

# OSCE Centre in Astana

## Water projects

Alexander Peytchev  
Economic and Environmental Affairs Officer

- From an OSCE perspective inefficient water management in a trans-boundary or national context may lead to political pressure and conflicts.
- The climate change implications and rising water consumption in Central Asia pose additional challenges to the region.
- