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Statement

by

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Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

at

**the 4th Meeting of the Parties to the Framework Agreement
on the Sava River Basin**

Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 31 May 2013

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all let me thank you for the invitation. I am happy to be here with you today at this important meeting, which I hope will pave the way for effective future cooperation in the Sava River Basin.

Just recently, in 2012, you celebrated the tenth anniversary of the International Framework Agreement on the Sava River Basin. When it was signed in 2002, it was not only a significant breakthrough for integrated water resources management and the development of inland navigation in the Sava Basin, but also the first international agreement signed between the four countries after the Agreement on Succession Issues. This shows that shared waters much more often lead to cooperation than to conflict, it is being highlighted during the 2013 International Year of Water Cooperation.

Indeed, the Sava Agreement is often praised for its integral nature, combining navigation and river basin management. Since 2002, significant progress has been made: national water management has been improved and approximated with EU legislation; new protocols, for example on flood management, have been elaborated; a plan for the waterways has been drawn up; and data is being exchanged. However, significant challenges remain, such as addressing hydrological and morphological changes, pollution and flooding.

The Sava River Basin Management Plan will help to address these challenges. I therefore hope that it will be adopted and implemented as soon as possible.

The successful development and implementation of the Sava

Agreement has been supported by many partners. I would like to thank the Sava River Basin Commission and its secretariat for its excellent cooperation with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), which has proven to be very mutually beneficial from the start.

At the outset, I would like to express my gratitude to the Sava Commission for its active participation in the work of the UNECE Working Party on Inland Water Transport to develop harmonized pan-European technical and safety requirements for inland navigation. Based on these pan-European legal instruments and recommendations, the Sava Commission develops and implements regionally adapted regulations.

In the environmental field, this cooperation concerns several UNECE environmental conventions, such as the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention), which can be applied to many planned activities in the basin.

Cooperation has been especially strong with the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, or Water Convention, which all Sava countries have ratified. I hope that Montenegro will also soon ratify the Water Convention. I would like to assure you that UNECE stands ready to provide the support to this accession, if needed.

Since 2011, cooperation between the Water Convention and the Sava Commission has focused on the project, “Building the link between transboundary flood risk management and climate change adaptation in the Sava Basin”. Funded by Finland, the project is part of a programme on adaptation to climate change in transboundary basins under the UNECE Water Convention, implemented in the framework of the Environment and Security Initiative. It supports countries in transboundary basins to jointly adapt their water management to climate variability and change.

The Sava project focuses on flood management and has led to the elaboration of the draft programme for development of the Flood Risk Management Plan in the Sava River Basin. This Plan will help you to collectively address transboundary flood risks. The project thereby supports the implementation of the Protocol on Flood Protection, already ratified by Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, as well as, indirectly, the implementation of the EU flood risk directive in the basin. In addition, the project has resulted in an initial flood risk vulnerability assessment and the compilation of climate change scenarios, as well as proposed adaptation measures. The final project results will be presented and discussed at a stakeholder workshop, to be held on 5 and 6 June in Zagreb.

While several difficulties have delayed the project, I sincerely hope that you will contribute to ensuring that the final project results will be of high quality and usefulness to the Sava countries. I also hope that the results will be implemented and used to further improve transboundary flood risk management. Finally, I encourage you to continue sharing your experiences with this and other projects within the framework of the Water Convention’s platform for

exchanging experience on climate change adaptation in transboundary basins.

A new area of cooperation between the Sava Commission and the Water Convention is the thematic assessment of the water-energy-food-ecosystems nexus. This innovative assessment will evaluate the challenges and opportunities related to coordination between the water, energy and food sectors in selected transboundary basins. It will help to identify intersectoral synergies as well as policy measures and actions that could reduce tensions between sectoral objectives, avoid unintended negative consequences of resource management and resolve trade-offs between sectors, thereby contributing to the transition to a green economy. The assessment could also support the next river basin management planning cycle by helping to bring together the different water-using sectors and collecting related information.

The Sava Basin, where hydropower, agriculture and industry exert pressure on water resources, is certainly a very good example to be assessed in this exercise. We are therefore grateful that the Sava Commission has expressed its interest in participating in this assessment and look forward to an official confirmation and to cooperating with you. The UNECE secretariat would welcome the Sava Basin as the pilot basin for the nexus assessment in 2013. In return, through the testing of the assessment methodology, the Commission and others in the Sava Basin will benefit from the UNECE secretariat's resources, guidance, and capacity-building, as well as from an analysis by international experts.

As mentioned earlier, since the Sava Commission has some of the most advanced experience of transboundary cooperation in the UNECE region, others are very much interested in hearing about the lessons you have learned, your success factors and challenges. This is even more relevant since, as you may know, the Water Convention became a global legal framework for transboundary cooperation in February 2013, with the entry into force of amendments opening it for accession by all United Nations Member States. This ground-breaking development is very much welcomed, and has been long awaited by non-UNECE countries that want to learn from the experiences collected under the Convention. I hope that the secretariat and the Sava Commission will continue to disseminate the Sava experience to promote water cooperation, in the spirit of the Water Convention and the 2013 International Year of Water Cooperation.

In closing, I would like to wish you all success in this important meeting and look forward to our future cooperation.

Thank you for your attention
