

**Presentation by Sonja Koepfel at the event: “WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBALIZATION”  
International scientific and practical conference**

Ladies and gentlemen,

Water is life. Without water, we cannot drink, eat, cook, grow food, run factories. Water is the only natural resource for which the only substitute is water.

Water is therefore gaining increasing importance at the global level

The introduction of a dedicated SDG goal on water, namely SDG 6, in 2015 was a great step forward. It requires countries to provide water and sanitation for all by 2030.

Water ie SDG 6 is closely related to most other SDGs : poverty alleviation (goal 1) requires water for all, growing food is impossible without water and globally 70% of water is used for irrigation, many illnesses are related to water or can be prevented by better water supply, sanitation and hygiene (goal 3). With regards to goal 8, nearly 80% of the jobs constituting the global workforce are dependent upon having access to an adequate supply of water and water-related services, including sanitation, according to the 2016 World Water Development Report. The large majority of climate change impacts are transmitted through the water cycle, so water is crucial for both adaptation and mitigation.

Also, SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions is related to water since transboundary waters are often a source of conflict, but more frequently a source of cooperation.

The action decade “water for life” introduced by Tajikistan and running from 2018 to 2028 is another breakthrough and much welcome since it helps to raise political attention to water issues. I look forward to the 2023 United Nations conference on the review of the decade, the first big United Nations water conference since Mar del Plata in 1977, as well as the many preparatory events, for example the high level event on water by the President of the UN General assembly next week. I hope that Central Asian countries will actively contribute to the conference- and that transboundary water cooperation will be discussed at the conference. UNECE is planning to organize a regional preparatory meeting in 2022 and I already invite you all to attend and contribute. The voice from Central Asia should be heard at all these events.

The 9<sup>th</sup> World Water Forum foreseen on 21 to 26 March 2022 in Dakar aims to be a very high-level event on water with a Summit of Heads of State and major international institutions to advance the global political agenda on water and sanitation targets and sustainable development objectives. Cooperation is one out of the four priorities for discussion retained by Forum organizers and UNECE is a strategic partner and coordinator of the priority area 3.2 on transboundary water cooperation.

Through this priority area, the Forum aims to contribute to strengthening transboundary cooperation worldwide. Activities in support of transboundary cooperation will be defined and implemented in the frame of preparation of the Forum, and the results of these activities will be presented at the Forum. These activities include inter alia advocacy at international, regional and local levels, for promoting cooperation on transboundary water resources management and for implementing international water law, in particular, the United Nations Conventions on Water, as well as support to the negotiation of agreements or other arrangements in the river basins. The Forum will allow showcasing experiences of transboundary cooperation from around the world, including potentially from Central Asia.

60 per cent of the world's freshwater flows in shared basins. In the UNECE region, shared basins cover more than 40 per cent of the surface area and are home to about 460 million inhabitants — more than 50 per cent of the European and Asian population of UNECE. Therefore, achieving SDG6 requires effective transboundary water cooperation. Transboundary cooperation is also crucial for other SDGs including peace, health, food, and energy. SDG Target 6.5 was therefore a great step forward. It requires countries to implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation.

The SDG indicator 6.5.2 measures the proportion of transboundary basin area with an operational arrangement for water cooperation. The 2 monitoring exercises of SDG indicator 6.5.2, carried out by UNECE and UNESCO, show that we need greater progress.

Only 24 of the 128 reporting countries achieved the target in 2020. The second reporting exercise just completed has shown greater engagement with over 80% of countries sharing waters. We are very happy that 4 out of 5 countries, except Tajikistan, from Central Asia have reported this time. Some regions show more positive progress than others. Regionally speaking, transboundary cooperation

is more advanced in Europe, North America and Sub-Saharan Africa, whereas many rivers, lakes and aquifers in Latin America, North Africa and Western Asia, Central and Southern Asia, and Eastern and South-eastern Asia lack operational arrangements.

