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## FIFTH SESSION OF MEETING OF PARTIES TO WATER CONVENTION TO DISCUSS FUTURE STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS IN TRANSBOUNDARY WATER COOPERATION



Transboundary water relations in the pan-European region are expected to take a significant step forward at the fifth session of the *Meeting of the Parties to the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention)*. The session is being held in Geneva on 10-12 November.

Since its entry into force in 1996, the Water Convention has provided an important legal framework and contributed to improving transboundary water management in the UNECE region. The Convention currently has 36 Parties, ranging from Portugal to Uzbekistan and including almost all the EU countries as well as the European Community.

The Convention has served as a model for transboundary cooperation arrangements throughout the region. It has played a crucial role for the new countries that emerged after the break-up of the Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia, and has been the reference for new agreements on waters that were previously managed by single countries.

The fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties will review progress achieved in implementation and consider and plan for the challenges that lie ahead. The session's agenda includes a wide variety of topics that have been the focus of work over the past three years.

### STRENGTHENING IMPLEMENTATION

A major topic for discussion will be how to promote implementation and compliance. The recently completed *Guide to Implementing the Convention*, which the Meeting of the Parties is expected to adopt, will offer a practical tool both to Parties and to countries considering accession. The *Guide* features a comprehensive commentary on the Convention's provisions and gives explanations of the procedural, legal, administrative, technical and practical aspects of the Convention's requirements. The explanations are coupled with examples of good practices in the UNECE region. The Parties are expected to decide on directions for further work on implementation, in particular ways to address concrete problems and to prevent or settle differences in the interpretation and application of the Convention. This would be a major step in the evolution of the Convention.

### ASSESSMENT OF TRANSBOUNDARY WATERS

Data-sharing and joint monitoring are essential for transboundary water cooperation, and informed decision-making is one of the core obligations of the Convention. Periodic assessments are done to monitor the Convention's effectiveness and progress. A second *Assessment of Transboundary Rivers, Lakes and Groundwaters in the UNECE region* is being prepared and will be submitted to the Seventh Ministerial Conference "*Environment for Europe*" (Astana, Kazakhstan, 2011). At its upcoming session, the Meeting of the Parties will review the preliminary findings of the assessment of transboundary waters in South-East Europe.

### OUTREACH BEYOND THE UNECE REGION

The Parties amended the Convention in 2003 to allow accession by countries outside the region, with the aims of sharing the Convention's experience with other regions, promoting river basin cooperation globally, and thus contributing to peace, security and sustainable water management. The amendment is still not in force, with only 14 out of the 23 ratifications needed. In 2009, however, four more Parties ratified the amendment. The Meeting of the Parties will discuss how to step up the pace of ratifications and how to involve interested non-UNECE countries in activities under the Convention.

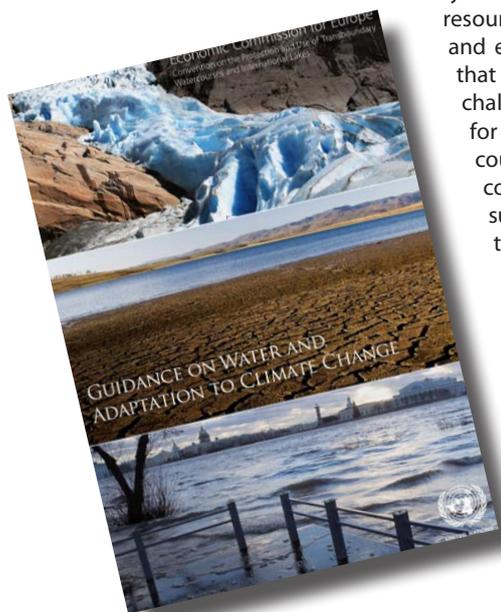


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## SUPPORTING CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION IN TRANSBOUNDARY BASINS

Hydrometeorological records and climate projections provide abundant evidence that water resources are highly vulnerable to climate change, with wide-ranging consequences for populations and ecosystems. Nonetheless, very few countries have developed adaptation strategies. The fact that many water bodies cross boundaries, especially in the UNECE region, means that the risks and challenges are shared and thus solutions need to be coordinated. There is also a growing potential for conflict arising from competition over dwindling water resources and an increasing risk that countries will act unilaterally, with possible negative effects on riparian countries. Transboundary cooperation is therefore necessary to prevent negative impacts of unilateral measures and to support the coordination of adaptation measures at the river-basin level. However, at present transboundary cooperation in developing adaptation strategies is virtually non-existent.

At their fourth session in 2006, the Meeting of the Parties recognized that climate change would pose one of the main challenges to transboundary water cooperation and security. They decided to develop a *Guidance on Water and Adaptation to Climate Change*, which after two years' preparation is expected to be adopted in November. The *Guidance* is the first document of its kind to focus on the transboundary setting. Based on the concept of integrated water resources management, the *Guidance* offers advice to decision-makers and water managers on how to assess climate change impacts on water quantity and quality, how to perform risk assessment, including health risk assessment, how to gauge vulnerability, and how to design and implement sound adaptation strategies. At the fifth session, the Meeting of the Parties will also discuss further ways to increase countries' adaptive capacity in transboundary basins, in particular through projects on the ground.



### EUROPEAN UNION WATER INITIATIVE

Since 2006, the *National Policy Dialogues* on integrated water resource management — one of the main instruments of the EU Water Initiative, with UNECE as a strategic partner — have been pursued in line with the EU Water Framework Directive, the Convention and the Convention's Protocol on Water and Health. The European Commission has provided major funding. Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine currently participate in the *Dialogues*, and the process will start in Azerbaijan, Georgia, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan in 2010. The Meeting of the Parties will examine the progress made with the *National Policy Dialogues*, and the role of the Parties and the UNECE secretariat in the process. It will also consider governance and financing, as well as future directions for the *Dialogues*.

### HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT AND SIDE-EVENTS

For the first time, the Meeting of the Parties will include a High-level Segment. This will focus on transboundary water cooperation in Central Asia and the role of the Convention in the subregion. It will give participants the opportunity to discuss the needs of Central Asian countries regarding transboundary water cooperation and sustainable management of water resources and to discuss the role that the permanent cooperation under the Convention can play in meeting those needs. Parties to the Convention and other participants will share their experiences with implementing the Convention and demonstrate how the Convention can benefit both upstream and downstream riparian countries.

A number of side events will take place at lunchtime during the session. These will allow for in-depth discussions of important experiences and tools in the Convention's implementation.

- Tuesday, 10 November, 13.15–14.45 ▶ *Work of European river commissions*
- Wednesday, 11 November, 13.15–14.45 ▶ *EU Water Initiative National Policy Dialogues in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia*
- Thursday, 12 November, 13.15–14.45 ▶ *Environment and Security (ENVSEC) Initiative*
- Thursday, 12 November, 13.15–14.45 ▶ *Petersberg II/Athens Declaration Process*



For more information, agenda and registration, visit <http://www.unece.org/env/water/mop5.htm> or contact [water.convention@unece.org](mailto:water.convention@unece.org) or [Francesca.bernardini@unece.org](mailto:Francesca.bernardini@unece.org).

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