrazil, was not transboundary and requested it to be removed from the inventory.

33. There was some discussion about whether information concerning sub-basins should be reflected at the main basin level; Armenia would not provide data for the assessment of the Kura, because it did not share it. It was agreed that the Kura should be assessed separately from its tributaries.

34. The secretariat clarified that the draft assessments would still go through editing, including making the terminology consistent, reorganizing the contents of the section on pressures to better reflect the relative importance of the pressure factors in some cases, and some editorial shortening (maintaining the essence of the contents).

35. The Working Group invited Parties and non-Parties to provide amendments and additions to the information contained in the following documents to the secretariat by 31 August 2010: Main findings of the assessment of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters in the Caucasus (ECE/MP.WAT/2010/WG.1/3–ECE/MP.WAT/2010/WG.2/4); Assessment of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters in the Caucasus discharging into the Caspian Sea (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2010/5); and Assessment of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters in the Caucasus discharging into the Black Sea (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2010/6). The Working Group requested the secretariat to submit the revised and final version of the Caucasus Assessment (summary and basin assessments) for its endorsement at its twelfth session.

C. Preliminary assessment of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters in Eastern and Northern Europe

36. The secretariat reported on the status of the preparations of the assessment in Eastern and Northern Europe including information on inputs received and on difficulties encountered, as well as the proposed schedule for the finalization of that subregional assessment. The preliminary summary assessment was prepared mainly on the basis of the outcome of the subregional workshop held in Kyiv from 27 to 29 April 2010, complemented with an initial analysis of the input to the datasheets received by then (Information paper: Preliminary findings of the assessment of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters in Eastern and Northern Europe, WGMA/2010/Inf.2–WGIWRM/2010/Inf.1).

37. The secretariat acknowledged the coordination efforts made by countries in completing the datasheets for some basins, as agreed in the Kyiv workshop, but some difficulties were still faced by some of the countries coordinating the collection of information (for instance by Hungary to gather information on the Tisza).

38. As a new development, the Republic of Moldova and Romania had announced they had signed an agreement on the Prut in June 2010, and were in the process of ratification. The countries were requested to make the full text of the agreement available to the secretariat for inclusion of a reference to it in the second Assessment.

39. The Working Group agreed that for that specific subregion it was important to clearly refer to European Union (EU) countries (and not to the western part of the subregion). Romania requested revision of the information concerning establishment of protection zones in Romania. Moreover, the Working Group requested more specific information to be added about wastewater treatment efficiency, and noted that progress towards a good status was not uniform.

40. The Working Group agreed on the next steps for the preparation of the assessment for Eastern and Northern Europe (see paras. 69 to 71). In particular, the secretariat emphasized the need for the countries to check the preliminary inventory of transboundary waters in document WGMA/2010/Inf.2–WGIWRM/2010/Inf.1

41. Considering the relative importance of the assessment of Eastern and Northern Europe within the second Assessment, due to the high number of transboundary basins, the Working Group decided to hold an extraordinary meeting on 15 and 16 December 2010, focusing on the assessment of that subregion, with participation limited to the countries concerned. IWAC kindly offered to host the meeting in Bratislava, Slovakia. In addition, the Working Group requested the secretariat to submit the revised and final version of the Eastern and Northern Europe Assessment (summary and basin assessments) for its endorsement at its twelfth session.

D. Maps and graphics for the second Assessment

42. The secretariat informed the Working Group about the plans for the development of maps and graphics to be included in the second Assessment, which were described in detail in the information paper on the final layout and contents of the second Assessment, including maps and graphics (WGMA/2010/Inf.3–WGIWRM/2010/Inf.2). The intention was to present more contents in the form of maps and graphs, compared to the first Assessment, increasing communication impacts. Basins and aquifers would be presented together, to the degree possible, adjusting to an appropriate scale. A basic feature would be a basin map (in some cases covering several basins), developed by the Institut F.–A. Forel (IFAF institute) of the University of Geneva in cooperation with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) GRID–Europe, using land use/land cover distribution (from the GlobCover dataset) and being accompanied by selected graphs. The graphs would include discharge (mean, minimum and maximum, replacing the tables now included in the assessment), population by country in the basin and the percentages of main land use/land cover categories.

43. The maps were already under preparations. Moreover, the secretariat wished to develop additional specific maps and graphics by basin or aquifers that would help to illustrate the findings of the assessment, e.g., distribution of pressures, change in water quantity or quality over time or impact of measures taken. The development of such maps would highly depend on the availability of data for their production.

44. A representative of IGRAC, which cooperated with the secretariat for the preparation of the inventory of transboundary groundwaters in the region and the

development of maps delineating transboundary aquifers, presented the maps produced so far, the information needed from countries and the future plans in that area. He also reported that this work in the second Assessment built on previous inventories of transboundary aquifers, such as the inventory of the UNECE Task Force on Monitoring and Assessment in Europe in 1999 and the inventory by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization/IGRAC in the Caucasus and in Central Asia in 2009.

