



**NATIONS UNIES**  
COMMISSION ÉCONOMIQUE  
POUR L'EUROPE

**ОБЪЕДИНЕННЫЕ НАЦИИ**  
ЭКОНОМИЧЕСКАЯ КОМИССИЯ  
ДЛЯ ЕВРОПЫ

**UNITED NATIONS**  
ECONOMIC COMMISSION  
FOR EUROPE

## **Blue Diplomacy Conference, Panel 3**

**Berlin, 8 March 2012**

**Statement by Marton Krasznai**  
**Regional Adviser on Central Asia, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe**

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Three and a half years ago in November 2008 in Almaty at the second “Water Unites” Conference organized jointly by the UNECE and the Federal Foreign Office, the then Deputy Executive Secretary of the UNECE said:

“I believe that the countries of the region and their development partners can still win the race with the increasingly dramatic effects of climate change, rapid deterioration of soil and water quality or the huge demographic pressure on limited sources of clean drinking water, agricultural production and hydro-power.” The implementation of the first three year phase of Program “Trans-boundary Water Management in Central Asia”, funded by the Federal Foreign Office of Germany was an outstanding effort to help Central Asian countries to win this race.

When the UNECE was invited to become a partner of GIZ in the implementation of the first phase of the Federal Foreign Office’s Water Initiative, it offered a series of comparative advantages. It is the custodian of several relevant international legal instruments and implements a broad range of projects and programs in the area of water, energy and environment. Let me just mention UNECE work in the area of dam safety, water quality, bilateral cooperation on the Chu and Talas Rivers or the highly important National Policy Dialogues in the framework of the EU Water Initiative.

Thus the UNECE was well prepared to implement a Program Component addressing perhaps the most complicated and politically most sensitive issue: regional cooperation.

The Program Component included a series of regional and national capacity building activities on international water law, which encouraging results. Turkmenistan decided to accede to the ECE Water Convention in the near future and the two upstream countries, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan hosted national capacity building workshops, participating with an open mind and in a constructive spirit. This represents a markedly positive change in their approach to international water law.

The IFAS Summit in April 2009 in Almaty provided a strong political mandate for UNECE support to the modernization of the legal basis of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea. Representatives of all five countries have actively participated in this work.

The Program conducted a broad and thorough analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of present legal and institutional arrangements for water resources management at the regional level. This work was concluded by the elaboration of building blocks for a single regional agreement that would significantly improve the legal basis of IFAS. It is fully in line with international water law and international best practices.

The package of proposals called “Conceptual elements” cannot claim to be a fully agreed document. It would take further political level consultations to bridge the remaining differences. A break through is possible only if all participants are ready to base these consultations on such universally accepted principles as the integrated management of water resources, including the river basin approach.

The Program also contributed to the development better decision support through improved water monitoring and data exchange.

The UNECE worked closely with the donor community, too, in particular when providing support to the Executive Committee of IFAS in the elaboration of the Third Aral Sea Basin Program. This well-balanced and professionally drafted document provides a good basis for further efforts to achieve environmental sustainability in the Aral Sea Basin. I mention with regret that a year after it was adopted by the IFAS Board and supported by the donor community in a declaration, ASBP-3 it still waits approval by all member countries.

The great number of capacity building events, working group and expert group meetings, donor coordination conferences and political consultations held under the Program provided for a permanent dialogue and confidence building among IFAS member countries. Expert level work was complemented by top-level political consultations through a series of meetings between the Executive Secretary of the UNECE and the Presidents of almost all IFAS member countries and. These regular contacts and the ability of the Governments of IFAS member countries to work together despite occasional disagreements were particularly important in a period of

elevated political tensions among the countries of the region. In recent years several regional bodies responsible for regional water resources management experienced difficulties to meet or take decisions.

It is hoped that Phase two of the Federal Foreign Office's Water Initiative will continue to pay attention to the promotion of regional cooperation. The first phase of the Program laid a broad basis for further work towards strengthened cooperation on integrated water resources management at the regional level. It would be highly important to preserve this momentum in the areas where further work promises to empower IFAS member countries to resolve their disputes constructively and manage their water resources in an integrated, rational and efficient way.

Having thoroughly analyzed the results and lessons learned of the first phase, the UNECE developed a well-focused and still comprehensive program proposal to be implemented during Phase II of the Federal Foreign Office's Water Initiative in Central Asia. The program proposal foresees the continuation of national and regional capacity building on international water law and aims to develop synergies among activities in support of integrated water resources management at the river basin, national and regional levels. This, in turn, would require a more diversified approach, including the active engagement of all IFAS institutions, like the Basin Water Organizations or the Interstate Commission on Sustainable Development.

No other area of regional cooperation influences the economic development, social stability and security of these countries more profoundly than water resources management. Resolving disputes over the water and energy nexus has never been a more pressing challenge for Central Asia. Strengthened regional cooperation would greatly enhance the ability of these countries to fully develop their huge economic potential and effectively address the looming security challenges of the coming years.