

The Sustainable Use and Protection of Water – A New Field for the OSCE’s Work in Promoting Security and Stability

Water and Security

Security studies recognize the interdependence of poverty and stability, and much of the thinking about the concept of “environmental security” has moved beyond a presumed causal relationship between environmental stress and violent conflict to encompass a broader notion of “human security” – a more inclusive concept that focuses on the intricate sets of relationships between environment, society and security.

Issues relating to water resources – including questions of scarcity, distribution and quality – have been recognized as environmental factors that can lead to political tension.

Since 1950, the renewable supply of water per person has decreased by 58 per cent as the world population has swelled from 2.5 to six billion. According to the findings released at a symposium of the Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI) in August 2001, nearly a third of the world’s population is likely to live in regions facing severe water scarcity by 2025. One billion people already lack access to safe drinking water.

With the rise in population, the amount of water withdrawn from rivers, lakes and aquifers has increased at an exponential rate. The UN’s third Global Environment Outlook (2002) reported that the world water cycle seems unlikely to be able to cope with demands for water in the coming decades. Expanding agricultural, urban and industrial activities are polluting sources, thereby reducing the amounts of water that can be used without substantial treatment. Other water-management objectives, including hydro-power production, flood control and navigation, also compete with the uses for which water is withdrawn from rivers and lakes.

These pressures on water resources lead to competition between uses and users both within and between countries. As Professor Aaron Wolf of Oregon State University puts it: Water disputes occur when the rate of change within a water basin exceeds the institutional capacities to absorb that change.²

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2 Cf. Aaron T. Wolf, *The Importance of Regional Co-operation on Water Management for Confidence Building: Lessons Learned*, paper prepared for the Tenth OSCE Economic Forum, 28-30 May 2002, at: <http://www.osce.org/eea>.

Worldwide, there are 261 watersheds that cross the political boundaries of two or more countries. These international basins cover 45.3 per cent of the land surface of the earth, affect about 40 per cent of the world's population and account for approximately 60 per cent of global river flow. In the OSCE region, there are 104 watersheds shared by two or more countries, 14 between Canada and the USA, 71 in Europe and 19 in Asia. These basins have certain characteristics that make their management especially difficult, most notable of which is that they require co-operation between sovereign, independent political units. Disparities between riparian nations – whether in economic development, infrastructural capacity or political orientation – add very serious complications to water-resources development, institutions and management.

There is, however, some good news: While water has been the cause of conflicts within and between countries, and while increasing water scarcity could make water wars more likely in the future, history tells us otherwise: Water has been a basis for co-operation more often than a cause of wars.

Riparians have shown tremendous creativity in approaching regional co-operation, often through preventive diplomacy and the creation of “baskets of benefits”, which allow for positive-sum allocations of water between various partners and users.

The Role of the OSCE

OSCE participating States, concerned by the potential threats to stability posed by unsustainable water uses, yet aware of the opportunities offered by water management for building confidence and fostering greater co-operation, decided to make the sustainable use and the protection of the quality of water the topic of the Tenth OSCE Economic Forum³ held in Prague in May 2002.

OSCE Activities

To follow up the recommendations made at the Economic Forum,⁴ the Office of the Co-ordinator for OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities (OCEEA) worked with specialized organizations to identify a number of projects that aim at addressing water-related security risks and at promoting dialogue and co-operation on sustainable water management. The implementation of these projects will contribute to enhancing early-warning and

3 The Tenth Economic Forum was preceded by three preparatory seminars held in Belgrade, Zamora (Spain) and Baku.

4 The consolidated summary of the Tenth OSCE Economic Forum is available at: <http://www.osce.org/eea>.

conflict-prevention mechanisms and will strengthen processes of confidence building and post-conflict rehabilitation.

Water in Central Asia is a primary issue of concern. If not addressed effectively and in a timely manner, conflicts of interest among water uses and users could, in the long run, become a destabilizing factor.⁵

The conclusions drawn by Central Asian delegates at the regional meeting on "Environment and Security"⁶ held in Ashgabad in January 2003 indicate that the reasons for the gap between the existing policy processes and their implementation were related to the following difficulties:

- A lack of co-ordination and co-operation between governments (and between donors)
- Difficulties in generating political will both internally (to take action) and internationally (to co-operate)
- A lack of funding and internal capacity
- Incomplete implementation of laws and difficulties ensuring the rule of law
- A lack of technological capacities, monitoring and data-management systems
- A lack of international and regional experience in these issues
- A lack of integration across policy spheres (industrial development, foreign policy, agriculture, environment).

