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International Water Assessment Centre

Progress report on the work of the International Water Assessment Centre and draft programme of work for 2013–2015

Submitted by Slovakia

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Background and proposed action by the Meeting of the Parties

1. The International Water Assessment Centre (IWAC) is the collaborative centre on monitoring and assessment and integrated resources management for the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention). The present document summarizes the activities carried out by IWAC since the fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention, as well as the lessons learned from the implementation of the 2010–2012 IWAC workplan (annex I). It also includes a proposal for the future programme of work of IWAC, which is being submitted to the Meeting of the Parties for adoption (annex II). The draft programme of work defines activities foreseen for the period 2013–2015 and the corresponding resource needs to support that work.

2. Following its move from the Netherlands to Slovakia, IWAC was formally inaugurated on 7 April 2009 in Bratislava and a Memorandum of Understanding on IWAC between the Slovak Government and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) was signed at the same time. Since then, IWAC has proved to be an effective operational arm of the Convention and its Protocol on Water and Health, supporting the implementation of the two instruments through concrete action on the ground. Based on the successful cooperation between IWAC and the Water Convention bodies and Parties, all concerned actors expressed their wish for the prolongation of the hosting of IWAC by the Slovak Hydrometeorological Institute through the period covered by the next programme of work of the Convention (2013–2015). The relevant procedure for formal approval of this cooperation was started in Slovakia, and a new memorandum of understanding should be signed between the Government of Slovakia and the Executive Secretary of ECE by the end of 2012.

3. The present document was prepared by the director of IWAC, in cooperation with the Bureau of the Meeting of the Parties and the Convention secretariat. A previous draft of this document was discussed at the joint meeting of the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment and the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management (Geneva, 3–4 July 2012) (see ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2012/2–ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2012/2, forthcoming). The present document and activities proposed by IWAC are meant to support the Convention's overall programme of work for 2013–2015 (ECE/MP.WAT/2012/L.1).

4. In accordance with the IWAC strategy adopted at the fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties, the Meeting of the Parties shall consider progress achieved in IWAC activities and decide on strategic directions for its further work (ECE/MP.WAT/29/Add.2, sect. III, para. 9).

5. The Meeting of the Parties may wish:

(a) To restate the important role played by IWAC in the implementation of the Convention and its programme of work;

(b) To thank the Government of Slovakia for hosting IWAC, for its support to IWAC work and for confirming the continuation of the hosting of IWAC in Slovakia through the renewal of the Memorandum of Understanding governing IWAC;

(c) To adopt the IWAC programme of work for 2013–2015, as contained in annex II to the present document;

(d) To encourage Governments and stakeholders to join in IWAC activities, and to call upon donors to mobilize the needed funds to support such work.

Annex I

Activities of the International Water Assessment Centre for the period November 2009 to June 2012

I. Background

1. IWAC is the Convention's collaborative centre on monitoring and assessment and integrated resources management and a support tool for the implementation of the Water Convention and its protocols. IWAC is hosted at the Slovak Hydrometeorological Institute (SHMI). The draft strategy and workplan for 2010–2012 of IWAC were approved by the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention at its fifth session, held from 10 to 12 November 2009 in Geneva, Switzerland (ECE/MP.WAT/29/Add.2, sects. 3 and 4).

2. The implementation of the IWAC workplan depends, among others, on the commitment of partner countries and institutions and on the availability of resources for the activities foreseen. The support of the Slovak Government and of some other donors was secured for the activities of IWAC for the period 2009 to 2012. In addition, links with other ongoing projects and activities were initiated to develop synergies in relevant transboundary cooperation.

II. Activities

A. Projects

1. Project "Capacity-building in data administration"¹

3. The project, "Capacity-building in data administration for assessing and monitoring transboundary water resources in the countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia", funded by the French Global Environment Facility (FFEM) and implemented mainly by the International Office for Water, is executed in two pilot sites — the Dniester River Basin, shared by Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova; and basins of the Aral Sea (Amu Darya and Syr Darya River Basins), shared by the five countries of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan) and Afghanistan.

