



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

The Secretariat

Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities

Vienna, June 2008

Contribution of the OSCE to the EXPO Zaragoza 2008 Water Tribune Conference
Thematic Week: Water, unique resource: Shared waters, governance, basin and water geopolitics
Topic: Water basins

Promotion of security and co-operation in river basins

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The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) is the largest regional security organization set up under Chapter VIII of the United Nations Charter and is a primary instrument for early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation in its area. Its approach to security is unique in being both comprehensive and co-operative: comprehensive in that it deals with three dimensions of security – the politico-military, the economic and environmental and the human. It therefore addresses a wide range of security related concerns, including arms control, confidence- and security-building measures, human rights, protection of national minorities, democratization, police strategies, counterterrorism, anti-trafficking measures, and economic and environmental activities. It is co-operative in that all 56 States enjoy equal status. Decisions are taken by consensus and are politically but not legally binding.

The OSCE Co-ordinator of Economic and Environmental Activities

Although not primarily an economic organization, the OSCE is involved in economic and environmental activities, operating on the premise that promoting economic prosperity and co-operating on environmental problems can contribute to the enhancement of international security and stability.

The OSCE promotes a continuous dialogue through regular meetings of its permanent bodies in Vienna such as the Permanent Council and the Economic and Environmental Committee. Economic and Environmental Officers operate on the ground in the OSCE Field Presences in South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

The Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, acting in support of the Chairman-in-Office, is tasked with strengthening the ability of the

Permanent Council and the OSCE institutions to address economic, social and environmental aspects of security.

The Co-ordinator's tasks include:

- enhancing the OSCE's interaction with relevant international organizations;
- strengthening the economic, environmental, and social components in the work of OSCE missions and field activities;
- deepening interaction with the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly;
- broadening OSCE contacts with non-governmental organizations and the private sector;
- formulating a programme of work for appropriate additional activities in and relating to the OSCE's economic and environmental dimension.

The Co-ordinator, who works under the direct supervision of the Secretary General, is assisted by an office staff consisting currently of 19 persons.

The ENVSEC Initiative

It is widely recognized that the exploration and exploitation of natural resources and human security are interdependent. The international community and numerous research papers have acknowledged the links between the use of natural resources, environmental protection and the possibility of violent conflict. Firstly, there are environmental scarcity conflicts that stem from competition over declining natural resources such as forests, fresh water, fisheries and fertile soils. Secondly, disputes over environmental risks, problems and hazards including cross-border pollution or environmental accidents with transboundary consequences can cause political tension and threaten peace. Thirdly, human security is vulnerable to natural disasters that have different consequences for various human communities and their livelihoods depending on the community's coping capacity. Finally, also environmental wealth – non-renewable natural resources such as oil, diamonds, and various metals such as gold and timber - may play a key role in triggering, prolonging, and financing violent conflicts.

On the other hand environmental deterioration can also be a common point of interest and potential source for cooperation between regions or nations inclined to conflict. The need to protect the environment and jointly develop and manage natural resources can be used to increase cooperation between groups that share for example a water basin or a biodiversity rich mountainous area.

The 1994 UNDP Human Development Report made clear that a nation's security cannot be guaranteed by state-centered military force alone, but has to be understood in terms of the state's overall political, economic, social, human and environmental condition. Already in 1986, the World Commission on Environment and Development issued the well known Brundlandt report "Our Common future", in which it stated that the environment was an important element of security that needed to be integrated into the way conflict and peace building were managed. This and similar statements were repeated at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit and the 2002 Johannesburg Summit, at which the world's leaders committed themselves to 'save our planet, promote human development and achieve universal prosperity and peace'.

In 2004, the report from the 'High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change' to the UN Secretary General referred extensively to the need to address threats to security from the mismanagement of natural resources and the marginalization of communities in relation to resources and threats from natural disasters. The Panel also recognised that protecting the environment is a security related issue and must be seen as such (UN. 2004). In the same year, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Wangari Mathai, an environmental activist, confirming to the public that preserving the environment and peace making are interrelated and in 2007 Al Gore together with the Intergovernmental Panel to Combat Climate Change (IPCCC) received the Nobel Peace Prize for their work in raising awareness of the implications of climate change.

