

Gabriel Leonte/Saba Nordström

Promotion of Security and Co-operation through Water Management Activities¹

Introduction

Environmental concerns encompass an important part of the comprehensive concept of security within the OSCE and have been on its agenda from the beginning. With the understanding that environmental degradation, the unsustainable use of and unequal access to natural resources, including water resources, have security implications, the OSCE is committed to raising environmental security issues to a higher level on national and international political agendas and aims at building local capacity to adequately address such challenges.

The OSCE's involvement in promoting transboundary water co-operation and sound water management in its region has generated a number of success stories. The work in this area is also an excellent example of how the Organization operates, particularly with regard to the economic and environmental dimension. It exemplifies how rhetoric translates into practice, how needs are identified, how recommendations are formulated, and how they are implemented. It also illustrates both the OSCE's comprehensive philosophy, and the way that leads from ideas to implementation, from sometimes abstract political dialogue to the delivery of concrete activities and capacity-building projects. The OSCE's work on water also tells the story of the growth of the economic and environmental dimension in the last couple of years, as well as that of the challenges ahead.

Water Issues and the OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum

Water has featured twice on the high-level political agenda of the OSCE in the economic and environmental dimension. Recognizing the significance of water in terms of both security and co-operation, two Chairmanships made the topic a priority.

The Economic and Environmental Forum is the major and highest level annual meeting within the economic and environmental dimension of the OSCE. Each year, it focuses on a theme proposed by the Chairmanship and agreed upon by the 56 participating States. Its objective is to give political stimulus to the dialogue on security-relevant economic and environmental issues and to contribute to the elaboration of specific recommendations and

¹ The views expressed in this contribution are the personal opinions of the authors.

follow-up activities to address these challenges. It also reviews the implementation of the participating States' commitments in the economic and environmental dimension.

Each Economic and Environmental Forum is preceded by a series of expert-level preparatory conferences aimed at assisting the participating States to prepare for that year's Forum.

The annual Forum brings together more than 400 participants representing governments, civil society, the business community, and other international organizations to engage in dialogue and consultations and identify practical solutions for common economic and environmental concerns.

The Tenth Meeting of the Economic Forum, which took place in Prague from 28 to 31 May 2002 under the Portuguese Chairmanship, had "Cooperation for the sustainable use and the protection of quality of water in the context of the OSCE" as its overall theme.

Five years later, the 2007 Spanish OSCE Chairmanship renewed this commitment by proposing, "Key Challenges to Ensure Environmental Security and Sustainable Development in the OSCE Area: Land Degradation, Soil Contamination and Water Management" as the theme of the 15th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum.

Consensus on the theme of the 2002 Forum was not easily achieved. Negotiations were long and difficult and finally three interpretative statements were attached to the Permanent Council Decision on the place, date, and overall theme of the Tenth Meeting of the Economic Forum.² The arguments invoked by those delegations that made interpretative statements ranged from claims that the OSCE lacked the necessary expertise to deal with such issues, via expressions of preference for an alternative topic, to a reluctance to discuss transboundary water issues, transboundary water management regimes, the distribution and management of water resources, etc. in the OSCE context. Extreme caution was recommended in handling this issue, as, particularly in the case of parts of the Central Asian region, water was not only regarded as a natural resource belonging in the ecological and economic category, but could also be seen as a political category in its own right.

In 2007, a rather different mood characterized the debates regarding water management in the OSCE context. Not only were no objections expressed to the theme of the 15th Economic and Environmental Forum proposed by the Spanish Chairmanship, but, on the contrary, most delegations engaged actively in the preparatory process for the Forum, and participation reached record levels.

Moreover, following the 2007 Forum and drawing from its recommendations, two important documents were approved at the Madrid Ministerial Council on 29-30 November 2007, namely the Madrid Declaration on Envir-

2 Cf. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Permanent Council, *Decision No. 429, Place, Date and Overall Theme for the Tenth Meeting of the Economic Forum*, PC.DEC/429, 19 July 2001.

onment and Security,³ which singles out not only water management but also issues such as climate change as crucial long-term challenges in the OSCE area, and a Ministerial Council decision on water management,⁴ which provides the OSCE with a strong mandate to strengthen dialogue and co-operation on water management within its region, to act as a framework for the further development of water management co-operation between states and relevant international actors, and to support the participating States, upon request, in the implementation of relevant commitments.

