

# UNECE Water Convention: Support to Managing Transboundary Groundwaters

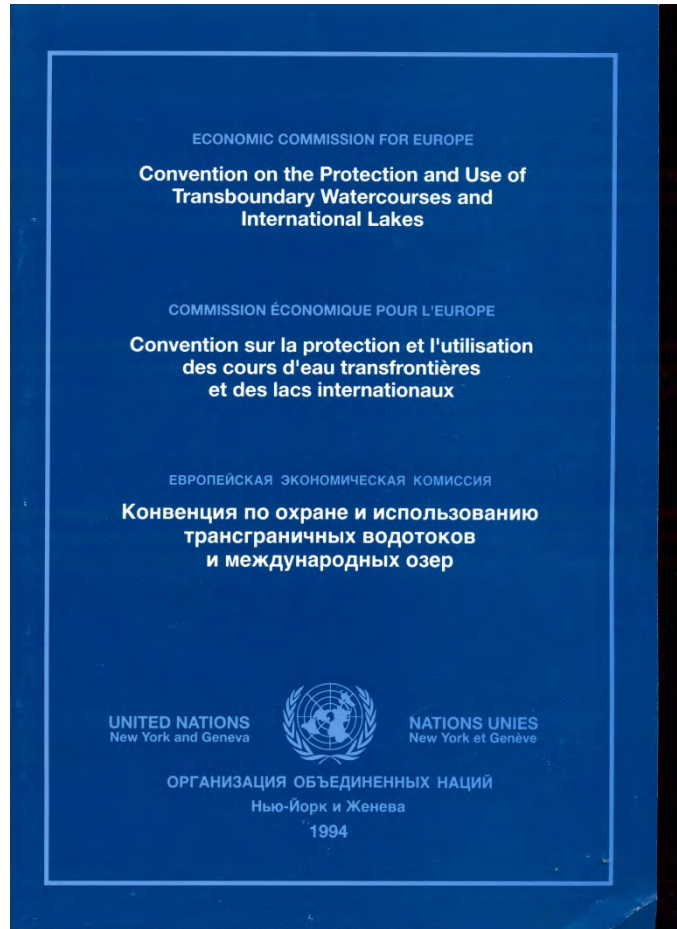
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UNECE Water Convention



United Nations Economic  
Commission for Europe

Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes

# UNECE/Helsinki Water Convention (1992)



- Signed on 17 March 1992
- Entered into force on 6 October 1996
- Amended in 2003 to allow accession to countries beyond the UNECE region
- Amendment entered into force on 6 February 2013  
=> countries outside ECE expected to be able to accede as of 2014