The OSCE is possibly the only organization in the region in a position to promote political dialogue. As such it has a key role to play. The Organization can and should foster the generation of political will as well as developing activities and projects targeted at enhancing co-operation and co-ordination. The OSCE must employ a multi-level approach:

1. *Top level:* The OSCE should mediate with the Heads of State on conflicts of interests, promote contacts and discussion of the issues and bring all parties to the table. Building on the experience of the failed UK-OSCE initiative,⁷ it might be wise to consider developing a dialogue on the bilateral/trilateral level, which can hopefully be extended to the regional level at a later stage.⁸

5 Cf. on this the ICG Report, Central Asia: Water and Conflict, Asia Report No. 34, 30 May 2002.

6 The meeting was organized within the framework of the Environment and Security Initiative (see below) and was attended by experts from all five Central Asian states.

7 The UK took the initiative, under OSCE auspices, in the year 2000 to organize a regional conference on water. The initiative failed when Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan decided not to participate. This occurred in spite of efforts by the then OSCE Chairperson-in-Office (Austrian Foreign Minister Benita Ferrero-Waldner) to lobby for the conference during a tour in the region.

8 A first step would be to search for examples of successful co-operation based on shared interests that can serve as illustrations of best practices. An example is the ongoing

2. *Interstate institutional level:* The OSCE should support the reform and strengthening of existing interstate institutional mechanisms.
3. *National level:* The OSCE should address the relevant authorities and agencies to raise awareness, and to identify and define priorities, interests and needs so as to facilitate a process whereby parties in the region move away from thinking in terms of their “rights” (whether historically or otherwise defined) and begin to negotiate on the basis of “needs” and “interests”.
4. *Local/grass-roots level:* The OSCE should raise awareness, build capacities within civil society and local authorities (for example, to promote public participation in decision making) and promote catalysing and confidence-building projects (for example, between border regions).

The OCEEA is working with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) to provide assistance to Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan in setting up an interstate water commission on the Chu and Talas rivers. The implementation of this project would not only contribute to improved co-operation between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan on the Rivers Chu and Talas, but would also be an example for the whole region on how improved co-operation on transboundary waters could be established to the benefit of all parties (see box 1).

Furthermore, in partnership with the Interstate Commission for Water Co-ordination (ICWC), which is based in Tashkent, the OSCE organized a one-week workshop in early 2003 devoted to irrigation issues. The workshop provided a forum where governmental officials and NGO representatives from the five Central Asian states came together to focus on irrigation issues and on how irrigation practices may be enhanced in each country. Irrigation topics were related to the wider issues of sound water-management practices in Central Asia.

In the South Caucasus, the OCEEA is trying to promote co-operation on water management as a confidence-building measure.

Currently, there are no institutional mechanisms or legal instruments available for water management in the Kura-Araks Basin and no mechanisms for aquifer management. The limited data available is often obsolete. Levels of pollution are high.

The OSCE and the NATO Science for Peace programme decided to join forces and support the South Caucasus River Monitoring project. Their aim is to eliminate inconsistencies in the application of international water standards throughout the region and to re-establish regional water-monitoring systems and databases. To quote Ferenc László, a consultant to NATO, “development of a system of information exchange in water management contributes to

OSCE-UNECE project providing assistance to Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan in setting up an interstate water commission on the Chu and Talas Rivers (see below).

economic and political stability, security and peace in the South Caucasus region” (see box 2).

Box 1: The Kyrgyz-Kazakh Intergovernmental Transboundary Water Commission

In February 2002, the governments of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan submitted a request to the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) for assistance in establishing an intergovernmental transboundary water commission, including developing the commission statute and other actions aimed at effective implementation of the intergovernmental transboundary water agreement. At the Prague Economic Forum, the UNECE asked the OSCE for active support in establishing such a commission.

The project aims at establishing good governance in the management of water resources shared between Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. This is to be achieved through the development of institutional arrangements, policies and procedures as well as capacity-building activities that will enable the effective implementation of the transboundary water agreement signed between the two countries.

First, the project will provide assistance in formulating a statute, rules and procedures of operation for the joint commission through a series of informal meetings, fact-finding missions and negotiations. Meetings between representatives of the Republics of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and other major regional stakeholders will be arranged, in which UN and OSCE officials and project consultants will also participate. During this project phase, the commission’s statute, rules and procedures will be developed and adopted by the parties.

Second, the project will promote the development of policies and tools and will help the commission to build capacity to implement and effectively enforce the agreement. This will be undertaken by means of field trips to meet transboundary water commission representatives in other regions of Europe and Asia and through the publication of a brochure on the commission – both online and as hard copy. Furthermore, training tailored to the needs of the technical experts involved in implementation of the agreement will be provided.