Water-Related Activities

Based on recommendations from the Economic and Environmental Forums, a number of activities have been developed by the OSCE, at both headquarters and field level.

ENVSEC

One of the OSCE's most important environmental activities is its participation in the Environment and Security Initiative, initiated during the 2002 Forum and formally launched in 2003. Recognizing that environmental problems do not stop at national borders, the ENVSEC initiative has developed a platform that turns potential disagreements between states into opportunities for confidence-building and co-operation.

Joining the OSCE in the ENVSEC initiative are the United Nations Development and Environmental Programmes (UNDP, UNEP), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), and the Regional Environmental Centre (REC) for Central and Eastern Europe. NATO is an associated member. The combined strengths of these partner organizations help focus interventions to meet the environment and security priorities of national governments in a co-ordinated manner, avoiding duplication.

In close co-ordination and co-operation with national governments, ENVSEC has conducted environment and security assessments in the regions of Central Asia, South-eastern Europe, the Southern Caucasus, and Eastern Europe. Following these in-depth assessments, ENVSEC has developed work programmes, consisting of over 70 projects ranging from capacity-building to environmental-policy development and public-awareness events to address priority issues. In terms of water-related projects, there are two ongoing assessments taking place, one on the Eastern Caspian and another on the Amu

3 Cf. *Madrid Declaration on Environment and Security*, MC.DOC/4/07 of 30 November 2007, in: *Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Fifteenth Meeting of the Ministerial Council*, 29 and 30 November 2007, Madrid 2007, 30 November 2007, pp. 10-12.

4 Cf. *Decision No. 7/07, Follow-up to the Fifteenth Economic and Environmental Forum: Water Management*, MC.DEC/7/07 of 30 November 2007, in: *ibid.*, pp. 27-28.

Darya. The Eastern Caspian assessment was launched at the ENVSEC Management Board meeting in Brussels in November 2008, while the Amu Darya assessment will be launched during 2009.

Chu-Talas

At the initiative of the governments of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, the transboundary project “Promoting the Creation of a Commission for the Chu and Talas between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan” was started in 2003. A number of partners joined forces to implement the project, including the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Ministry of Agriculture, Water Resources, and Processing Industry of the Kyrgyz Republic, the OSCE, the UNECE, and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), as well as the Peipsi Centre for Transboundary Water Co-operation in Estonia. The OSCE field presences also provided important support in terms of project implementation.

The ultimate objective of the project was to support Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in implementing the Agreement on the Use of Water Facilities of Intergovernmental Use on the Chu and Talas Rivers, which the two countries had signed in January 2000 and ratified in February 2002. Through this Agreement, the parties had committed themselves to establishing a permanent structure, a joint commission, to regulate the use of the water, and to sharing the financing of the exploitation and maintenance of the infrastructure.

Assistance was provided to the two governments in the following ways: drafting documents that would define the status, functions, responsibilities, and rights of the commission; developing procedures and preparing basic documents regarding the co-funding of various structures; mediation to achieve a consensus between the two governments as the above mentioned documents were drafted.

An important component of this work was the various elements of public participation built into the process, as one of the project objectives was to provide information to stakeholders and involve broad public participation in the management of water resources in the Chu and Talas river basins. In that regard, local NGOs counterparts – the NGO *Zhalgas* from Kazakhstan and the NGO *Sheriktesh* from Kyrgyzstan – contributed to project implementation and the drafting of the documents.

The project culminated in the creation and inauguration of a Bilateral Chu and Talas Commission between the Kyrgyz and Kazakh governments. Through the creation of the Bilateral Commission, a long-term, mutually beneficial and co-operative exchange of resources between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan is now in place, promoting regional governance through shared responsibilities and obligations toward the Chu and Talas Commission.

An Asian Development Bank (ADB) project, “Improved Management of Shared Water Resources in Central Asia”, supported in parallel the work

of the Commission through the establishment of a Secretariat and permanent working groups of experts.

It is worth noting that there were no comparable co-operative projects in Central Asia at the time the project started. This co-operation can therefore be seen as a new departure that could serve as a good example for the Central Asian countries, as well as other regions, in the field of improved co-operation on the use of transboundary water resources.

In short, the project has demonstrated that co-operation can function, and that co-operative agreements of this sort, pioneered in the region through the Chu and Talas project, can and do have significant benefits for all participants. Many lessons learned from this project go beyond the borders of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and even beyond Central Asia.