In this regard, UNECE is supporting development and implementation of transboundary agreements through guidance, projects on the ground and capacity-building in the framework of our **Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, known as the Water Convention.**

The Water Convention provides a unique global legal and intergovernmental UN platform for the peaceful management of shared waters. Since 1992, it has greatly accelerated progress towards transboundary cooperation. Following its opening to all UN Member States in 2016 it now counts 44 Parties. 20 countries are in the process of accession and more than 120 participate in the Convention's activities. I invite you all to join the Convention's ninth Meeting of the Parties to be held on 29 September to 1 October in Tallinn and to demonstrate the Central Asia experience there.

The current chairmanship of the Convention by Kazakhstan plays an important role in highlighting the role, experiences and lessons learned of Central Asia to the global audience for example in Geneva and New York. I thank Kazakhstan for their active engagement, including the very memorable Meeting of the Parties in 2018 in Astana, and hope that Kazakhstan will remain active in the Convention also beyond its current chairmanship. Also the International Water Assessment Centre plays an important role in bringing the Central Asia voice on topics such as water allocation. I also really hope that IWAC will continue beyond 2022.

UNECE is currently and will continue to support water management in Central Asia at national, basin and regional levels. I will give 3 examples:

### **1) Protocol on Water and Health**

The 2030 Agenda and SDG 6 in particular call on integrated approaches across water, sanitation and health. The crisis of COVID-19 has further shown that safe and sufficient water, adequate sanitation and hygiene can save lives and are crucial for building a better post-COVID world. The Protocol on Water and Health, jointly serviced by UNECE and WHO-Europe, provides a practical tool for

implementing the 2030 Agenda: Its progressive target setting and national reporting on all aspects of water, sanitation, hygiene and health are mechanisms to accelerate progress. It supports countries in recovery from COVID-19 and preparedness to this and other infectious diseases. Its principles such as universality of access and inclusiveness are helping to progressively realize the human rights to water and sanitation. I call on all Central Asian countries to ratify and implement the Protocol and use its many tools such as the equitable access scorecard and the target-setting approach which has been already applied in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

## **2) National Policy Dialogues (NPDs) on IWRM in Central Asia:**

EUWI National Policy Dialogues have been operational in Central Asia since 2008 as multistakeholder intersectoral platforms to drive water sector reforms. Currently, the support is provided through an EU-funded regional project European Union Water Initiative NPDs in Central Asia (2019-2022), implemented in cooperation with OECD under the overall umbrella of the WECOOP programme with the objective to enhance IWRM and inter-sectoral coordination for water security at the national level in Central Asian countries to support sustainable development. Enhancing water policies at national levels and approximating them to EU standards and promoting green investments in the water sector in Central Asia are specific objectives of the project.

The project aims at sustaining and further strengthening the on-going inter-sectoral processes of the NPDs in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, re-establishing NPD in Turkmenistan and launching an NPD process in Uzbekistan. A robust analytical basis will substantiate policy dialogues through "policy packages" defined at the national level and focused on priorities selected by the national governments. Support to drafting legislation, reporting under SDG 6.5.2, work on water security indicators and water quality issues in a transboundary context, including with regards to preventing accidental water pollution, feature high among the priorities NPDs are currently working on. A first set of NPD meetings in all Central Asian countries under this new project started with an NPD SC meeting in Kazakhstan in November 2020 and will continue in spring and summer of 2021.

## **3) Dam safety**

Under the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia, UNECE continues supporting the Central Asian region in building human and institutional capacity on the safe management of dams, including improving regional and bilateral cooperation on dams located on transboundary rivers. Countries requested UNECE to develop a Central Asia region-wide agreement on dam safety highlighting the importance of ensuring the safety of hydraulic structures in the region and that effective cooperation among the countries is needed. The overall objective of the agreement would be to provide a legal and institutional platform for the countries to facilitate their efforts to collectively manage transboundary dams in the region

All these areas show the importance of regional cooperation on water- and the numerous good practice examples from Central Asia- which need to be highlighted at the global level. The cooperation on the Chu Talas basin between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan is an often cited good practice example for transboundary cooperation in Central Asia.

Finally, UNECE looks forward to continuing the good cooperation with the countries of Central Asia as well as with EC-IFAS and other regional institutions working on water issues.

I wish you an interesting side event.

Thank you