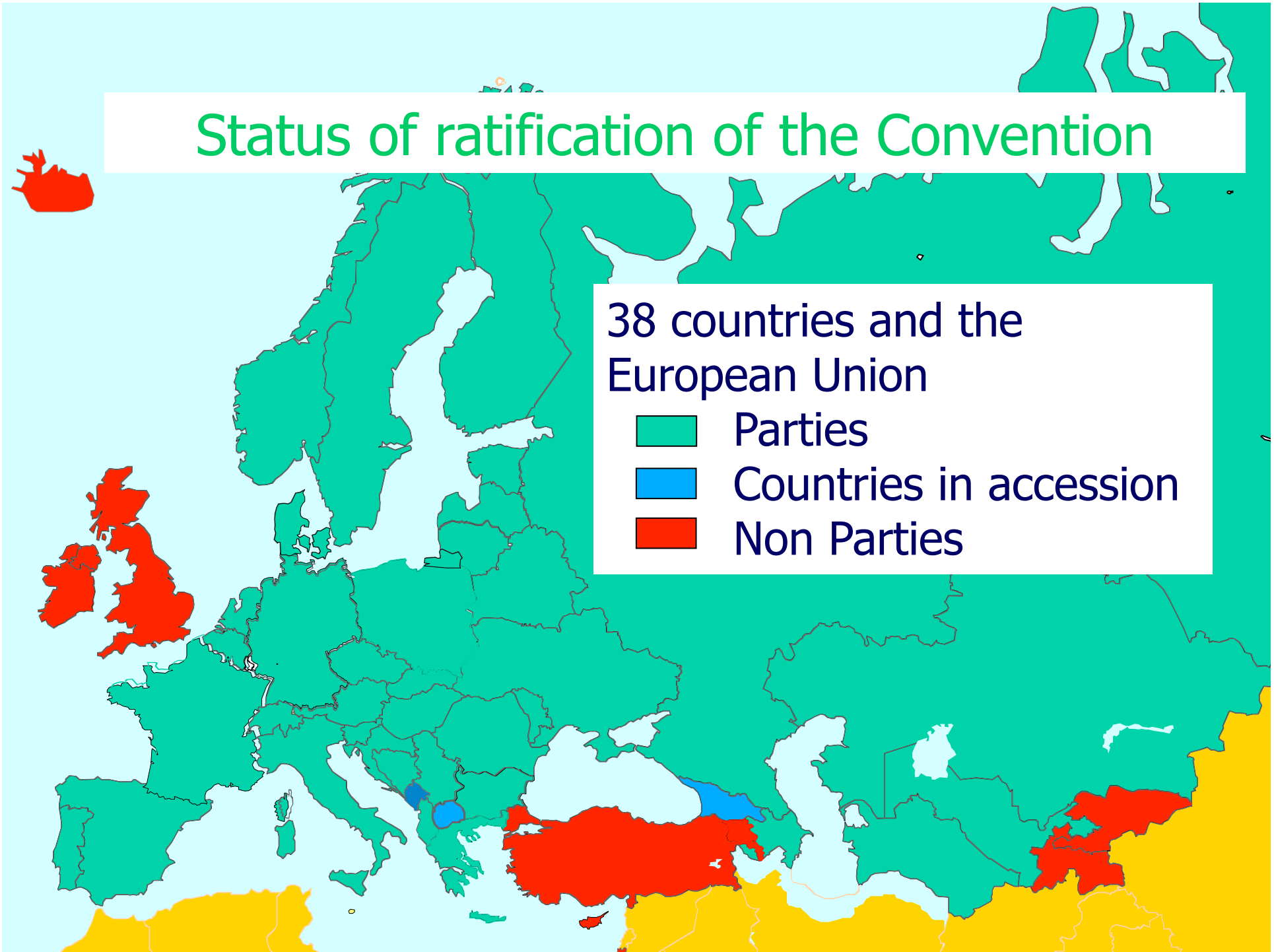
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# Status of ratification of the Convention

38 countries and the  
European Union

- Parties
- Countries in accession
- Non Parties



# Main obligations under the Convention



- Protection of transboundary waters by preventing, controlling and reducing transboundary impacts
  - Reasonable and equitable use of transboundary waters
  - Obligation to cooperate through agreements and joint institutions
- => Overall objective of sustainability



## Two categories of obligations

- For all Parties => also benefit for national legislation
- For Riparian Parties => the Convention does not replace basin agreements
  - Conclude bilateral and multilateral agreements Cooperate on the basis of IWRM
  - Establish joint bodies (e.g. river commissions)
  - Consult and exchange of information
  - Joint monitoring and assessment
  - Elaborate joint objectives and action programme





## Applicability of the Convention to groundwater

- applies surface waters and groundwaters alike and also makes a link to recipient seas
- "Transboundary waters" means any surface or ground waters which mark, cross or are located on boundaries between two or more States (Art.1(1))
- The Guide to Implementing the Convention:  
“As for groundwaters, the Convention includes both confined and unconfined aquifers”





## Diverse activities

- **Inventory** of transboundary groundwaters (1999); First (2007) and Second (2011) **Assessments** of Transboundary Rivers, Lakes and Groundwaters
- **Guidelines** on monitoring and assessment of transboundary groundwaters (2000); **pilot projects**
- Preliminary **study** of the application of the principles of the Convention to transboundary groundwater (2010-2011) and Study on groundwater in transboundary water agreements in EECCA (2009)
- **Model Provisions** on Transboundary Groundwaters 2012
- Capacity for Water Cooperation workshop for EECCA countries (Almaty, 2012), by UNECE, UNESCO etc.