Third, an overall economic analysis of the water resources will be conducted and policy recommendations for the development of economic instruments for sustainable management of the transboundary waters will be developed. Results of the study will be published as a report in English and Russian.

The governments of Sweden and the United Kingdom have each pledged 50,000 euros to cover the costs of the project. The operational phase of the project started in early 2003.

Furthermore, in a meeting organized in co-operation with USAID in Tbilisi in November 2002, the OSCE proposed the establishment of a South Caucasus Water Management Co-ordination Group. The Group would be an advisory body consisting of representatives from the governments of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, the international donor community, international organizations and implementing partners working on regional water-related projects in the South Caucasus. The proposal should be interpreted as defining a process that would eventually lead from the current situation, which is

dominated by unilateralism, through stages of co-ordination and collaboration to, hopefully, the establishment of a regional water body.

Box 2: The NATO-OSCE Project on River Monitoring in the South Caucasus

The NATO-OSCE project on river monitoring in the South Caucasus has been in the planning stage for over two years. It consists of parallel monitoring of water resources covering 30 sites in each of the three South Caucasus countries in the Kura-Araks river system. It has the objective of increasing local technical capabilities, establishing standard sampling, analysis and data-management techniques and creating a database accessible on the Internet. Areas covered include preparation for sample and data collection, training, laboratory analysis and data management as well as the development of watershed management systems and infrastructures. Data will be placed on a website with free access managed by the University of New Mexico.

The project has been approved for funding by the NATO Science for Peace programme and the co-directors of the project have also requested the support of the OSCE. The NATO Science for Peace programme will provide a grant of 433,000 euros for a period of three years, covering the project's core budget. Thanks to 55,000 euros provided by the Swedish government and 75,000 US dollars from Statoil, the Norwegian state oil company, the OSCE will cover part of the supplementary costs not included in the core budget and not covered by NATO. This supplementary funding covers training and salaries for scientists totalling 283,000 euros for a period of three years. The OCEEA is still trying to raise the remaining funds required.

The operational phase of the project started in November 2002.

The role and functions of the Water Management Co-ordination Group would be to:

- a. ensure the timely and smooth flow of information on completed, ongoing and planned programmes and projects between the members of the Group;
- b. facilitate the co-ordination of donor initiatives with the objective of ensuring efforts are complementary, generate synergies and avoid duplication;
- c. formulate recommendations to donor agencies and/or government representatives for priority action on critical water-related issues.

The proposal was discussed at three national workshops held in Baku, Yerevan and Tbilisi in February 2003 and again at the regional level shortly after the Fifth Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe" in May 2003 in Kiev.

The OCEEA's objective in Eastern Europe (Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova) is to use water-based initiatives to promote transboundary co-operation and confidence building.

The OSCE is working to support regional co-operation on the management of the Dniestr Basin and to introduce and enforce principles of Integrated Water Resources Management in the area. The OSCE is working with

UNECE to facilitate discussion on the current legal status of relationships between Moldova and Ukraine on transboundary water issues and to support the final elaboration, signing and ratification of an agreement on the Dniestr River. This project will commence with a thorough assessment of the current legal regime covering the river basin and an analysis of existing uses of and pressures on the river and catchment area. Particular efforts will be made to keep the process transparent and to involve civil society and the inhabitants of the river basin, thus setting an example for public participation in environmental decision making.

In Ukraine, the OSCE Project Co-ordinator, the Ukrainian Ministry of the Environment and the State Committee on Water Management launched the project "Introduction and Implementation of the EU Water Framework Directive in Ukraine" in March 2002. Within the scope of this project, the EU Water Framework Directive was translated into Ukrainian and Russian, and a comparative analysis of Ukrainian water management regulations was elaborated. Furthermore, a guidebook entitled "EU Water Framework Directive and Ukraine" was published, containing general information on the EU Directive and Ukrainian legislation on water issues. In order to introduce these materials to the Ukrainian authorities, the public and NGOs at state and local level, two workshops were held at which they were disseminated.

During the workshops, representatives of other Eastern European states expressed interest in developing similar projects. The possibility of replicating this kind of project by compiling and disseminating experiences relating to the regulation of water management for the CIS region as a whole and drawing parallels to ongoing implementation of the Water Framework Directive in the EU is currently being discussed.

In Belarus, the recently reopened OSCE Mission has met with government officials as well as academic and scientific institutions to agree on priorities for future co-operation. Among the agreed priorities are activities relating to the introduction of Belarusian decision makers and national specialists to water management principles and the EU Water Framework Directive, the establishment of regional environmental networks and their possible integration into European environmental networks and environmental education for students, judges and the media.

