



NATIONS UNIES

COMMISSION ÉCONOMIQUE  
POUR L'EUROPE

ОБЪЕДИНЕННЫЕ НАЦИИ

ЕВРОПЕЙСКАЯ ЭКОНОМИЧЕСКАЯ  
КОМИССИЯ

UNITED NATIONS

ECONOMIC COMMISSION  
FOR EUROPE

**Keynote speech**

by

**Mr. Marco Keiner**

**Director of the Environment Division  
of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe**

at

**Second Preparatory Meeting of the 23<sup>rd</sup> OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum  
“Water governance in the OSCE area  
- increasing security and stability through cooperation”**

**Belgrade, 11-12 May 2015**

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to address you at this second preparatory meeting of the OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum, having already contributed to the first meeting. As you may recall from that meeting, water governance, the focus of this year's Forum, is an issue of importance to the member States of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe – UNECE – and is a topic on which UNECE has a long and successful history of cooperation with OSCE.

Today I will address a particular aspect of water governance – awareness-raising and public participation – because participatory and accountable water governance is necessary for well-informed choices and can help prevent or reduce negative effects of investments on development and on water resources. Ignoring a wide participatory approach can be costly and lead to uncertainty for government, civil society and business alike. And without awareness there cannot be participatory governance.

For the past 20 years, UNECE has worked to strengthen water governance and water cooperation through environmental treaties and policy instruments and by working with countries in strengthening institutions and capacities.

The UNECE member States have negotiated treaties that provide crucial frameworks for water governance and environmental democracy in the pan-European region and beyond:

The Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes – or Water Convention – and its Protocol on Water and Health;

The Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context – or Espoo Convention – and its Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment; and

The Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters – or Aarhus Convention – and its Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers.

The Water Convention and the Espoo Convention both operate in a transboundary context. This is of tremendous importance in the pan-European region where more than half of all freshwater resources cross national boundaries. We need to cooperate in the management of natural resources, in tackling environmental threats and in increasing security and stability. And that means the involvement of numerous stakeholders and good water governance at many levels, from local to regional.

The Water Convention is an important legal framework for improving water governance and integrated water resources management, in particular at the basin level. It strengthens transboundary water cooperation and measures for the ecologically-sound management and protection of transboundary surface waters and groundwaters. The Convention requires intersectoral cooperation, public participation, transparency through data exchange for example and much more. In addition, and very importantly, the Convention requires riparian Parties to enter into agreements for their shared waters and establish joint institutions for their management.

The Water Convention provides an intergovernmental forum for discussing transboundary water cooperation and sharing good practices, but also supports countries through assessment, capacity-development, guidance and projects on the ground.

Many of these projects on the ground are carried out in cooperation with OSCE. I will pick out one particular example, of the Dniester River Basin shared by Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, where UNECE and OSCE have supported the riparian countries in the framework of the Environment and Security Initiative for several years to improve their water cooperation.

This led to, among other successes, the development and signature in November 2012 of the bilateral Dniester Treaty. That agreement was developed in a process that included civil society, first through the participation of NGO representatives in the expert consultations on the draft text then in public hearings organized in the two countries. The public's comments were then taken into account in the revision of the draft text. The resulting Treaty provides for public access to information and public participation in decision-making.

Indeed many of the basin-level and bilateral agreements that countries have established within the framework of the Water Convention provide strong opportunities for the public. That is not by chance as the Convention requires that its Parties ensure that information is made available to the public on the conditions of transboundary waters, on measures taken or planned to be taken to prevent, control and reduce transboundary impact, and on the effectiveness of those measures.

The cooperation between UNECE and OSCE on the Dniester continues. At the end of April, a strategy for adaptation to climate change for the Dniester, facilitated by UNECE and OSCE was launched at a high-level event in Kyiv. The strategy aims to increase the effectiveness of adaptation by locating measures where they have the optimum effect and it promotes a common understanding on climate change impacts and necessary adaptation measures from the transboundary perspective. With this, the Dniester is now one of the very few basins worldwide with a transboundary adaptation strategy.

Let me thank OSCE again for the good cooperation and for supporting countries to implement the UNECE Water Convention.

