Statement for the 1st RA VI (Region Europe) Hydrology Forum
UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes

- The Second Assessment of Transboundary Rivers, Lakes and Groundwaters, which was recently prepared under the UNECE (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe) Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, is the most comprehensive, up-to-date overview of the status of transboundary waters in the pan-European region. It covers more than 140 transboundary rivers, 25 transboundary lakes, about 200 transboundary groundwaters and 25 Ramsar Sites or other wetlands of transboundary importance. The Second Assessment presents a broad analysis of transboundary water resources, pressure factors, quantity and quality status, and transboundary impacts, as well as responses and future trends (including predicted impacts of climate change). The Assessment highlighted a number of issues related to availability of and access to hydrological information in a transboundary context.
- Availability of hydrological information consistently at the level of a river basin as the management unit - also a transboundary basin - is necessary for sound management. In most transboundary basins information exchange still very weak and information produced in riparian countries is not harmonized. Harmonization of approaches remains a challenge. Joint monitoring and assessment almost do not exist in many transboundary basins of the region, while such cooperation would foster a common understanding about the water availability and variability, and create a good basis for developing commonly agreed objectives for planning.
- This comes up strongly also in the pilot projects and platform for exchanging experience on adaptation to climate change in transboundary basins under the Water Convention which are supported by several partners including WMO and funded, among others, by Finland. The projects aim to strengthen the capacity to adapt to climate change and to create positive examples demonstrating the benefits of, and possible mechanisms for, transboundary cooperation in adaptation planning and implementation. They include joint impact and vulnerability assessment and the development of a basin-wide adaptation strategy. In most pilot projects basins some climate change impact assessments had already been done nationally, but using different methodologies and often not specifically for a particular river basin. This underlines the importance of cooperation, harmonisation of models or the use of joint models and scenarios as well as joint vulnerability assessment in all riparian countries. Transboundary cooperation helps to reduce the uncertainties through exchange of information and data, broadening the knowledge base and enlarging the range of measures available.
- Weak exchange of data between different national sector authorities was commonly observed in the Second Assessment, with various obstacles - charging policy or other - in the way of accessing relevant hydrological information. Wider dissemination of information to support decision-making is crucial. This underlines the importance of developing appropriate structures and mechanisms for sharing data and information across sectors and at transboundary level. Information is too

often scattered and isolated and does not support sound management and decision-making, and therefore efforts to integrate hydrological information with other types of information (on pressure factors, socio-economic information etc.) should be supported. In general, data and information exchange at transboundary level needs improvement, more regularity, continuity, transparency and structure. Where joint bodies like river basin commissions are established there is better data exchange. Through ensuring a legal basis for data exchange in agreements concerning transboundary waters and in the mandates of joint bodies, the situation can be improved. A considerable body of experience and good practice in joint monitoring and assessment of water resources has accumulated under the UNECE Water Convention over the past 20 years, synthesized in published guidelines and strategies. UNECE stands ready to share this.

- Some sporadic improvement in transboundary monitoring cooperation in the countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia is brought about by international projects that support addressing the lack of material and equipment, the poor condition of the existing monitoring stations and the lack of harmonization in the approaches. The challenge is how to sustain the improvements beyond the life of the projects.
- For a holistic overview of the different components of the water cycle, important from a user perspective to be able to access information on not only on precipitation and surface water flows, but also on glaciers, snow cover and groundwaters. Notably in the Eastern part of the pan-European region, there gaps in their monitoring.
- For regional assessments, databases like that of the Global Runoff Data Centre are extremely valuable. Regular updating of the data by countries ensures a necessary information base. The provision of data by GRDC to the Second Assessment is acknowledged with warm thanks.
- The governing bodies of the UNECE Water Convention have decided to develop the next comprehensive assessment in six to eight years' time, that is, from 2017 to 2019. In the meantime, in order to ensure continuity of the assessment process and to keep the status of transboundary waters under scrutiny, a special edition assessment will be prepared by 2015, most likely focusing on the so-called water-food-energy nexus, covering a (limited) representative set of basins. This nexus commonly refers to challenges around the interlinkages and trade-offs between water, energy and agricultural sectors. Cooperation with the WMO and the national hydrometeorological services in the future assessments is very much hoped for.