It was the increased call for assistance to tackle environmental problems creating security risks, which in the 2002 led to the establishment of the Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC). The Initiative was built on the combined capacity and expertise of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and was publicly announced and politically endorsed in May 2003, simultaneously by the Ministers for Environment at the "Environment for Europe" Conference in Kiev and by Ministers of Foreign Affairs of OSCE countries at the OSCE Economic Forum in Prague.

Soon after the Initiative was established, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) became an associated partner, and in 2006 the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the Regional Environment Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC) joined the Initiative as full partners.

Working in close collaboration with national Ministries of Environment and Foreign Affairs as well as with many other local partners, ENVSEC today operates in 20 countries from the Balkans to Central Asia. Participatory assessments of environment and security risks have been carried out in four sub-regions: South Eastern Europe, the Southern Caucasus, Central Asia and Eastern Europe.

ENVSEC operations are supported by the field and country offices of the OSCE, the UNDP the REC. As the Initiative explicitly recognizes that environment and security issues are often trans-boundary in nature and therefore require sustained and coordinated action between states, the ENVSEC partners work with and facilitate dialogue and collaboration between policy makers, environmental experts, and civil society actors across borders. The assessments and the work programmes and project portfolios are developed in close consultation with national experts from various ministries and national agencies as well as NGOs and research institutes.

Promotion of security and co-operation in river basins

Introduction

Within the OSCE region there are 180 watercourses extending over the territory of more than one country. Moreover, due to the increase of countries, within the OSCE region, from 35 to 56 in the span of the last 17 years, rivers once governed by authorities of one single country are now subject to the sovereignty of two, three or more countries. Hence, improving governance of water resources is of high priority for the OSCE and is a prerequisite for achieving the goals as set out in the OSCE Maastricht Strategy Document for the economic and environmental dimension, which calls on the OSCE to, through co-

operation, enhance development, security and stability. Good governance principles, transparency, combating corruption and the enhancement of public and private co-operation are areas highlighted in the Maastricht document and particularly relevant to the water sector, both at a national and international level.

In 2007, the Spanish Chairmanship chose water management as of the theme for the 15th Economic and Environmental Forum thus enabling the organisation to take stock of previous experience and to build on the results of previous Economic Fora, such as the 2002 Economic Forum on Sustainable use and protection of the quality of water, under the Portuguese Chairmanship. In 2007 the OSCE participating States adopted a Ministerial Declaration on Environment and Security as well as a Ministerial Decision on Water Management.

Transboundary water management can be a tool for confidence building, including between different groups within the society. With this in mind, the OSCE sees water issues as a strategic factor in its work. In particular, the OSCE cooperates with the UNECE¹, within and outside of the ENVSEC initiative, promoting the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes as a tool in enhancing cooperation between States.

The OSCE and Water, conflict and co-operation

The OSCE participating States, recognizing the importance of co-operation in the management of water resources to the enhancement of regional economic and environmental co-operation and of stability in the OSCE area, adopted at the Ministerial Council Meeting, held in Madrid on November 2007, a Decision on Water Management. The Minister Council decided to:

- Endeavour to enhance the existing co-operation between the OSCE, the UNECE and other relevant international organisations on water management related matters;
- Encourage participating States to strengthen dialogue and co-operation on water management within the OSCE; and
- Encourage participating States to consider the ratification of existing environmental legal instruments related to water management and relevant to the OSCE region and to support their full implementation by participating States that are parties to them.

This Ministerial Decision defines the OSCE mandate with regard to water management co-operation and explains OSCE's presence at international events Contributing to relevant international events related to water management such as the International Expo on Sustainable Development and Water Management in Zaragoza, Spain, or the Fifth World Water Forum which will be held in Istanbul, Turkey, from 15 to 22 March 2009.

The Ministerial Decision also encourages continued partnerships between participating States and with relevant international organizations that focus on water management, paying particular attention to transboundary issues of water management, promoting a wide dissemination of best practices and facilitating the implementation of

¹ The OSCE and the UNECE signed a Memorandum of Understanding in 2004, which calls for reinforced co-operation on areas of mutual interest.

standards developed by relevant international organizations in the field of water management as well as better co-ordination in this area among participating States and partner organizations,

OSCE political decisions gain practical implementation through projects on the ground. Projects already developed by the OSCE in the area of water management aim at early warning, conflict prevention, conflict resolution and post-conflict rehabilitation.