# Model Provisions on Transboundary Groundwaters

- Non-binding guidance
- adopted by Meeting of the Parties in 2012
- Build on the ILC Draft Articles
- Active participation of UNESCO and IAH in their development
- To be used by Parties and non-Parties when entering into or reviewing bilateral or multilateral agreements on transboundary groundwaters (in the form of an additional protocol to an existing agreement or a new and separate specific agreement on groundwaters)
- Accompanied by commentaries with references to international commitments and existing State practice







# Model Provisions on Transboundary Groundwaters

**Provision 1:** Obligations to prevent, control and reduce any transboundary impact ; equitable and reasonable use

**Provision 2:** Obligation of sustainable use

**Provision 3:** Obligation of cooperation in the identification, delineation and characterization; joint monitoring & assessment

**Provision 4:** Integrated management of surface & groundwater

**Provision 5:** Prevention, control and reduction of pollution

**Provision 6:** Exchange of information and data

**Provision 7:** Joint or coordinated management plans

**Provision 8:** EIA, notification and consultations, access to information and to justice, public participation

**Provision 9:** Joint body

# Pan-European regional assessment of transboundary waters

>140 rivers, 25 lakes, about 200 groundwaters and 25 Ramsar Sites/wetlands of transboundary importance covered  
EU, South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe, Caucasus, Central Asia

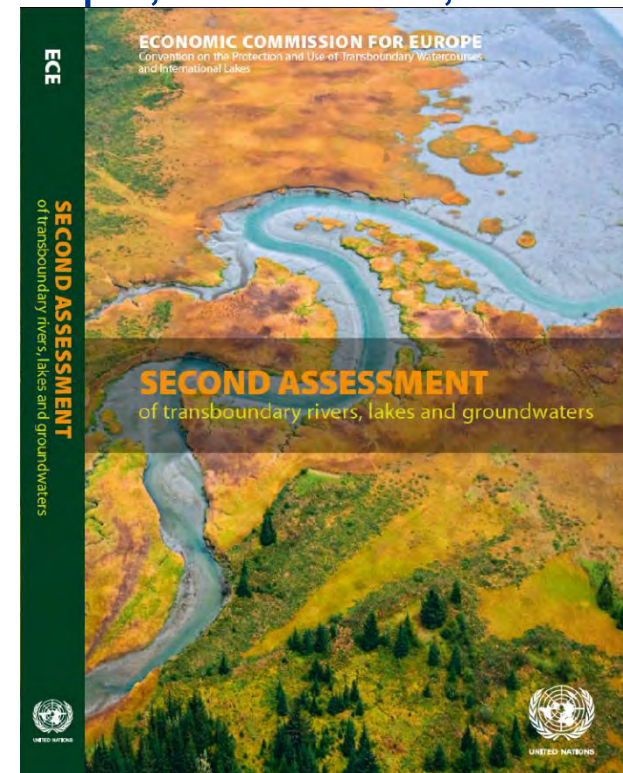
Information collected:

- Inventory
- Location, extent and delineations
- Quantity and quality status
- Pressure factors (abstractions, pollution sources)
- Transboundary impacts
- Management response
- Transboundary cooperation