Moreover, the ability of the OSCE to capitalize upon political strength and dialogue between its participating States, fostering co-operation in water management, in this case, and on other issues in general, is indeed a major strength of the Organization. The Chu and Talas project clearly illustrates the ability of the OSCE to work directly with all parties, serving as a broker to ensure that dialogue and discussion is effective at both the political and the working levels. While the OSCE, as a political security organization, can foster political co-operation among stakeholders, resulting in policy change on water management issues, the technical expertise on water-related development issues available at both the UNECE and UNESCAP is invaluable. Further partners with specialist knowledge of the NGO sector or national implementation projects and solutions to water issues lend enormous value to the project. Following the successful outcomes, the OSCE was requested by both co-Chairs of the Chu and Talas Commission to continue supporting the work of the Commission in deepening dialogue and broadening co-operation between the countries.

Dniester

A project on transboundary co-operation and the sustainable management of the Dniester river was initiated in 2004. It aimed at establishing institutionalized co-operation in the Dniester river basin, developing an action programme to improve the legal framework and supporting confidence-building activities and the exchange of information. This joint OSCE-UNECE endeavour within the ENVSEC framework involved the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources of Moldova, the Moldovan state water concern *Apele Moldovei*, the Ukrainian Ministry of Environmental Protection, the Ukrainian State Committee for Water Management, as well as civil society partners such as the Eco-TIRAS International Environmental Association of River Keepers from Moldova and the Ukrainian environmental organization MAMA-86.

The first phase of the project culminated in the drafting of a transboundary diagnostic study for the basin, which analysed its current state, defined transboundary environmental problems, and outlined international legal tools for transboundary co-operation. The report concluded that further development of transboundary co-operation was needed.

Following the successful collaboration between the OSCE and UNECE on the “Transboundary Co-operation and Sustainable Management of the Dniester River” project (Dniester I), both organizations were requested, by Ukrainian and Moldovan authorities, to facilitate the development of a follow-up project. The objectives were to update the bilateral agreement between the states and develop an action programme to improve the existing international legal framework for interstate co-operation, emergency-response co-operation, and co-operation on “water and health”, and to develop information-exchange systems for the entire basin. This “Action Programme for Improved Joint Management of the Dniester River Basin” (Dniester II) aimed at addressing bottlenecks in the transboundary water co-operation process and, in particular, to expand the scope of co-operation and improve public participation and access to and exchange of information.

The UNECE, which also oversees the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, is an important partner with its expertise on transboundary water issues and direct links to the water authorities in the region. The OSCE is the largest regional security organization in the world, and through the delegations in Vienna, as well as its field presences, offers good mechanisms for continuous, international political dialogue linked to project implementation.

The key output of the Dniester II project consisted in an agreed action programme elaborating on development of the legal and institutional framework, co-operation on emergency and sanitary-hygienic issues, and development of the open joint information system. A list of the draft documents developed within the scope of the project includes an updated draft bilateral agreement on the Dniester, a regulation on public participation in decision-making relevant to the Dniester river basin, a regulation on co-operation on sanitary-hygienic control, a regulation on management of the joint Dniester website, and an action plan to develop an information management system for the Dniester river. The documents are presently being agreed upon by representatives of state authorities, the public, and research institutes in Moldova and Ukraine.

The relevance of this activity to the Transdnestrrian conflict lies in the element of confidence-building and normalization of relations that results from having Moldovan and Transdnestrrian authorities and stakeholders forming part of the same national working group and participating in regular, bilateral working meetings. Thus, the project is an example on how opportunities offered by water management can be used to build confidence and foster co-operation among states and communities.

The OSCE is now working to ensure that all the legal documents created under Dniester II are approved in both parliaments by supporting a Dniester III project.

South Caucasus River Monitoring Programme

A joint OSCE/NATO South Caucasus co-operative river-monitoring project was started in 2002 aiming at quantitative and qualitative monitoring of the Kura-Aras/Araks river basin system, supporting the development of innovative monitoring techniques, and promoting data sharing between national institutions. The project brought together representatives of the National Academies of Sciences of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia to conduct co-operative monitoring of the Kura-Aras/Araks river basin. Monitoring activities are presently being carried out regularly at over 40 locations along the river to measure the occurrence of persistent organic pesticides, heavy metals, and radioactivity in the river basin system.