45. For the Caucasus assessment, the draft delineations of the transboundary aquifers (presented as a draft map in annex 6 of document WGMA/2010/Inf.3–WGIWRM/2010/Inf.2) were presented for review by the countries concerned.

46. The Working Group was informed that the transboundary aquifer map of South–Eastern Europe — compiled and adjusted incorporating material from the subregional workshop held in Sarajevo (18–20 May 2009) and subsequent country input — only required final adjustments. To that end, the draft map and a list of aquifers had been made available for review as annexes 4 and 5 of document WGMA/2010/Inf.3–WGIWRM/2010/Inf.2. A number of countries would also be consulted individually about specific clarifications needed. IGRAC was preparing a draft map of Eastern and Northern Europe based on the material presented in the Kyiv workshop and the related discussions, but emphasized that feedback from the countries was very much needed. Dealing with two concepts, aquifers and groundwater bodies (as defined in the EU Water Framework Directive), was emerging as a challenge. Linking with the river basins was among the further steps needed.

47. The Working Group expressed appreciation for the development of the maps, which greatly increased the readability and impact of the second Assessment. The representative of the International Office for Water proposed that all the maps of the second Assessment should be included in the regional metadata database.

48. The Working Group endorsed the prototype basin map (document WGMA/2010/Inf.3–WGIWRM/2010/Inf.2, annex 2) and the accompanying graphs to serve as models for the second Assessment (annex 3 of the above document). The Working Group also endorsed the approach proposed in document WGMA/2010/Inf.3–WGIWRM/2010/Inf.2 to use the information provided by countries for generating the land use/land cover pie charts and population graphs, and filling any remaining gaps from GlobCover and LandScan datasets, respectively. The GlobCover dataset, as reclassified as close as possible to the classes of the assessment datasheet, was approved to be used as the source for the land cover/land use distribution information in the background maps.

49. The Working Group invited all countries concerned to review and, if needed, to correct the preliminary inventory and draft maps of delineations of transboundary aquifers in South–Eastern Europe and the Caucasus prepared by IGRAC (presented in annexes 4–6). In order to ensure the correctness of the delineations of transboundary aquifers, the Working Group also required countries to send such delineations to the secretariat as GIS shapefiles or as maps.

50. The Working Group stressed the importance that countries in South–Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Eastern and Northern European countries which had not done so should provide the needed information for the maps and graphics: in particular land use/land cover, population and discharge for all basins.

51. The Working Group requested the secretariat to circulate draft maps to concerned countries for validation during their preparation, and to submit all maps for the second Assessment to its next meeting.

52. The Working Group invited the countries to make suggestions for graphics to be included to illustrate the findings of the assessment in specific basins/aquifers. For the

subregions yet to be assessed, the proposals could be made when the completed datasheets were submitted.

E. Final layout and contents of the second Assessment

53. The secretariat presented the proposed final layout and contents of the second Assessment, and laid out the next steps for its finalization. As described in the document, the second Assessment consisted of an overview, subregional summaries and basin assessments grouped according to recipient seas (as in the first Assessment).

54. Some basin assessments contained an assessment of a transboundary Ramsar site(s) or wetlands of transboundary importance presented in a separate box.

55. Of the remaining subregions, the assessment of Central Asia would be carried out from September to February 2011, and that of Western and South–Western Europe from November 2010 to April 2011. Editing and translation of the text and finalization of the maps would take place from May to July 2011, to allow finalization of the Assessment for printing in summer 2011.

56. The Working Group endorsed the proposed outline for the contents (as presented in document WGMA/2010/Inf.3–WGIWRM/2010/Inf.2), including the decision to prepare an executive summary as a separate publication/document.

57. It requested the secretariat to prepare for its next meeting for review and endorsement the subregional assessments (summary and basin assessments), an overview and a draft executive summary. The Working Group also stressed that the preparation of the documentation according to the tight schedule that had been established required timely submission of information by all countries.

VI. Assessment of Assessments report for the Seventh “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference

58. A representative of EEA reported on the preparation of the Assessment of Assessments for the Seventh “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference, including the links to the second Assessment of transboundary waters. He detailed the plans and progress achieved in the preparation of the Assessment of Assessments (AoA), which intended to make a gap analysis of the regional needs and priorities for conducting assessments. The AoA built on national and local level reports on the state of the environment linked to the two themes of the Ministerial Conference.