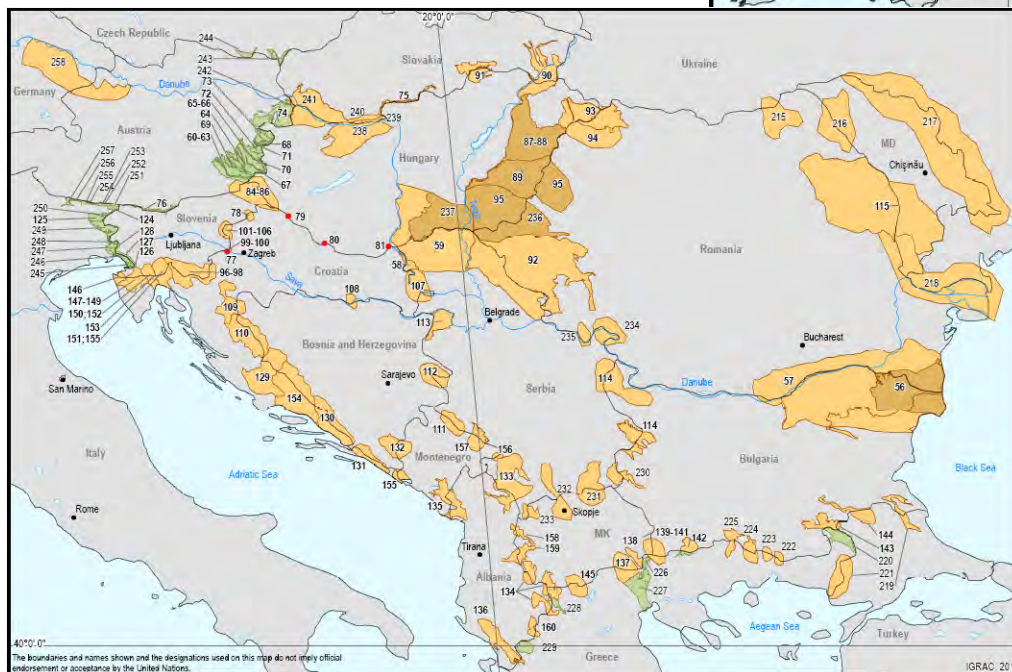
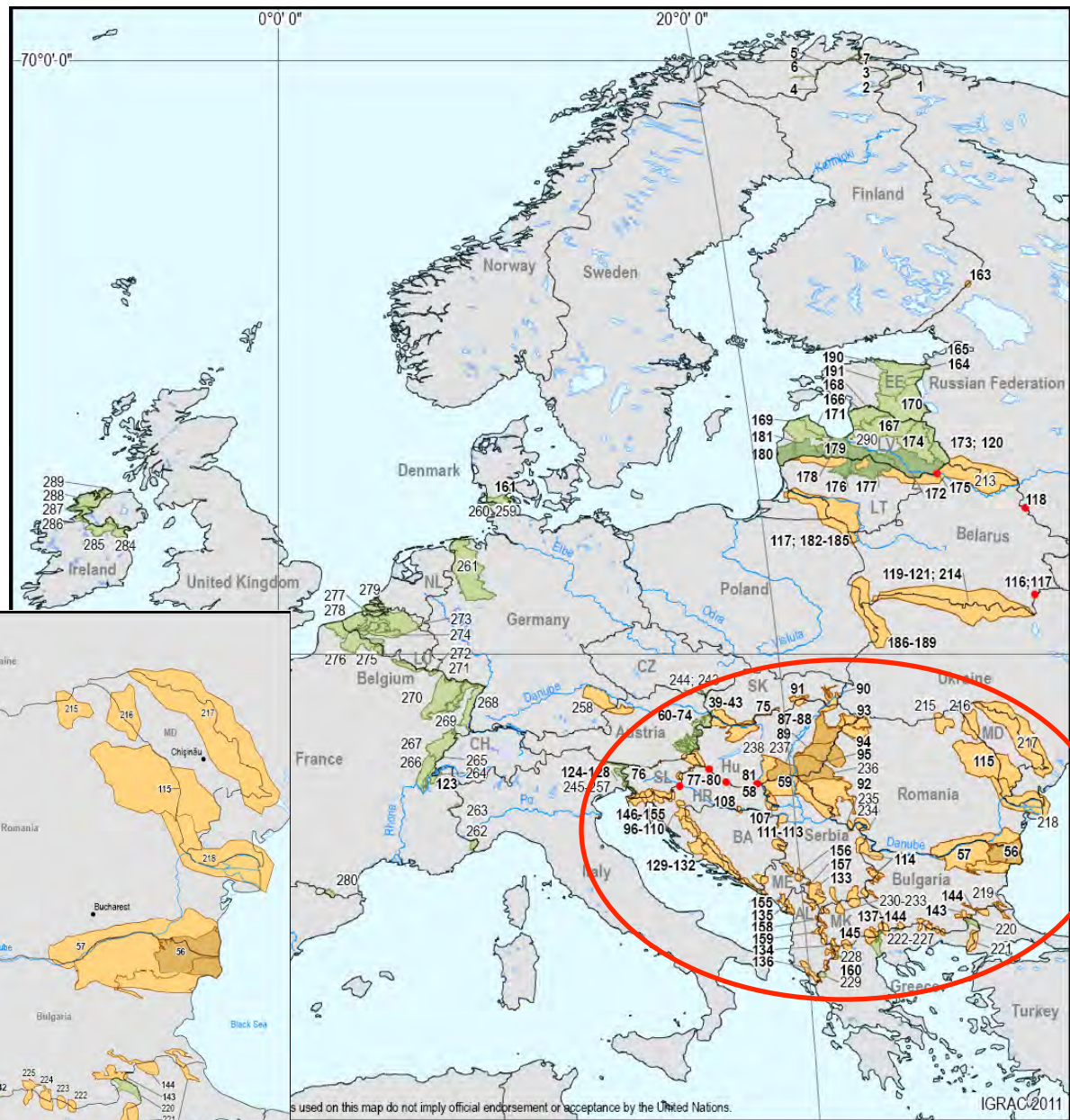
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# Transboundary groundwaters in Europe