The OSCE has proven to be a valid interlocutor in the field of water management, assisting participating States in achieving international agreements guided by the principles of international conventions, and facilitating dialogue between riparian States through projects aimed at strengthening transboundary water co-operation.

Another added value of the OSCE's involvement in water management, and in general in any environmental project, is the strong commitment that the OSCE has in promoting the civil society and the principles of the Convention on Access to Information Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (the Aarhus Convention) and in establishing so-called Aarhus Centers or Public Environmental Information Centers, which provides a meeting place and a link between the government and the civil society.

Moreover, by acting as a catalyst of initiatives for co-operation, establishing working partnerships with other international organizations such as UNECE, UNEP, UNDP or UNITAR and reinforcing their expertise with a broader understanding of security issues, the OSCE's value in this field is well recognized and appreciated.

To summarize, the mutual need to share water resources can serve as an incentive to build peaceful co-operation between societal groups and to support stakeholder dialogue. Broad participation in decision-making at different levels, facilitated by strengthened civil society groups, helps to mitigate tensions arising from unequal access to water resources. Between States, improved data, monitoring and information sharing as well as joint water management frameworks and harmonized legal frameworks are crucial in sustaining efforts to reduce the risk of conflict.

Examples of River Basin Co-operation

Mechanisms for addressing the above concerns can be established or improved through multilateral and bilateral agreements as well as through national plans. At the national level, integrated water resource management and integrated watershed management are essential political tools, in close correlation with drought management plans. Integrated water resource management takes into consideration the multifaceted water uses and functions, such as irrigation, provision of potable water and industrial uses. Integrated watershed management extends the cooperation to encompass the entire watershed system, with a focus on the water budget of an entire basin.

Obviously integrated watershed management is more complex at the international level and requires international co-operation. Transboundary river basins cover more than 40 per cent of the European surface of the OSCE region, and of the 56 OSCE member countries, all but Cyprus, Iceland, and Malta share water resources with one or more countries. There are 140 transboundary rivers and 30 transboundary lakes in the European and Asian parts of the region, as well as 70 transboundary aquifers located in South-Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia.

The OSCE has been instrumental in the development of several projects or mechanisms of transboundary river basin co-operation, which are described below.

The Sava River project

The Sava River is a tributary of the Danube that starts in Slovenia, crosses Croatia, then forms the latter's border with Bosnia-Herzegovina before entering Serbia and joining the Danube at Belgrade. Prior to the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the entire Sava River Basin fell within the boundaries of one country and was managed through national institutions. Today it passes through four countries and is an international river. The four countries have taken widely divergent paths in their development since 1991, and after a decade of strife are now working together to create jointly a state-of-the-art river basin management regime.

In December 2002, the four countries entered into a process of co-operation for the sustainable management of the water resources of the Sava River basin. The International Framework Agreement on the Sava River Basin, signed by the Sava countries on December 3, 2002, provides the principles and mechanism for this regional co-operation. It constituted the first international agreements signed by four ex-Yugoslav States after the disintegration of Yugoslavia.

The OSCE provided continued support to the Sava Process since a first letter of intent was signed by the Republic of Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia and Montenegro at the first OSCE preparatory seminar for the Economic Forum in Belgrade in November 2001. The permanent Commission of the Sava River Basin was established in Zagreb and has been operational since January 2006.

The OSCE and UNITAR implemented a project aiming at establishing networks among local actors from the Sava river basin to promote information exchange and collaboration, identify the role played by local actors in river basin management, particularly in the context of shared resources and encourage the public in general to participate in the decision making process. The project was based on UNITAR's wide experience on the CIFAL network (International Training Centre for Local Authorities/Actors) and was completed in 2006.

The Dniester River project

The Dniester River is a transboundary river 1380 km long, which starts in the Ukrainian Carpathians, flows through Moldova and reaches Ukraine again near the Black Sea. The upper and lower reaches of the Dniester flow within Ukraine, totalling a length of 629 km. Another 225 km of the river is shared by Ukraine and Moldova, while 475 km are within the borders of Moldova. Only a very small upper part of the Strviash River (a tributary of the Dniester) lies within the territory of Poland.

