Statement by
Ms. Tatiana Molcean, United Nations Under-Secretary-General, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

with regards to the launch of the UN System-wide Strategy for Water and Sanitation

The urgency of the global water crisis is unmistakable: from floods in Central Asia, Brazil, and Switzerland to droughts in America and Southern Africa. Recognizing this, Member States have elevated water and sanitation to a priority, as evidenced by the recent UN Water Conference—the first in nearly fifty years—and the swift decision to schedule another. I am pleased to note that the first UN System-wide Strategy for Water and Sanitation was developed and launched in less than a year. UNECE played a significant role in crafting this milestone strategy. Our greatest challenge now is implementing it through the Collaborative Implementation Plan (CIP).

Shared basins constitute 60% of global freshwater resources. At the 2023 UN Water Conference, approximately 70 Member States highlighted the necessity of transboundary cooperation in their national statements. Additionally, 129 countries participated in the third reporting exercise on SDG indicator 6.5.2, focusing on transboundary water cooperation, conducted by UNECE in collaboration with UNESCO.

The UN System-wide Strategy for Water and Sanitation aims to achieve 14 specific outputs, each representing a key area where the UN system will enhance support for countries and drive transformative change. One critical area, output 4.5 of the Collaborative Implementation Plan (CIP), focuses on transboundary water cooperation, among other key priorities. To achieve this, we must assist Member States in developing climate-resilient legal and institutional frameworks, i.e. operational arrangements for transboundary water cooperation.

Strengthening mechanisms like the Water Convention and its Protocol on Water and Health, which have significantly enhanced water governance for over 30 years, is crucial. The Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention), serviced by UNECE, has improved governance, built capacity, mobilized funding, and supported climate action. Its globalization presents a unique opportunity to accelerate cooperation.

Let us leverage the UN System-wide Strategy for Water and Sanitation to advance transboundary water cooperation, particularly through the Water Convention. UNECE is fully committed to implementing this strategy.