The 15th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum (2007)

The 15th Economic and Environmental Forum (EEF) was a good and timely opportunity to review and build upon the various OSCE activities and initiatives in the field of water management, take stock of existing achievements, strengthen co-operation with partners, and identify future challenges and opportunities.

It was preceded by two preparatory conferences: one in Central Asia (Bishkek), and one in Spain (Zaragoza), where a major international exhibition on water took place in the summer of 2008. The focus of the preparatory conference in Zaragoza was water management, where discussions benefited from input from top-level experts and practitioners.

At the Zaragoza conference, Francesca Bernardini, Secretary of the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, outlined five factors needed if water resources are to be managed successfully to meet growing challenges. First, it is necessary to create legal frameworks, such as conventions, that promote co-operation, include enforcement and dispute mechanisms, and provide necessary assistance. Second, the establishment of joint institutions at national and regional levels that engage local actors will reduce the often reoccurring issue of lack of co-ordination within national authorities and institutions. Third, there must be policy integration among all national governmental actors that seeks to define medium and long-term goals. Fourth, more emphasis should be placed on sharing both benefits and costs. In particular, mutually beneficial co-operative activities should be developed. Finally, there

is a need to adapt mechanisms to ensure that goals remain realistic, as managing water resources is not a static endeavour.

Anders Berntell, Executive Director of the Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI), noted that water, a public good, is shared most of the time by two or more countries, and that diplomatic engagement is therefore imperative. More emphasis needs to be placed on the beneficial potential of water co-operation, and efforts should be made to build a sense of water as a source of co-operation rather than conflict. He further noted that long-term processes at national and international levels (such as conventions) are very important and that adequate financing is imperative for creating lasting, stable institutions of water co-operation. This co-operation creates political momentum in and of itself but is sometimes insufficient to overcome existing political barriers. In order to effectively address these political barriers and undertake complex projects, regional power dynamics need to be understood, as does the key role of donors in enabling a level playing field. Berntell stressed that the OSCE had a clear role to play in promoting water co-operation. As a neutral actor, the Organization could work to create the political will needed to manage water resources more effectively when water co-operation did not create the necessary momentum to fully address the problems.

The outcome of the debates in Zaragoza were brought to the political-level meeting of the EEF in Prague, which recognized once more that water co-operation is a highly political issue and should have a high profile on the OSCE agenda for that reason. The importance of water co-operation for economic development and security was also emphasized.

Sustainable (transboundary) water management is a complex exercise requiring long-term involvement and co-operation at various levels, not just between countries, but also between state institutions, civil society, and the business community within countries. The OSCE, with its experience and mandate, has a role to play in that regard.

One of the main conclusions of the 15th EEF process was that water management is very closely linked with good governance. Good-governance issues are particularly pertinent in the water sector, and the concept of water governance is sometimes highly political in nature. For example, meaningful participation in decision making at different levels is essential for effective democracy. The fact that very few countries in the OSCE region have a minister of water also indicates the low level of political commitment towards water governance in the region. The same goes for national budgets, which have seen financing of the sector cut in many parts of the OSCE region. Furthermore, in terms of water being integrated into poverty reduction strategy papers, water management may be mentioned in the document (in particular flooding and droughts), but this does not seem to translate into programmes of action or priorities for investment. The OSCE should therefore continue to promote the principles of good governance in the water sector.

In the area of water management, the OSCE should expand its co-operation with regional and international organizations and direct its efforts toward building political will and local capacities, filling existing gaps, and strengthening and enforcing existing co-operation mechanisms. The OSCE should deepen its partnership with the UNECE, in particular towards:

- promoting the implementation of international conventions and basic legal acts (here, the OSCE can go back to the Helsinki Final Act given the major role that water has come to play modern global policy making), and
- involving the general public and fostering the development of a new “culture of water” in civil society. The Prague Forum stressed that the Aarhus Convention was a useful tool in this connection.

Under its general theme of environmental security and sustainable development, the Prague Forum also dealt with issues related to climate change. The international community needs to co-ordinate action among states to prevent the worst effects of this crisis from materializing. The OSCE will do its part to promote co-operation between its participating States on emerging threats to environmental security.

Further Water-Related Activities

The Forum was instrumental in clarifying the possible role of the Organization in each of the following areas and generated a number of follow-up activities.