The total population of the Dniester River basin in Ukraine and Moldova is about 8 million people, with over 5 million in Ukraine and 2.7 million in Moldova. The population density in the Dniester River basin (over 110 people/km²) is higher than the average population density in the Eastern European region.

The Dniester is currently facing environmental problems due to pollution, the current water flow regime and illegal sand and gravel extraction. The environmental degradation of the Dniester is made worse by the frozen Transnistrian conflict, which,

inter alia, negatively impacts the use of existing infrastructure for wastewater treatment. The problem assumes transboundary dimensions, as polluted water flows into Moldova from Ukraine and thereafter back into Ukraine again before it discharges into the Black Sea South-West of the city of Odessa.

During Soviet times, the water basin was managed as one system, but since 1991 Moldova and Ukraine have been managing their respective parts of the river separately. A bilateral "Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Moldova and the Government of Ukraine on the Joint Use and Protection of the Cross-Border Waters" was signed in 1994 and a Meeting of Plenipotentiaries was instituted as a cooperative mechanism. The Agreement and its institutional mechanism are presently in need of revision and modernization, especially taking into account modern principles of the Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM), including public participation.

During 2004-2005, the OSCE and the UNECE implemented a project that resulted in a "Transboundary Diagnostic Study for the Dniester River Basin" and established a network of stakeholders (Dniester I). A project website (www.dniester.org) was also established. Within the framework of the "Dniester I" project, the Ministers of Environment and Heads of water agencies of the two countries signed the Protocol of Intentions Regarding Cooperation in Environmental Rehabilitation of the Dniester River Basin (2005). The Protocol outlined, among others, the following intentions: (1) to improve the international legal basis for intergovernmental cooperation, (2) to establish a basin system of regular information exchange, and (3) to maintain a close interaction with the public, including involvement of NGOs into the decision-making process on the environmental conditions of the Dniester River basin.

The Dniester II project (2006-2007) was implemented by the OSCE and the UNECE in collaboration with authorities and NGOs in Moldova and Ukraine in parallel to a UNEP/GRID-Arendal project dealing with information management. The most important results of the Dniester II project included:

- The Action Programme to Improve Transboundary Cooperation and Sustainable Management of the Dniester River Basin in 2007-10;
- A Draft bi-lateral Dniester River basin Agreement;
- A Regulation on stakeholder participation in the activities of the institution of Plenipotentiaries; and
- A Draft Regulation on cooperation of the sanitary-epidemiological services of the two states.

The involvement of the OSCE in the Dniester river basin continues in 2008 with the Dniester III project, aiming at supporting the implementation of the action programme, while supporting the discussions on ratifying the Dniester River Basin Agreement in both parliaments.

The Chu and Talas Rivers project

The Chu and Talas river basins are located within the Northern part of mountainous Tian-Shan and the Eastern part of the Turan depression on the border territory of the Kyrgyz Republic (the Kyrgyz Republic) and Republic of Kazakhstan (Kazakhstan).

The population of the Jambyl province of Kazakhstan covering the territory of both basins is above 620,000 people. In the Kyrgyz Republic, the population of three provinces entirely within the Chu basin is above 800,000 people while the population of the Talas province is more than 200,000 people.

In January 2000 the Agreement on the Use of Water Facilities of Inter-Governmental Use on the Chu and Talas Rivers was signed between the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic and the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Facilities, such as dams, water reservoirs and canals, are located in the territory of Kyrgyzstan. Under the Agreement, the Parties have agreed that operation and maintenance costs for the facilities specified in the Agreement would be shared on a pro rata basis in accordance with the water volume received by each Party. Under Article 5 of this Agreement, the Parties commit themselves to establish a permanent commission to determine the operation mode for water infrastructure and the share of each Party in funding operation and maintenance costs. The Agreement became effective in February 2002 upon the ratification by the Parliaments of both countries.

At the initiative of the Governments of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, the international project "Promoting the Creation of the Commission for the Chu and Talas between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan" begun in 2003. The project was implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Ministry of Agriculture, Water Resources and Processing Industry of Kyrgyz Republic, jointly with the OSCE, the UNECE and the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific Region (UNESCAP), with the participation of the Russian-Estonian Center of Transboundary Co-operation for the Chudskoye Lake. The project was initiated following the UN Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA), which developed a regional strategy for water management, and called for more practical and concrete mechanisms for the joint management of water resources.

