High-Level International Conference on International Decade for Action
«Water for Sustainable Development», 2018-2028

Plenary Intervention of Mr. Andrey Vasilyev, Deputy Executive Secretary,
United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

Excellencies,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to be here and address this High-Level International Conference.

Let me, first of all, thank the Republic of Tajikistan for hosting the Conference, and all the organizing partners for their hard work in making it a success.

I would like to focus my intervention on transboundary water management, as I consider that the inclusion of a call for transboundary cooperation is a major ambition of the 2030 Agenda.
Across the world, 153 countries share rivers, lakes and aquifers - these transboundary basins cover more than half of the Earth’s land surface, account for an estimated 60% of global freshwater flow and are home to more than 40 per cent of the world’s population.

These shared waters create socio-economic, environmental and political inter-dependencies.

Transboundary water cooperation is therefore not only key to achieving SDG6, but also provides an important catalyst for other water-related SDGs on poverty (SDG 1), food security (SDG 2), health and wellbeing (SDG 3), sustainable energy (SDG 7), climate action (SDG 13), ecosystem protection (SDGs 14 and 15) and peaceful societies (SDG 16).

Conversely, in transboundary basins where cooperation is lacking, it will be hard to achieve sustainable development for all.
Transboundary cooperation is also key to prevent conflicts over dwindling water resources and to promote peace and stability.

Water cooperation is therefore at the cross road of development and peace.

This Conference is about how to accelerate action in achieving SDG 6 and we badly need to accelerate action to strengthen cooperation on transboundary water resources.

In fact, the first monitoring of the advancement of transboundary water cooperation, based on SDG indicator 6.5.2, for which UNECE and UNESCO are co-custodians, showed that, at the global level, the average percentage of national transboundary basin area covered by an operational arrangement is only 59 per cent.

Merely 17 countries out of 153 reported that cooperation is operational on all their transboundary basins.

To get to 100% operational cooperation by 2030, significant efforts need to be done.
The Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes - also known as the Water Convention or the Helsinki Convention – which is serviced by UNECE, has a key role to play to support such efforts.

The Convention provides a United Nations legal and intergovernmental framework promoting the quantity, quality and sustainable use of transboundary water resources by facilitating and strengthening cooperation.

Originally negotiated in 1992 as a regional framework for the pan-European region, it was amended to become globally available.

As of 2016, all United Nations Member States can accede to it.
Currently, the Convention counts 42 Parties, including almost all countries in the pan-European region sharing transboundary waters, and Chad, which acceded to the Convention in February this year and is the first Party from Africa.

Three weeks ago, the Senegalese parliament passed legislation on Senegal acceding to the Water Convention.

Several other countries - for instance Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Iraq, Lebanon, Togo, Tunisia, Viet Nam - have started national accession processes.

Over the past 25 years, the Convention has proven its effectiveness and has made a real difference on the ground by significantly advancing transboundary water cooperation, fostering regional integration and preventing conflicts over the use of shared resources in the Pan-European region, including in conflict prone areas.
It has done so in very different settings: in developed countries and in countries in transition, including in least developed countries; in water rich and water scarce countries, in countries with high political instability and between countries with very different political and economic situations.

How has it done so?

The Convention has provided a sound but flexible legal framework to support the development of basins agreements in very different settings.

It has thus promoted long term sustainability and predictability of cooperation based on internationally agreed principles of water law.

It has provided a multilateral framework that supports countries’ efforts by building capacity and promoting the exchange of experiences on legal, institutional and technical issues.
It has provided an intergovernmental framework to develop common policy responses to emerging challenges.

It has provided a political platform to strengthen political will towards cooperation and at the same time monitor and foster continuous progress.

In many respects, the Water Convention demonstrates the strength of multilateralism and of the rule of law.

The global opening of the Water Convention therefore offers great opportunities to accelerate efforts towards cooperation worldwide.

I call all United Nations Member States to accede to it and to take advantage of its tools and of its multilateral framework.

Before concluding, I would like to take the opportunity to invite you to the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention which will be hosted by Kazakhstan in Astana from 10 to 12 October 2018.
The Meeting of the Parties will mark an historical milestone for the Convention.

It will be the first Meeting of the Parties held in Asia, with a membership beyond the pan-European region.

I thank you for your attention and wish us all continued successful deliberations.