4. IWAC is assisting in the implementation of the capacity-building project by undertaking regional activities, including:

(a) Putting online the first regional catalogue exploiting information from the two pilot areas;

(b) Producing a summary document underlining the experience in the two areas by end of June 2013;

(c) Carrying out actions for communication and dissemination of the results (e.g., information leaflets and side events during international conferences and events, such as the Seventh "Environment for Europe" Ministerial Conference in Astana and the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention).

¹ For more information on the project, see ECE/MP.WAT/WGMA/2012/Inf.3–ECE/MP.WAT/WGIWRM/2012/Inf.3, available from http://www.unece.org/env/water/joint_meeting_wgiwrm_wgma.html.

5. In the two pilot sites, IWAC has assisted in the organization of local and regional working events, in cooperation with national authorities and institutions, in the organization of the project's Steering Committee meetings and in the dissemination of results and their presentation in conferences and meetings.

2. Pilot projects on adaptation to climate change in transboundary basins

6. The ECE secretariat is implementing pilot projects on adaptation to climate change in transboundary basins, which are funded in the framework of the Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC), in cooperation with other ENVSEC partner organizations, as well as local partners. The work is being carried out in the Dniester, Neman, Sava, Chu and Talas Basins. Since 2010, IWAC has participated in project meetings in order to transfer knowledge and expertise, and to provide expert advice to the projects. IWAC also participated and contributed to the core group of pilot projects meetings (Geneva, 15–16 February 2011 and 23–24 November 2011).

7. The Dniester pilot project, "Reducing vulnerability to extreme floods and climate change in the Dniester River Basin (Dniester III floods & climate)", implemented by ECE, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) under ENVSEC, aims to reduce risks from climate change — and specifically flooding — by improving the adaptive capacity of recipient countries. More specifically, the project aims to expand and further strengthen cooperative management in the Dniester River Basin to address cross-border management of floods, taking into account both current climate variability and long-term impacts of climate change on flood risks. IWAC organized and supported an expert meeting on modelling, scenarios and vulnerability assessment for the pilot project on the Dniester from 2 to 4 March 2011 in Bratislava. The meeting outcome was a detailed proposal for the vulnerability assessment and modelling under the project. At the meeting, numerous experts from IWAC and other Slovak institutions presented Slovak experience regarding climate change impact and vulnerability assessment, as well as flood mapping and monitoring. IWAC also participated actively in all meetings of the working group on flood management and climate change adaptation under the project, namely the meetings on 18 April 2011 and 7 June 2012 in Chisinau, Republic of Moldova, on 7 and 8 June 2010 in Odessa, Ukraine, and on 1 December 2011 and 9 November 2010 in Kyiv, Ukraine.

8. Within the Neman pilot project on river basin management and climate change adaptation, implemented by ECE and the Belarus office of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), on 3 and 4 August 2011 IWAC organized an expert meeting in Slovakia on modelling, scenario selection and vulnerability assessment, which resulted in a detailed proposal for activities in the project regarding environmental analysis, water balance assessment and climate change impact assessment. At the meeting, IWAC experts also presented experiences from Slovakia and the Danube region. Besides taking care of all the practical and substantial arrangements for the meeting, IWAC supported the participation of experts from Belarus. In addition, IWAC participated in expert meetings under the project on 14 October 2010 in Minsk and on 6 March 2012 in Grodno, Belarus.

3. National Policy Dialogues under the European Union Water Initiative

9. IWAC participated in the meeting of the Steering Committee for the National Policy Dialogue (NPD) in Ukraine held on 10 and 11 November 2010 in Kyiv. During the meeting, the possible involvement of IWAC in the NPD and other activities in Ukraine was discussed.

10. IWAC is assisting in the preparation of the NPD in Kazakhstan. IWAC is ready to provide support for organizing the first Steering Committee meeting, as well as expert support during the NPD process in Kazakhstan.

4. Other projects

11. In the reporting period, IWAC participated in the ECE project on water quality in Central Asia by providing expertise, for example, in project meetings. Experts of IWAC also participated in some activities under the Dam Safety project in Central Asia, including a meeting held in Bishkek on 19 and 20 September 2011, the evaluation of the reports and suggestions for future work. A meeting in Slovakia on dam safety for experts from Central Asia is under preparation.