The objective of the project was to provide assistance to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in implementing the "Agreement on the Use of Water Facilities of Inter-Governmental Use on the Chu and Talas Rivers" signed between the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic and the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan on January 21, 2000, through the following:

- Drafting legal documents that would define the Commission's status, functions, responsibilities and rights;
- Developing procedures and preparing basic documents for co-funding of the repair, maintenance and operation of multi-purpose water facilities on both rivers that are subjects of the Agreement; and
- Intermediation to reach consensus between the Governments of both countries during the development of the above documents.

Another objective of the project was to provide information to stakeholders and involve broad public participation into the management of water resources in the Chu and Talas River basins.

The implementation of the project provided for improved management of the use of water resources of the Chu and Talas Rivers and served as a good example for the Central Asian countries in the field of improved co-operation on the use of transboundary water resources. Specifically, the project was implemented in four modules:

Module 1: Development of a Statute and regulations for the Bilateral Commission on the Chu and Talas rivers

Working groups of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, with the assistance of international experts, drafted the *Statute on the Commission of the Republic of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyz Republic for Use of Water Facilities of Inter-Governmental Use on the Chu and Talas Rivers*. After several years of negotiations, the inauguration of the River Basin Commission took place in Bishkek on July 26, 2006, .

Module 2: Allocation of costs for operation, management and rehabilitation of selected water control projects

A team of International experts drafted the *Recommendations to Fund Operation and Repair Costs and Other Measures on the Sites and Facilities of Intergovernmental Use on the Chu and Talas Rivers*. In addition, the team of international experts prepared the following documents:

- Provisions on the Executive Secretariat of the Commission of the Republic of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyz Republic for Use of Water Facilities of Intergovernmental Use on the Chu and Talas Rivers; and
- Methodological Recommendations for Developing and Revising the “Key Provisions of the Rules of Comprehensive Use of Water Resources of Water Reservoirs on the Chu and Talas Rivers”.

Module 3: Public Participation in Management of Transboundary Water Resources of the Chu and Talas Rivers

A *Program of Public Participation in Management of Transboundary Water Resources of the Chu and Talas River* was prepared together with a booklet on “*Establishment of Joint Commission of the Republic of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyz Republic for Intergovernmental Use of the Chu and Talas Rivers*” which was published in Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Russian and English. Other activities were organized aimed at improving public participation including a study tour to Estonia in 2004 and an international workshop on river co-operation in 2006.

Module 4: Project Information

In order to provide information on the project activities and publish the key documents developed during its implementation, the web-page www.talascchu.org was created through support from the Russian-Estonian Center of Transboundary Co-operation of the Chudskoye Lake. In October, 2006, the website was transferred to the Commission to use as an official webpage.

Other material produced included a booklet as well as a special video “*Channel of Common Interests*”, which illustrates the co-operation between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in the joint use of water resources of the Chu and Talas rivers.

Funds were also allocated for the development and implementation, including staff training, of the Information System on the intergovernmental Chumyshsky Waterworks Facility on the Chu River.

Through the establishment of the Bilateral Commission, a longer-term stable, mutually beneficial framework for co-operation between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan is

now in place. The OSCE and the UNECE will continue to support the Commission's work aimed at further deepening the collaboration between the two countries.

The Kura-Araks Project

The geopolitical boundaries of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia oblige these countries to share transboundary natural resources such as water. The Kura-Araks/Aras river basin is the main source of fresh water in the Southern Caucasus.

To tackle this challenge, the ENVSEC partners began a series of interventions to develop greater interstate cooperation in the management of trans-boundary natural resources in the South Caucasus. First, the NATO/OSCE-led South Caucasus River Monitoring project involves the scientific communities of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia in a joint effort to assess water quality parameters in the Kura-Araks river basin.

The NATO/OSCE South Caucasus River Monitoring project has introduced new standards for water quality monitoring, harmonized sampling and testing methodologies, offered trainings to the local staff and established a data sharing system that is accessible to all project partners via the Internet. This project is carried out in co-operation with scientific institutions from all three South Caucasus countries and sets a good precedent of a mutually beneficial co-operation on transboundary water quality issues.

