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**Statement by Mr. Sven Alkalaj
United Nations Under-Secretary-General
Executive Secretary of the United Nations
Economic Commission for Europe**

at

United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development

**Rio de Janeiro
Tuesday, 19 June 19.30, Room P3-6**

**UN-WATER SIDE EVENT ON
INTERNATIONAL YEAR FOR WATER COOPERATION**

Mr Chair,
Distinguished delegates,
Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

As you have probably already heard today and will hear throughout Rio+20, water is one of the crucial resources of our century. It is a prerequisite for sustainable development and for green economies.

To ensure good quality and sufficient quantities of this dwindling resource however requires cooperation. That is why the United Nations General Assembly designated 2013 as the International Year of Water Cooperation.

Water cooperation involves cooperation between sectors, institutions, different economic actors and the public, as well as between countries. As water knows no borders, either sectoral or political, cooperation on either of these levels depends heavily on cooperation on the others.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe has negotiated a unique

instrument which has greatly contributed to improving transboundary cooperation in the pan-European region. The Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, also known as the Water Convention or Helsinki Convention, has been in force since 1996.

This year the Water Convention is also celebrating its twentieth anniversary, as it was adopted in the same year as the first Rio Conference. Since its entry into force, the UNECE Water Convention has provided an important framework for cooperation on transboundary waters. The Convention has been a driver for continuous progress in very different situations, including in the context of economic difficulties and political tensions. It has been a crucial model for transboundary cooperation arrangements, serving as an example for both legal agreements and institutions. It has supported its Parties and non-Parties in the establishment and strengthening of transboundary cooperation through the development of guidance, the continuous exchange of experience and direct support on the ground.

But the Water Convention provides more than a sound legal framework, which reflects the most modern approaches to international water law. It is coupled with an institutional framework (the different governing and subsidiary bodies) and a programme of work. It is this institutional framework that allows for continuous progress and mutual assistance, and which provides a forum for discussion on traditional challenges and emerging issues. These different bodies practice water cooperation by facilitating exchange of knowledge and experience, and common understanding on different issues.

In 2003, the Parties amended the Water Convention to make it possible for any United Nations Member State to accede. This decision was driven by the conviction that the Convention is also an effective instrument to support cooperation beyond the UNECE region; by the wish to share the knowledge, practices and experience collected under the Convention; and, at the same time, to benefit from the experience in other regions of the world. Twenty-two Parties have ratified the amendment to date. Only three ratifications are missing for the amendment's entry into force, which is expected by the end of the year.

The entry into force of the amendment opening the Water Convention to all United Nations Member States is very timely. Several non-UNECE countries have expressed interest in acceding to the Convention. There have also been an increasing number of representatives from non-UNECE countries taking part in activities under the Convention in recent years, in particular for activities related to water and climate change adaptation in a transboundary context. Twenty-two non-UNECE countries have participated in the activities.

Another major positive development expected in the near future is the entry into force of the 1997 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses — the other main international legal framework for transboundary water cooperation. The two Conventions are not only mutually compatible in terms of their interpretation and application, but are also legally consistent and complementary. Each furthers and consolidates the process of building up a framework of international customary law on transboundary waters. The synergies between the two Conventions is also demonstrated by the fact that 13 countries are

Parties to both.

I therefore call on countries to accede to and implement both conventions in order to enhance cooperation on and sustainable management of our precious shared water resources.

UNECE is committed to continue supporting transboundary cooperation, within and outside the UNECE region, in cooperation with its numerous partners, in particular other UN-Water members and partners.

The entry into force of the two United Nations Conventions at the global level will represent a major contribution to the International Year of Water cooperation. In particular, the events organized under the Water Convention in 2013 will be important opportunities to debate and exchange experience on the transboundary dimension of water cooperation. The experience, guidance material and activities under the UNECE Water Convention can also help countries to accede to and implement the UN Watercourses Convention.

Let me conclude by thanking the many UN-Water members and partners present here, in particular UNESCO, for the very good cooperation and for having organized this day and side event. UN-Water is certainly by itself a great symbol of what water cooperation means and of its potential. I hope that we can continue to join forces to advance transboundary water cooperation worldwide.