5. Contribution to projects carried out in cooperation with other organizations

12. IWAC also contributes to projects carried in cooperation with other organizations, using the experience of the Danube Basin cooperation. Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and some South-Eastern European countries are members of the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR). The goal of IWAC is to promote transboundary water cooperation in these and other countries beyond the Danube River Basin. At the ICPDR Ordinary meeting on 9 to 10 December 2010 in Vienna, the delegation of Slovakia informed Danube countries about IWAC activities. It was agreed that the IWAC representative will participate in the ICPDR working structures as a member of the Slovakian delegation (mainly in the River Basin Management Expert Group, Public Participation Working Group, Tisza Working Group and other relevant Working Groups).

13. For the Tisza River Basin (shared by Ukraine, Slovakia, Romania, Hungary and Serbia), the Integrated Tisza River Basin Management Plan was finalized and approved during the Ministerial Conference in April 2011 in Ukraine. The Tisza plan also includes water quantity aspects, and flood and drought management. The work was coordinated by the Tisza Group of the ICPDR, co-chaired by the representative of the European Commission. The UNDP/GEF/ICPDR project, "Integrating multiple benefits of wetlands and flood-plains into improved transboundary management for the Tisza River Basin" has facilitated the preparation of the plan. In the framework of these activities a demonstration project, "Making space for water in the Bodrog River Basin" was implemented by the consortium of partners from Hungary, Slovakia and Ukraine, with the Global Water Partnership Slovakia and IWAC playing a leading role.

14. Since November 2009, the Slovak Hydrometeorological Institute (IWAC) has been leading a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) project in the Science for Peace and Security Programme entitled "Flood Risk Monitoring and Forecast in the Pripjat River Basin", within which institutions at the national and regional levels in Slovakia, Ukraine, and Belarus cooperate. The project assists the participating countries in implementing the Water Convention, and in particular the obligations related to monitoring and assessment and early warning. Training activities were organized by IWAC for operational services in the Pripjat River Basin from 4 to 9 October 2010, along with a training and study tour for 12 young scientists from Ukraine and Belarus in Slovakia. On 18 February 2011, the introduction of the first automatic hydrologic station in Lutsk, on the Styr tributary to the Pripjat, was celebrated with the participation of NATO, UNEP and other officials. The automatic hydrological system was finalized in November 2011 and is meeting local and national requirements and needs. NATO decided to prolong the project for the year 2012 with an additional grant for the extension of the network of automatic stations in the basin.

B. Second Assessment of Transboundary Rivers, Lakes and Groundwaters

15. IWAC has played an important role in the preparation of the *Second Assessment of Transboundary Rivers, Lakes and Groundwaters*,² both in terms of substantial and practical assistance to the Water Convention secretariat, for example by arranging translations, supporting participation of eligible experts, pre-filling datasheets and preparing draft assessments.

16. The subregional assessments for the Caucasus countries and for Eastern and Northern Europe were prepared with IWAC assistance. IWAC supported the development of preparatory materials, for example, through pre-filling datasheets for numerous river basins for subsequent review by riparian countries. IWAC also supported the organization of and moderated the subregional workshop for Central Asia, held from 13 to 15 October 2010 in Almaty, Kazakhstan. The cost of the meeting was partly covered by IWAC. IWAC also supported the Water Convention secretariat in revising and finalizing the text of the subregional assessments.

17. In addition, IWAC hosted and financed the extraordinary meeting of the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment, on 15 and 16 December 2010 in Bratislava, which reviewed the assessments of the basin and the overall subregional assessment for the Eastern and Northern European region.

18. The *Second Assessment of Transboundary Rivers, Lakes and Groundwaters* was presented at the Seventh "Environment for Europe" Ministerial Conference (Astana, 21–23 September 2011). The active role of the IWAC in the preparation was evaluated positively.

C. Sharing of experience and capacity-building

1. Protocol on Water and Health

19. With the support of IWAC and the ECE secretariat, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Environment of Slovakia organized the subregional workshop on water and health in Central Europe to share experience on the implementation of the Protocol on Water and Health in Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. The main goal of the workshop, which was held on 8 and 9 May 2012 in Bratislava, was to facilitate exchange of countries' experiences on water and health-related issues and to discuss emerging problems, implemented solutions and remaining challenges, in particular in relation to the implementation of the Protocol's provisions on the setting of targets. Participants included representatives of Governments and national non-governmental organizations from Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia as well as some international organizations.