Also in South-eastern Europe, the OCEEA is promoting co-operation on water management as a contribution to regional stability and reconciliation processes.

Under the auspices of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, the four states through which the Sava River flows – the Republic of Croatia, the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) and the Republic of Slovenia – signed the Framework Agreement on the Sava River Basin on 4 December 2002.

An Action Plan has been developed to implement the provisions of the Framework Agreement. The Action Plan will play a role in identifying, pri-

oritizing, scheduling, and managing activities and projects needed to execute the Framework Agreement. The development of protocols is the key to the successful implementation of the agreement; a great deal of effort is required to mediate between the various interests.

The International Sava River Basin Commission, established under Article 15 of the Framework Agreement, held its first meeting on 2 and 3 April 2003 in Vienna. The meeting was arranged by the Southeast European Co-operative Initiative (SECI) and hosted by the OCEEA.

The OSCE is also considering the possibility of developing a project to support capacity building at local and/or community level targeting border municipalities along the Sava River.

After discussions with the EU Commission (External Relations Directorate General) and the Danish Environment Protection Agency, which leads the initiative on behalf of the EU, the OCEEA agreed to participate in the development of the EU Water Initiative “Strategic Partnership on Water for Sustainable Development – EECCA Component” (Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia) by expanding the security dimension of Integrated Water Resources Management. The OCEEA will co-operate with the twelve CIS countries, the EU and partner organizations in the implementation of the initiative by contributing its experience and expertise, the resources of its field operations and by including its own activities in the programme. The OCEEA believes it is necessary to improve the co-ordination of existing and planned projects to create synergies and make more efficient use of existing financial resources. This will enhance the ability to foster sustainable development and address water-management issues that can either threaten stability or contribute to confidence building.

Lastly, the OSCE, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) are heading a project to encourage collaboration on environmental management as a strategy for promoting co-operation and security in South-eastern Europe and Central Asia.⁹ Due to its critical importance, water is one of the main focus areas of the project. The first stage, which has involved mapping out environmental and security hotspots, is close to being completed. The programme will then enter a second phase, during which activities and projects aimed at dealing with the problems identified during phase one will be developed and executed, supporting the OSCE’s work in the field of environment and security. The three partner organizations plan to develop a programme of work to tackle issues identified as threats to security. It will be based on the following pillars:

- *Vulnerability assessment, early warning and monitoring:* Continuing and strengthening the assessment of issues identified as threats, launch-

9 The Environment and Security Initiative. Further information can be found at: <http://www.envsec.org>.

ing a comprehensive awareness and communications campaign based on the dissemination of publications, training and education, consultation and dialogue. Steps will be taken to promote vulnerability assessment, the development of appropriate indicators, the establishment of an integrated database and a long-term monitoring system.

- *Integrated policy development and implementation:* Promoting the integration of links between conflicts and environmental issues across the full spectrum of policies and programmes, from multilateral environmental agreements and conflict prevention activities to national, regional and sectoral environmental plans and assessments forging links with other assessment projects, research networks and policy programmes.
- *Institutional development, capacity building and advocacy:* Facilitating regional, national and civil-society programmes to strengthen institutional and individual capacities to prevent and resolve disputes peacefully and to use environmental co-operation to strengthen socio-economic development. This will be addressed through informal and formal dispute-resolution mechanisms and peace-building measures, by improving access to and sharing information and by implementing stakeholder-training projects.

Lessons Learned

During this process, the OCEEA has learned a number of lessons that will guide its work in the development of a more structured approach in addressing water and security issues.

Disputes concerning water resources can, in combination with other factors (such as poverty, inequality and discrimination), lead to tension and ultimately trigger conflicts. At the same time, however, co-operation on water management can be a contributing factor in solving broader political disputes.

Institutions such as river basin commissions matter and need to be capable of absorbing change, both political and environmental.

Water can be a catalyst for co-operation because it helps to build technical, personal and ultimately political relations between parties.

Agreements on water disputes, in general, are not achieved as long as parties define their positions in terms of their “rights”. When parties to a conflict move away from their historical or otherwise defined rights and begin to negotiate on the principle of their “needs” and “interests”, agreements are more likely to be achieved.

Using a regional approach and focusing on “technical” matters can facilitate the solution of bilateral political disputes. Multilateralism can offer a

convenient platform for the deliberation of issues and may provide the basis for their bilateral resolution at a later date.

A multilateral approach can provide a means of discovering shared ground, of making personal acquaintances and undertaking confidence-building measures.

Finally, water is to be seen in the political context of international relations. Proposed solutions to water-related problems that do not take this into consideration have limited chances of achieving sustainable results