As a result of the South Caucasus River Monitoring project, the countries of the South Caucasus have collected data on heavy metals, persistent organic pollutants, and radio-nuclides at more than 30 inspection sites along the Kura-Araks/Aras River Basin..In addition, groups of young scientists from the three countries been trained together to use modern water analysis equipment. The results have led to a better understanding of the nature, degree and sources of pollution in the river basin.

More recently, the ENVSEC partners have initiated new efforts to promote transboundary cooperation on water with the development of new ENVSEC projects. The UNDP is leading an effort to assist the governments of the region to establish a legal and institutional framework for the riparian states of the Kura-Araks basin. Meanwhile, the UNECE and the OSCE are helping to facilitate a bi-lateral water agreement between Georgia and Azerbaijan. It is hoped that this project will provide the basis for future negotiations, supported by the GEF and other donors, for a lasting agreement underpinned by a strengthened institutional framework.

Conclusions

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

Primarily, it is worth noting that there existed no co-operative project comparable to the Chu and Talas project in Central Asia. The establishment of the Commissions on the Chu-Talas river basin further encouraged other international organizations (such as the EU and the 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 cooperation, including the exchange of information and public participation in decision making.

In the case of the Kura-Araks river monitoring project, scientific verifiable data have proved to be the best way to foster regional co-operation.

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

The OSCE transboundary river basin project achievements can be seen as far-ranging, and lie primarily in the steps taken to help neighbouring participating States co-ordinate the management of water resources in a methodical and stable manner.

Moreover, the ability of the OSCE to capitalize upon the platform it offers for political dialogue between its member governments, including natural resource management, is clearly a major strength of the Organization. The examples we have provided clearly illustrate the ability of the OSCE to work directly with all parties, serving as a broker, to ensure that dialogue and discussion are effective at both the political and implementation levels.

As it was the case with the Chu-Talas and Dniester project, the OSCE and its partners were able to co-ordinate the support of the international community including bilateral donors, international organizations and the local and international NGOs. This co-ordination is important in the light of the Paris Declaration for donor co-ordination and in view of ensuring that efforts are not duplicated and of promoting an overall sense of international co-operation.

While the OSCE, as a political security organization, can foster political co-operation among stakeholders resulting in policy changes on transboundary water management issues, the added value and technical expertise on water related development issues from both the UNECE and the NATO Science for Peace programme, as well as other partners, are invaluable. Further partners, like those with a specialization in the NGO sector, or in national implementation and solutions to water issues, lend an enormous added value to the project.

In the future, the OSCE will continue to foster the dialogue and cooperation on transboundary water management in Central Asia. In this respect, a conference was held in Tashkent, on the 30-31st of October, 2007 with the theme Challenges for Providing Environmental Security and Sustainable Development in the Region of Central Asia: Degradation of Land and Pollution of Soil. Since then, the OSCE has engaged in a dialogue with the Central Asian countries and in collaboration with the UN Convention to Combat Desertification and the World Meteorological Organisation, in establishing a drought management centre for Central Asia.

Under ENVSEC, the OSCE aims at supporting the follow-up to the Amu Darya assessment, in the framework of which direct responses to gaps and needs will be identified and directly implemented through projects agreed with the relevant Central Asian States and other ENVSEC partners.

In particular, the cooperation with the water convention and the UNECE will be strengthened, through continued support to the Chu and Talas Commission as well as through initiatives presently under discussion.

The OSCE is also looking forward to supporting the Interstate Committee for Water Coordination in Central Asia in a capacity building project, with a strong emphasis on regional cooperation, promoting policies on water management and environmental sustainability in the region.

Further to the recent International Conference on Water Related Disaster Risk Reduction in Dushanbe on the 27-29th of June 2008, the OSCE is considering to help organise a national water event toward the end of 2008, where the country will look at, amongst others, water sharing criteria between different sectors.

Finally, the OSCE will work closely with the UNDP regional office in Bratislava and the UNDP Offices in Central Asia in their support to national Integrated Water Resource Management plans, avoiding overlap and with the aim of strengthening the regional water policies in the region.