UNECE does not only play a role in transboundary water governance. Indeed, transboundary water cooperation can hardly be sustainable without well-functioning coordination between different ministries and stakeholders within countries. Water policies must not be shaped just by respective national water agencies, there must be broad discussions, taking into account interests of different water users. UNECE has therefore supported the development of platforms for such regular water policy discussions in nine countries through the process of National Policy Dialogues in the framework of the EU Water Initiative. Over the past eight years, these national platforms have helped to modernize water policies in many countries. NGO representatives participate in the intersectoral dialogues and, in some countries, the main meetings are supplemented by stakeholder events. Again, OSCE has been involved, as these national dialogues always feature a coordination role between donors active in the field of water to make sure there is no duplication of activities.

The UNECE Water Convention is supplemented by a Protocol on Water and Health that aims to protect human health and well-being by better water management, including the protection of water ecosystems, and by preventing, controlling and reducing water-related diseases. It is the first international agreement of its kind adopted specifically to attain an adequate supply of safe drinking water and adequate sanitation for everyone. Parties to the Protocol commit to set national or local targets in relation to the entire water cycle.

Therefore, the Protocol on Water and Health also has an important role to play in water governance in our region. It recognizes that access to information and public participation are essential. It builds public awareness of issues related to water and health. The Protocol specifically commits its Parties to make appropriate provisions for public participation, within a transparent and fair framework, and ensure that due account is taken of the outcome of the public participation while setting targets to ensure a high level of protection against water-related disease, when developing water-management plans and when reviewing and assessing progress.

Numerous countries have followed this path with the assistance of the Protocol's joint secretariat, provided by UNECE and the WHO Regional Office for Europe. For example, in December we assisted Serbia with the setting of its targets in a participatory process. In the Republic of Moldova we are working with many national stakeholders to implement measures to achieve the country's targets for water and sanitation.

The experience under that Protocol is that public participation can be hard to achieve due to a lack of awareness among the public of its rights and among the public authorities of their obligations, as well as the lack of national legal frameworks and cross-sectoral cooperation. There may also be political reluctance to engage the public, lack of access to information and budgetary constraints to running public-participation processes.

However, public participation gives the public the opportunity to express its concerns. It also enables public authorities to take due account of such concerns, which is vital to enhance the quality and the implementation of the decisions adopted to improve access to drinking water and sanitation and to protect human health.

In this regard, I would like to mention another key instrument: the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs which go to the heart of the relationship between people and their government thereby promoting environmental democracy. Their aims include not only environmental protection and sustainable development, but also such overarching themes as

government accountability, transparency and responsiveness what make their provisions relevant for implementation of other instruments. Water management therefore should be applied in the light of concepts and principles of the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol.

Furthermore, the Aarhus Convention requires its Parties to promote the application of the Convention's principles in international environmental decision-making, which also include the work of joint bodies for transboundary water cooperation.

The Aarhus Convention has proved to have an unprecedented value for transboundary water cooperation as it grants the rights to be exercised by the public "without discrimination as to citizenship, nationality or domicile".

The Protocol sets forth a specific regime for wastewaters, for example an off-site transfer of pollutants in wastewater beyond the boundaries of a facility via a sewer or any other means, such as containers or tank trucks. Many provisions of the Protocol are most important for transboundary water management, when it comes to the use of relevant data from various economic sectors for the purposes of water management and transboundary water cooperation. The Protocol too promotes informed public participation

And again, I would like to thank OSCE for the valuable cooperation. Aarhus Centres and the OSCE are key partners of the UNECE for implementing the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on the ground through building capacities and raising awareness. Aarhus Centres serve as an essential resource base for spreading environmental democracy and a valuable multiplier of the Aarhus principles.

That conclusion can be drawn under much of UNECE's work on environmental governance: yes, there are gaps in implementation and capacity needs. But the good governance practices and legal frameworks that the UNECE policy instruments introduce and define have enormous benefits in terms of well-informed decision-making. Good decisions lead to actions that can be implemented effectively and efficiently, have public support and foster sustainable development. Good environmental governance is in everyone's interest.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, UNECE is pleased to work with you in preparation for the twenty-third OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum. I look forward to our continuing cooperation in the coming months on this important topic.

---