59. The process was led by EEA and Kazakhstan, and the organization involved an Ad Hoc Steering Group, a Group of Experts and national contact points. The Working Group acknowledged the importance of ensuring consistency of the messages from the second Assessment and the AoA. The fact that the Chair of the Working Group was a member of the Ad Hoc Steering Group was considered a good asset to ensure coordination of the two efforts.

VII. Programme of work on monitoring and assessment for 2010–2012

60. The secretariat presented the new structure of the programme of work for 2010–2012 and the activities under the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment, in

particular the second Assessment of transboundary waters and pilot projects on monitoring and assessment.

61. Under Programme area 4, “Sharing of experienced and capacity–building”, besides the proposal to organize a workshop at the end of the project, “Strengthening capacity for data administration and exchange for monitoring and assessment of transboundary water resources in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia”, it was also suggested to organize a workshop after the completion of the second Assessment to take stock of the exercise and to guide future work in that area. The two activities could be combined.

62. The Working Group agreed that at the present stage no revision of the programme of work was required.

Joint session with the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment

VIII. Status and finalization of the second Assessment of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters

63. During the joint session, the two Working Groups discussed strategic issues related to the preparation of the second Assessment of transboundary rivers, lakes and groundwaters in the UNECE region. Both Chairs recalled that the second Assessment should be considered as a joint undertaking of the two Working Groups and that adequate inputs were needed from countries, and especially by the members of the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management, as information on management response had been limited so far.

64. The secretariat presented the preliminary main findings and messages of the second Assessment for two subregions, the Caucasus and Eastern and Northern Europe, for which subregional workshops had been held in December 2009 in Tbilisi, and in April 2010 in Kyiv, respectively.

65. The secretariat explained that, while the subregional assessment for the Caucasus had relied on prepared individual assessments of rivers, lakes and groundwaters in that subregion, the one for Eastern and Northern Europe was very preliminary as it had only been based on an initial analysis of the datasheets received. The latter subregional assessment would therefore need to be substantially revised when developing the assessment of the individual basins. The secretariat reassured the few delegations that were concerned because they could not find their inputs in the draft texts that all their contributions would be taken into account in the further preparations of the second Assessment.

66. The Working Groups commended the secretariat and the experts from the countries concerned on the work done and for the interesting preliminary conclusions of both subregional assessments.

67. Estonia suggested including more explanations for the limited progress in some areas, e.g., regarding wastewater treatment, the remaining problems and response measures taken.

68. Subsequently, the secretariat informed the Working Groups on the overall progress achieved in the preparation of the second Assessment, its outline and the next steps planned. The Working Groups endorsed the proposed outline of the Assessment (informal document WGMA/2010/Inf.3–WGIWRM/2010/Inf.2, annex 1) and the schedule for its finalization, as well as the plan to prepare an executive summary. The proposed maps and

graphs were particularly appreciated, especially as an illustration for decision makers, and it was recommended to include them wherever possible in the second Assessment.

69. The following next steps for the finalization of the assessment for Eastern and Northern Europe were agreed:

(a) By 30 July 2010, countries should send to the secretariat the pending datasheets completed, as well as comments to the draft summary for the Eastern and Northern European assessment;

(b) By early September 2010 the secretariat would send draft basin assessments for comments by countries by 15 October 2010.

70. As for the Caucasus assessment, the secretariat was entrusted to finalize it, taking into account possible amendments and additions, for which the agreed deadline was 31 August 2010.

71. At its twelfth meeting — the last one before the Seventh “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference, scheduled to be held in Astana from 21 to 23 September 2011 — the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment would review all the different subregional assessments and all the individual assessments of rivers, lakes and groundwaters, as well as the executive summary, with a view to endorsing them, in order to allow the secretariat to be able to finalize the Assessment for printing in summer 2011. Noting the tight schedule, the Working Groups once again asked all countries to provide timely inputs.

72. A representative of the Ramsar Convention secretariat presented the assessment of the Ramsar sites included so far in the second Assessment and proposals for possible sites to be covered in the other subregions. The Working Groups stressed that the inclusion of Ramsar sites in the second Assessment was one of the most interesting innovations and thanked the Ramsar Convention secretariat for its excellent and proactive cooperation. The Working Groups suggested considering establishing similar partnerships with other international organizations for the present or the next version of the Assessment. The representative of the UNCCD secretariat expressed his willingness to cooperate.

73. A representative of EEA informed the Working Groups about the information and data available regarding water resources and water quality and quantity within the agency, and especially in the Water Information System for Europe (WISE). He explained the possible input EEA could provide for the second Assessment, for example, regarding the Water Framework Directive river basin management plans submitted to the European Commission. However, since the majority of those river basin management plans were in national languages, they could not directly be used for the second Assessment. For that reason, the Working Groups agreed that countries should themselves extract the relevant information in the river basin management plans to be included in the second Assessment.