Kazakhstan – Building Capacity for Water Co-operation

In October 2007, the Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities (OCEEA) and the OSCE Centre in Almaty, jointly with UNECE and the local UNDP office and with the US support, organized a meeting on the “Capacity for Water Co-operation” project in Almaty, Kazakhstan. The meeting focused on “River basin commissions and other institutions for transboundary water co-operation”. Proceedings of the meeting are being prepared for publication. In the meantime, various stakeholders within the co-operation on water dialogue held a meeting on the human right to water with regard to the Protocol on Water and Health under the Convention of the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Helsinki Water Convention). Particularly interesting for all parties was the extended dialogue with the health sector and the World Health Organization (WHO) on achieving sound water governance.

Moldova – Monitoring Water Quality

In August 2007, the OSCE Mission to Moldova financially supported a project to monitor the environmental situation, including water quality, of the Cuciurgan reservoir in the southern part of Transdnestria. This project is scheduled to run for one year and is being implemented by the Moldovan NGO Eco-TIRAS in partnership with the Moldovan Ministry of Reintegration, the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, and three Transdnestrian environmental NGOs. The Cuciurgan reservoir is facing environmental pollution from a nearby power station and from the discharge of communal waste. The water from the reservoir discharges into the Black Sea in the area close to the city of Odessa.

Turkmenistan – Training on Efficient Use of Irrigation Water

On 21-25 January 2008, the OSCE Centre in Ashgabad, in co-operation with the city municipality and the agribusiness school of Turkmenabat, organized a five-day workshop aimed at sharing international best practices on water use management in irrigation and raising awareness of the environmental consequences of salinization and inefficient irrigation methods. Around 30 participants from Turkmenabat's municipal water utilities department, state and private farmers, and the Amu Darya River Basin Organization attended the workshop and learned about new water-saving technologies in the agricultural sector.

All these projects have improved co-operation and expanded stakeholder involvement both horizontally and vertically, creating co-operative practices and models that can be used beyond the sphere of water issues.

Renewed Focus on Water-Related Challenges in Central Asia

In the Central Asian region, approximately 50 to 60 per cent of the population live in rural areas and depend on the quality of land and water resources. During Soviet times, infrastructure development did not always take into consideration environmental concerns. In addition, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the existing infrastructure for the management of water resources (reservoirs, pumps, pipes, etc.) has not been well maintained. The challenges the region faces include a growing population and shrinking water supply, lower land fertility and yields, desertification, salination, the further drying up of the Aral Sea, a decrease in biodiversity and deterioration of ecosystems compounded by the adverse effects of climate change, the deterioration of irrigation infrastructure, and worrying social and health indicators. All these developments have major implications for security and stability in the region.

These issues were thoroughly discussed in the course of the 15th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum process, held under the Spanish Chairmanship. Moreover, as a direct follow-up to the Forum, a regional conference addressing the main challenges for providing environmental security and sustainable development in the Central Asian region, with a special focus on technology transfers, was organized in Tashkent for 30-31 October 2007.

Meeting the water-related challenges in Central Asia depends not only on raising capacities and financial resources. They also require the generation of political will to enhance regional co-operation and update regional arrangements and mechanisms stemming from the Soviet era. This is where it is to be hoped that the OSCE, as a platform for political dialogue with a strong presence in the field, could make a contribution.

According to the report on the review of the implementation of commitments prepared by the UNECE Secretariat for the 15th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum, despite progress, regulatory reforms in the field of water are far from complete in Central Asian countries, and have resulted in some gaps and contradictions between new laws, decrees, codes, and regulations. Many regulatory documents dating from the former Soviet Union are still in force, so it is not always clear which regulations apply in a specific case. It is also often impossible to comply with these norms, whether because appropriate measuring devices or financial and human resources are lacking or because they are not economically feasible or realistic. Challenges for transboundary co-operation include poorly defined shared responsibilities between national authorities and a lack of co-ordination between them. Transboundary water management suffers from problems at the national level as well, such as poor inter-ministerial co-ordination.