Maps: IGRAC



# Transboundary groundwaters in the Caucasus and Central Asia



Maps: IGRAC

# Some general observations – legal basis and institutions

- border of the European Union (EU) — a divide of approaches, concepts and regulatory obligations; “aquifer” vs. “groundwater body”
- Many bilateral and multilateral **agreements** in the EECCA subregion: often no explicit reference to groundwater, or application to groundwater remains very low
- principle of **integrated management of surface and groundwater** missing in water laws in a number of countries of the EECCA
- Joint bodies in most cases do not deal with groundwaters; among the exceptions: the Danube Basin, groundwater monitoring cooperation of the Russian Federation and Estonia



# Value of the UNECE Water Convention in managing transboundary groundwaters

- Already the platform for cooperation and sharing experience for some 40 Parties & increasingly beyond pan-Europe
- Convention has fostered the development of transboundary agreements, the establishment of joint bodies and cooperation at the political & technical levels for 20 years
- Strengthening of capacity, support to implementation
- The well-functioning institutional structure adjusts to the needs
  - Groundwater Task Force — monitoring guidelines
  - Core Group on Groundwater under the Legal Board — Model Provisions
- Rich experience accumulated; guidelines of wide applicability
- Regional assessments have inspired similar exercises



# Adapting to climate change in transboundary basins in the Convention's work programme

- Programme of pilot projects and global network of transboundary basins working on adaptation to climate change
- Global platform for exchanging experience: annual workshops since 2011, next one on 13-14 October 2014
- Collection of good practices and lessons learned to be prepared by 2015
- Based on the UNECE Guidance on Water and Adaptation to Climate change