74. Kazakhstan offered to host the subregional workshop for Central Asia in Almaty from 13 to 15 October 2010.

75. Hungary offered to host the subregional workshop for Western Europe in the first half of 2011 (preliminarily scheduled for 8–10 February 2011) during its Presidency of the EU, pending final approval of the calendar of the Presidency events.

76. The Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment decided to hold an extraordinary meeting to discuss the assessment of Eastern and Northern Europe on 15 and 16 December 2010. IWAC offered to host the extraordinary meeting in Bratislava and to financially support its organization, including the participation of eligible experts.

IX. Preparations for the Seventh “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference

77. The Secretary of the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) presented the background and reform of the “Environment for Europe” (EfE) process, the current state of preparations for the Seventh EfE Ministerial Conference, as well as the planned next steps. CEP, mandated to serve as the convening body for the preparatory process of the Ministerial Conference, had agreed at its sixteenth session (Geneva, 20–23 October 2009) on the two main themes for the Conference: sustainable management of water and water-related ecosystems; and greening the economy: mainstreaming the environment into economic development. The exact agenda and focus of the water theme had not yet been agreed upon and were under discussion by the CEP Bureau with a view to endorsing them at the seventeenth CEP session (Geneva, 2–5 November 2010).

78. The Working Groups stressed that the second Assessment and its findings should have a prominent place in the agenda of the Astana Ministerial Conference since the Assessment had been requested by the sixth EfE Ministerial Conference and would provide an authoritative basis for the discussions on the water theme.

79. The Working Groups stressed the importance of the Astana Conference for the water community and the need for its greater involvement. The Chairs strongly encouraged delegates to contact their national colleagues working on the preparations for the Astana Conference and participating in CEP meetings and to inform them about the main concerns of the water sector in order to influence the Conference agenda and make it politically relevant for the water community. Moreover, it was agreed, following a suggestion by Italy, to draft a short strategy paper for the focal points of the Water Convention, identifying the main issues to be addressed at the Conference as part of the water theme; ideas on possible inputs to the Conference; proposals for speakers; and possible actions/outcomes. The Working Groups entrusted the Bureau to prepare such a short strategy by September 2010. The Dutch Co-Chair of the Task Force on Water and Climate offered support to prepare inputs related to water and climate.

80. The secretariat underlined that such an approach would be useful only if coordinated with the CEP Bureau in order to ensure acceptance by the CEP of the proposals. It was therefore agreed that the draft would be consulted at an early stage with the focal points of the Convention as well as with the CEP Bureau. At the same time, the CEP and Water Convention secretariats would work closely together to facilitate communication.

81. Switzerland suggested also involving non-governmental organizations in the process and offered to ensure the Russian translation of the strategy, once ready. Countries should be encouraged to use the Astana Conference as an opportunity for acceding to or ratifying the Water Convention and its Protocol on Water and Health, as well as for signing or announcing bilateral and multilateral agreements.

82. Finland noted that the final conference of the project “Water Scenarios for Europe and for Neighbouring States” (SCENES), to be held from 22 to 24 March 2011 in Hungary, would provide some policy recommendations that could be a useful input to the Astana Conference.

X. International Water Assessment Centre

83. Mr. Boris Minarik, Director of IWAC, updated the Working Groups on IWAC activities since the fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties (Geneva, 10–12 November

2010) and future plans. IWAC was mainly focusing on support to the second Assessment, as well as the pilot project on strengthening capacity for data management in countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, funded by the French GEF and jointly implemented with the International Office for Water. IWAC was also ready to support the pilot projects under the Convention on water and adaptation to climate change and to organize capacity-building activities. It was further suggested that IWAC could act in the future as a regional data centre, to extend the lifetime of the regional catalogue to be produced through the French project. IWAC was also ready to design and implement additional projects supporting the implementation of the Water Convention.

84. Mr. Minarik reported that the IWAC core group had not been re-established, but that cooperation was ongoing with different organizations, such as the Global Water Partnership (GWP), Vituki in Hungary and others. That cooperation would need to be formalized in the future. IWAC planned to extend its cooperation with other GWP partners, e.g., GWP Central Asia and GWP China.

85. The Working Groups thanked IWAC for the work done, as well as for the future plans for cooperation, and underscored that IWAC represented an important asset for the Convention and had a crucial role to play in capacity-building activities.

XI. Dates and venues of the next meetings of the Working Groups

86. The Working Groups concluded that it had proven useful to hold their meetings back to back, including a joint session between the two, especially due to their joint responsibility for preparing the second Assessment. They therefore decided to hold their next meetings back to back on 3 and 4 and on 5 and 6 May 2011 in Geneva.

XII. Closure of the meeting

87. The Chair closed the meeting of the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment at 5.30 p.m. on Wednesday, 7 July 2010.