20. Back to back with the workshop, IWAC, together with the ECE secretariat, organized the fifth meeting of the Task Force on Target Setting and Reporting under the Protocol on Water and Health (Bratislava, 10–11 May 2012). The Task Force meeting was devoted to exchanging experience and to discussing the difficulties encountered and the lessons learned from implementation of the Protocol, as well as possible ways ahead to strengthen implementation at the national level.

² United Nations publication, Sales No. E. 11.II.E.15. Available from http://www.unece.org/env/water/publications/pub/second_assessment.html.

2. Other trainings

21. IWAC also organized other thematic trainings responding to countries' needs. The trainings were planned in the framework of the individual projects. For instance, in addition to the previously mentioned activities, from 7 to 11 December 2010 a study visit of six Georgian representatives was organized at IWAC on the implementation of the European Union (EU) Water Framework Directive.³ Monitoring programmes of water bodies as an inherent part of river basin management planning was the main theme of the training. A similar event for Armenian representatives was organized from 23 to 30 May 2011. Both events were partly financed by the EU Technical Assistance and Information Exchange instrument (TAIEX).

3. Exchange of experience

22. Exchange of experience is organized within the individual projects which IWAC is involved in or leading. IWAC attends many national and international events where exchange of experience, mostly between EU and non-EU countries, occurs. Best practices from the Danube Basin are frequently used for the dissemination of good results.

23. IWAC is also in contact with representatives of countries outside the ECE region (e.g., Mongolia, China, Afghanistan and Islamic Republic of Iran) through several international and regional meetings. For example, IWAC attended an international conference, *Transboundary Waters: Opportunities for Cooperation*, on 22 February 2012 in Yazd, Iran, where it provided information and training about the Water Convention. The conference was attended by many countries from arid and semi-arid regions.

4. Website

24. So far, the IWAC website is mostly used passively. An enhancement of the website to better support sharing of information and experience is planned.

III. Lessons learned from the past three years

25. During the past three years, IWAC played a key role in the Water Convention's implementation, supporting key activities in its programme of work. A number of lessons can be drawn from the period in which IWAC was hosted by the Slovak Hydrometeorological Institute which should guide future work.

26. The important role IWAC was able to play was owing to a number of factors:

(a) The close link to the Convention's and Protocol's programmes of work, which gave coherence to IWAC activities, ensured acceptance and ownership from recipient countries and guaranteed follow-up in the framework of Convention's intergovernmental bodies and other activities;

(b) The strong Slovak experience and competence — in particular in the Slovak Hydrometeorological Institute — in transboundary cooperation, monitoring and assessment, water management, extreme events, etc. The direct, hands-on experience of experts involved in IWAC activities, in particular in trainings organized by IWAC, was highly praised by experts from Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia;

³ Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy.

(c) The link to Slovak Foreign Affairs policy, in particular the involvement of Slovak embassies in the countries where projects were carried out. This made it possible to ensure a stronger political backing for projects, facilitated follow-up and, at the same time, increased recognition of Slovak expertise and support;

(d) The good synergy and cooperation with the ECE secretariat. In implementing activities in the Convention's programme of work, IWAC and ECE were able to find good work-sharing arrangements, maximizing the strength of IWAC technical expertise and ECE as a political facilitator;

(e) The possibility of using IWAC funds to add to other sources of funding, to quick-start activities or to respond to new requests. IWAC resources were mostly used to co-finance activities implemented together with other donors. This was particularly useful as it allowed joining forces, achieving greater impact and intervening where new requests or continuity of funding from other donors demanded a quick response;

(f) IWAC capacity to fund-raise from other sources in addition to the IWAC budget from the Government of Slovakia. This made it possible to broaden the scope of IWAC activities.

27. At the same time, a number of challenges were encountered in the past triennium, which need to be taken into account in future work:

(a) Due to internal changes in Slovakia, IWAC funding was irregular and unpredictable. This had negative consequences on its capacity to maintain certain engagements and to plan and implement certain activities. While fund-raising from other sources is important, it is of key importance that IWAC can rely on stable and predictable funding in the next three years;

(b) The scope of work undertaken by IWAC is extremely broad. While this allows a great flexibility in interventions, engagement in too many areas and directions could jeopardize the capacity of IWAC to fulfil all the agreed tasks. While the nature of IWAC work requires flexibility and capacity to take advantage of windows of opportunity, it is key that in the future a strategic prioritization of interventions strongly guides IWAC work.