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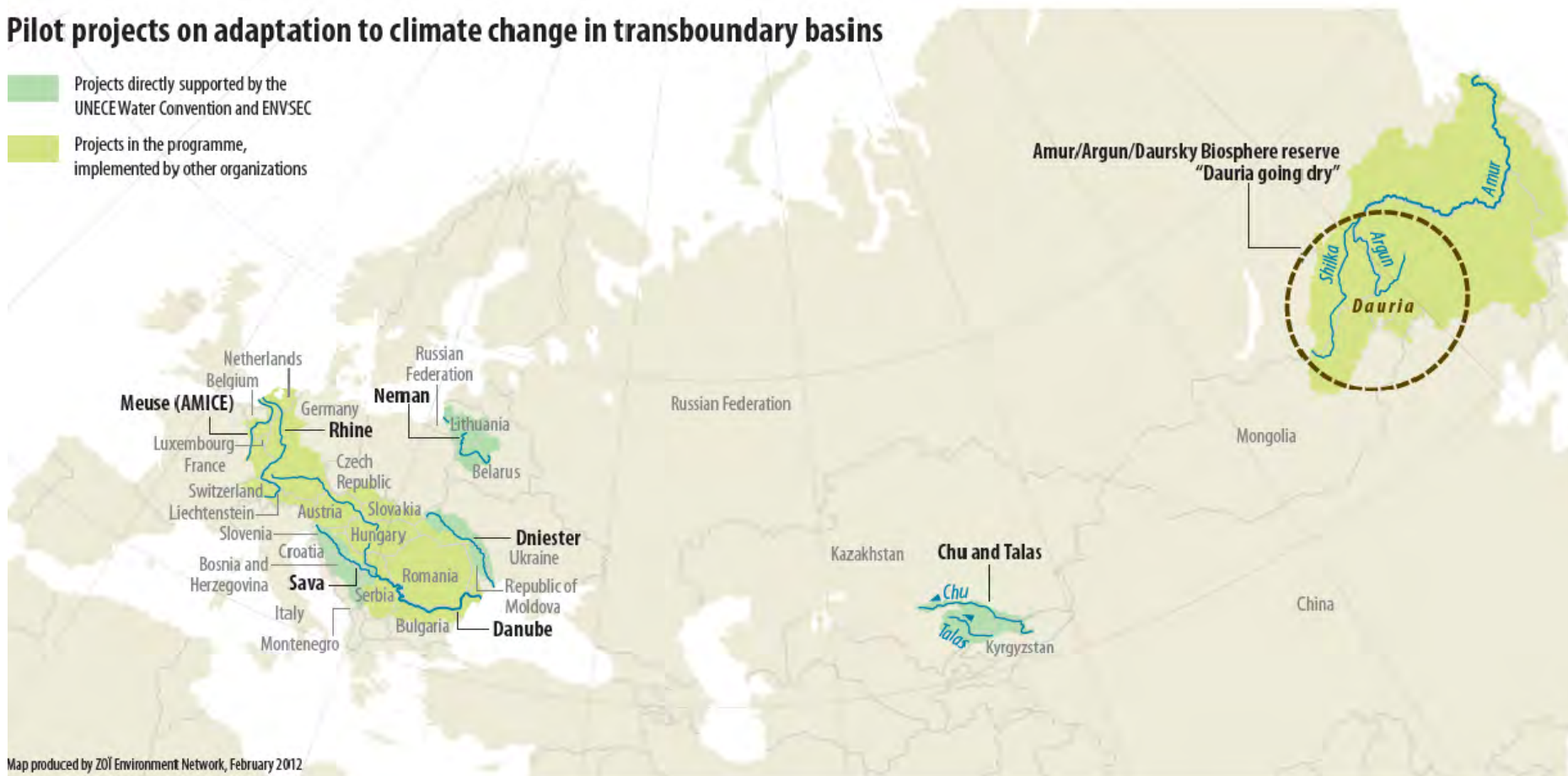




# Global network of basins

## Pilot projects on adaptation to climate change in transboundary basins

- Projects directly supported by the UNECE Water Convention and ENVSEC
- Projects in the programme, implemented by other organizations