Speaking at the Zaragoza conference, Prof. Victor A. Dukhovny, Director of the Scientific Information Center of the Central Asian Interstate Commission for Water Co-ordination (SIC-ICWC), presented the experience of co-operation between the five Central Asian States in transboundary water management, mainly regarding the basins of the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers and the Aral Sea. SIC-ICWC activities have included: joint planning of river regimes and water storage reservoirs; operational management of water supply – consumption control and in some instances quality control; development of the regional information system; and implementation of joint regional projects. The SIC-ICWC's main achievement has been to ensure conflict-free water supply for the countries of the region. Prof. Dukhovny underlined the importance of creating primary documents and institutional bodies to initiate conflict-free, harmonious water management that would benefit all the countries involved. He also stressed the importance of sustainable water availability and emphasized that it had to become a common understanding for governments and all other stakeholders that water was of similar vital importance as gas, oil, and minerals.

Along the same line of thinking, speaking at the above-mentioned Tashkent conference, Usman Buranov, the technical director of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS) stated that interstate water management co-operation in Central Asia was similar in importance to the co-operation on coal and steel that was instigated in Europe after the Second World War. The states in the region seem to have understood the importance of preventing further environmental degradation and improving the state of the environment. In this context, water management and infrastructure need to be improved, and some progress has been made, using loans from international institutions as well as financial arrangements from local investors.

Other speakers and participants in the Tashkent conference referred to a number of potentially destabilizing factors such as population growth, climate change, changing patterns of water consumption, aging water infrastructure, shortages of finance and qualified staff in the water sector, etc. Many existing problems were identified as being linked to the issues of interstate water management and the effective use of water resources. Joint management, development, and protection of water resources can lend regional co-operation and integration a new impetus. Nevertheless, not all the countries in the region are parties to the Helsinki Water Convention.

The issue of water consumption, its waste as a result of poor infrastructure, and the allocation of water to the various sectors of the economy was also mentioned. In particular, reference was made to agriculture and the high levels of water needed to grow cotton. Solutions to this include the planting of less water-intensive crops.

The gender dimension of soil and water management and the impact of land degradation and water scarcity on social conditions, health, and migration were also touched upon, and it was made clear that the health aspects of water affect women in particular in Central Asia.

Regarding the specific role of the OSCE, the following recommendations were made:

- The Organization should support, first and foremost, more regional co-operation, including through: sharing of data across borders, particularly in cases of emergency; adequate legal frameworks defining rights to water, including in a transboundary context.
- The Organization should facilitate co-ordination between donors in forming regional programmes on water and environmental co-operation and improving the usage of donors funds.
- The Organization should contribute to the provision of increased capacity-building opportunities to water users, water suppliers, and water experts at every level: basic, advanced, and professional; involving farmers can also contribute to reducing soil degradation.

- The Organization should advocate the crucial importance of environmental sustainability and the need to reserve water for ecological use.

Attention should be given to drawing up or enhancing agreements in the following river basins:

- Amu Darya, shared by Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan;
- Syr Darya, shared by Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan;
- Zeravshan, shared by Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Facilitating the transfer of experience and expertise with regard not only to technology but also to transboundary co-operation practices from other parts of the world, particularly Europe, could also be beneficial for the Central Asia region. It was also concluded that new technologies, incentives, and a pricing system capable of optimizing water consumption were important elements of a comprehensive and sustainable solution in the region.

The 16th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum (2008)

Finland, which holds the Chairmanship of the OSCE in 2008, selected “Maritime and inland waterways co-operation in the OSCE area: Increasing security and protecting the environment” as one of its priorities and as the theme of the 16th Economic and Environmental Forum. This draws partly from the topic of the 14th Forum, held under the Belgian Chairmanship, which covered a whole range of transportation issues including waterway transportation, and the 15th Forum, held under the Spanish Chairmanship, which concentrated on environmental aspects of security.

Regarding inland-waterways co-operation, the forum process indicated that addressing environmental challenges should be a priority. The Forum highlighted the positive experience in the Danube river basin, where the need for co-ordination in addressing economic and environmental challenges related to river management was recognized. The International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR) linked up with the Danube Navigation Commission and the International Commission for the Protection of the Sava River Basin, in order to initiate a cross-sectoral discussion process which led to a “Joint Statement on Guiding Principles on the Development of Inland Navigation and Environment in the Danube River Basin”. The Forum recommended applying the Danube model to other river basins. The OSCE could, for instance, help to replicate the above-mentioned Joint Statement and promote its principles.

The 16th Forum process also supported the continuation of a number of ongoing activities such as the Dniester project and the development of concrete activities following the ongoing ENVSEC assessment work in the Amu-Darya river basin.