Annex II

Programme of work of the International Water Assessment Centre for 2013–2015

1. In accordance with its terms of reference and strategy, the main role of International Water Assessment Centre (IWAC) will continue to be to assist Parties and non-Parties to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) and its Protocol on Water and Health to implement the two instruments, as well as assisting the bodies established under the two instruments to carry out their programmes of work. Therefore, the IWAC programme of work is closely linked to the respective programmes of work of the two instruments.
2. The following list of future activities includes activities in which IWAC will play a supportive or a leading role.
3. The implementation of the programme of work will depend on the commitment of partner countries and institutions and on the availability of resources for the activities foreseen.

I. Activities

4. IWAC will participate and contribute to the work of the Convention's subsidiary bodies, such as the Bureau, the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management, the task force on the water- food-energy-ecosystems nexus (expected to be established at the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties), the Task Force on Water and Climate and its core group of pilot projects and the core group on National Policy Dialogues, as well as the Protocol's Working Group on Water and Health and Task Force on Target Setting and Reporting.
5. In the framework of the activities listed below, IWAC will organize and support two events per year with the participation of representatives from Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia in Slovakia.
6. IWAC is planning to contribute to the following programme areas included in the draft programme of work for the Convention for 2013–2015 (ECE/MP.WAT/2012/L.1):

Programme area 1: Support to implementation and accession

7. IWAC will support projects on the ground aimed at promoting implementation of the Water Convention, where possible and appropriate, such as the dam safety project, the project on water quality in Central Asia, etc. In 2013, IWAC will also support the finalization of the project "Capacity-building in data administration".

Programme area 2: European Union Water Initiative and National Policy Dialogues

8. IWAC will support the National Policy Dialogues (NPDs) on Integrated Water Resources Management implemented by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) under the European Union Water Initiative in Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Kazakhstan, as needed. IWAC will participate also in some NPDs in other countries, with possible support to countries, if requested.

Programme Area 4: Adapting to climate change in transboundary basins

9. IWAC will support the creation of a global network of basins working on climate change adaptation, in particular by supporting, where needed and appropriate, specific pilot projects/basins. IWAC will organize expert meetings in Slovakia for consultation and training on selected issues upon request. In addition, IWAC will contribute to the collection of good practices on climate change adaptation in transboundary basins.

Programme area 5: Water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus

10. IWAC will assist (as it did for the Second Assessment) in the preparation of the thematic assessment on the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus, including the preparation of background material, translations, organization of regional meetings and consultations.

Programme area 6: Opening of the Convention to countries outside the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe region

11. IWAC will assist in promoting the Water Convention in countries outside the ECE region, where possible and appropriate.

Programme area 7: Promotion of the Convention and establishment of strategic partnerships

12. IWAC will disseminate experiences regarding implementation of the Convention among countries and regions, organize trainings, carry out promotion activities and produce promotional materials.

II. Resources

13. As a formal unit of the Slovak Hydrometeorological Institute, IWAC works under the supervision of the Director-General of the Institute. The Institute has approximately 420 employees and its portfolio covers nearly all thematic fields of IWAC work. IWAC will use the Institute's resources, as needed, for its activities.

14. Financial resources are allocated by the Slovak Government yearly to cover personnel costs, office costs and co-financing of IWAC activities. In addition, IWAC is seeking funds from other sources, such as bilateral, multilateral and European Commission sources.

Personnel

15. Permanent staff:

- (a) Director: Mr. Boris Minarik;
- (b) Deputy Director: Ms. Andrea Majovska;
- (c) Key expert: Ms. Lea Mrafkova;
- (d) Communication and administration: Ms. Henrieta Krizanova.

16. IWAC can rely on the capacity of the Slovak Hydrometeorological Institute in a number of areas, such as monitoring and assessment of surface waters and groundwaters, integrated water resources management, operational hydrology and flood protection.