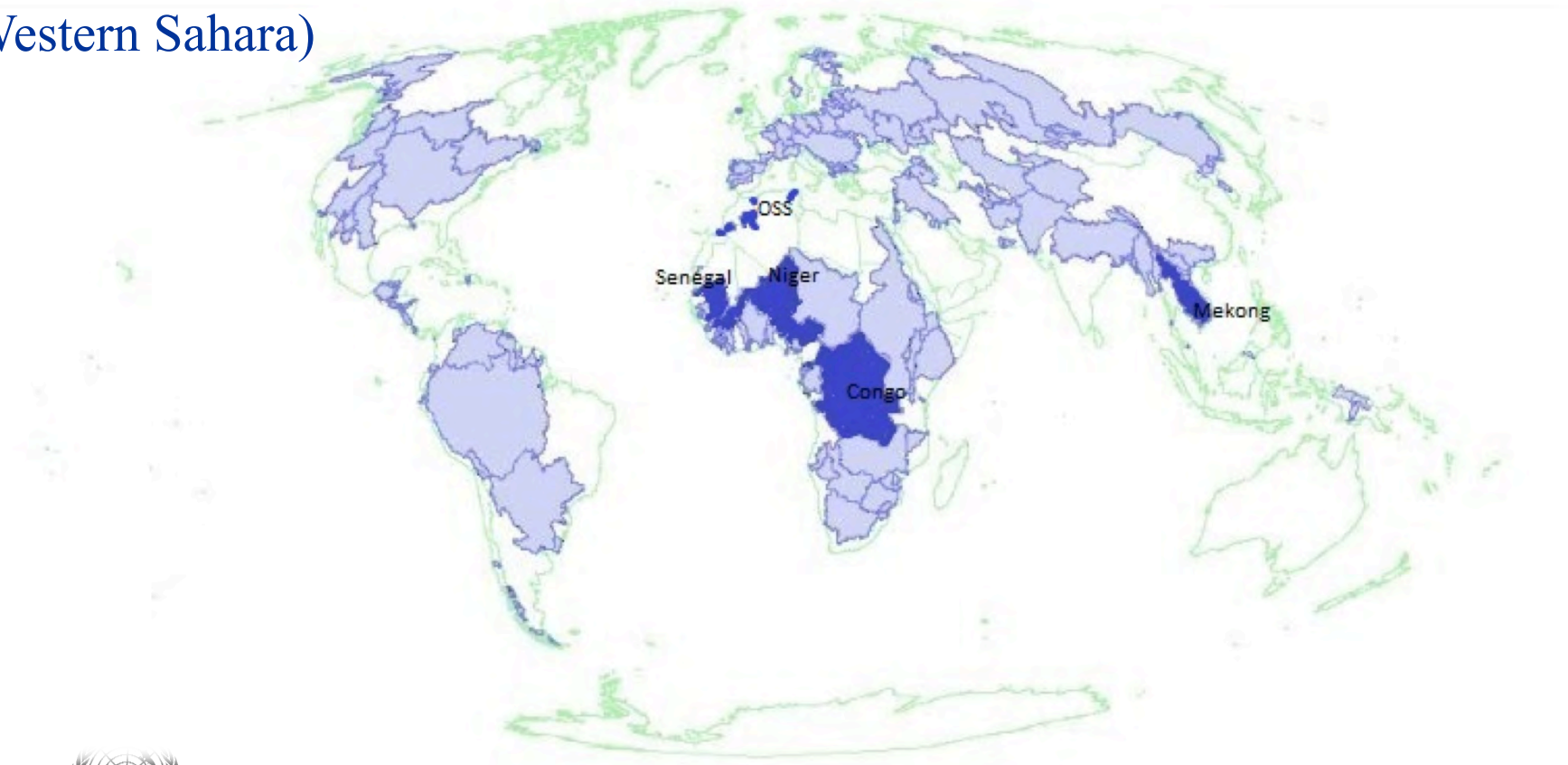


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# Global network of basins

Basins outside UNECE region that recently joined the global network are: Mekong, Niger, Congo, Senegal, OSS (Sub-Saharan Aquifer and Western Sahara)



# Some transboundary considerations related to adaptation – links to the Convention

- Adaptation measures potentially have transboundary impacts
- Cooperation enables more effective and efficient adaptation (through wider knowledge base, larger planning space etc.)
- Variability and change affect availability of the resource, and uses -> equitable & reasonable use
- Beneficial to develop common research, harmonized policies, programmes and strategies to adapt
- Well set-up transboundary cooperation can more effectively respond to changes





**Thank you!**

**More information**

including guidelines, publications and information  
on activities under the Convention can be found at

<http://unece.org/env/water>

[water.convention@unece.org](mailto:water.convention@unece.org)



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