It was again stressed that Central Asia should be a priority region for the OSCE with regard to river-basin co-operation and water management. The region's existing agreements need to be updated, and transparent information exchange established among the countries. The transfer of international knowledge and experience would be beneficial and the OSCE could be a useful facilitator. The regulation of the energy/water nexus and the development and improvement of water-saving strategies in the region were mentioned as areas for future OSCE involvement. Technology transfer could be another area where the OSCE could help – in co-operation with others. Building co-operation between the countries of the region and Afghanistan was also emphasized. It was suggested that the EU Central Asian Strategy adopted in 2007 might open new opportunities for co-operation.

Conclusions and the Way Ahead

As a direct follow-up to the 15th Economic and Environmental Forum, the OSCE held a seminar at Stockholm Water Week in 2007, where it presented and discussed the issues around transboundary water management. Clear conclusions and recommendations were reached during the seminar, which provide a good summary of the work the Organization has carried out in the field so far:

- Water is a political issue and can be a vehicle for enhancing democracy and public participation and empowering local stakeholders.
- Regional organizations, such as the OSCE, can play a much greater role in supporting transboundary water initiatives.
- Bilateral or multilateral water agreements require political will to be effective, hence political organizations play an important role in the process.
- Participation in international dialogue is a prerequisite for national/regional ownership, particularly in countries in transition.

The activities and projects implemented by the OSCE in co-operation with the UN and other partners in the field of transboundary water management can and have become catalysts for the development of co-operation in transboundary river basins.

Above all, it should be held in mind that no co-operative undertaking comparable to the Chu-Talas project existed in Central Asia when the OSCE and the UNECE began supporting the Kazakh and Kyrgyz governments. The

establishment of the commission in the Chu-Talas river basins further encouraged other international organizations (such as the EU and the Asian Development Bank, ADB) to provide assistance to the water authorities operating in the Chu and Talas basins. The support provided in the Dniester river basin has been important in improving the international legal basis for transboundary and intergovernmental co-operation, including the exchange of information and public participation in decision making. In the case of the Kura-Aras/Araks river monitoring project, gathering scientifically verifiable data has proved to be the best way to foster co-operation.

In short, the projects have demonstrated that co-operation can function, and that co-operative agreements of the sort that have been pioneered in these projects can and do have significant benefits for all participants.

The achievements of the OSCE's transboundary river basin projects can be seen as far-ranging, and lie primarily in the steps taken to co-ordinate water resources in a methodological and stable manner between neighbouring states.

Moreover, the OSCE's ability to capitalize upon the political strength of its participating States and the constant dialogue between them, in this case, in order to foster collaboration in transboundary water management and, indeed, in natural resource management in general, is clearly a major strength. The examples given above clearly illustrate the OSCE's ability to work directly with all parties, serving as a broker to ensure that dialogue and discussion is effective at both the political level and in implementation.

It is important to stress the strong role of co-operation and the key contribution made by the partners involved in the process. While the OSCE, as a security policy organization, can foster political co-operation among stakeholders resulting in policy changes on transboundary water management issues, the added value and technical expertise of both the UNECE and NATO's Science for Peace programme, as well as other partners, are invaluable. Further collaborators, including specialists in the NGO sector, or in national implementation and solutions to water issues, also lend enormous added value.

In the future, the OSCE will continue to foster dialogue and co-operation on transboundary water management in the region. The conference on "Challenges for Providing Environmental Security and Sustainable Development in the Region of Central Asia", held in Tashkent on the 30-31 October 2007 provides a good platform for further steps. Since then, the OSCE has engaged in dialogue with the Central Asian countries and has collaborated with the UN Convention to Combat Desertification and the World Meteorological Organization in supporting regional dialogue and establishing a drought management centre for Central Asia.

Under ENVSEC, the OSCE aims to support the follow-up to the Amu Darya assessment, where direct responses to gaps and needs will be identified

and directly implemented through projects agreed with the relevant Central Asian states, as well as Afghanistan and other ENVSEC partners.

In particular, co-operation with the Secretariat of the Helsinki Water Convention and with the UNECE will be strengthened. The OSCE is also looking forward to supporting the Interstate Committee for Water Co-ordination in Central Asia in a capacity building project that focuses strongly on regional co-operation, and promoting policies to encourage water management and environmental sustainability in the region. Finally, the OSCE will work closely with the UNDP regional office in Bratislava and offices in Central Asia to support national integrated water resource management plans, avoid overlap, and strengthen water policies in the region.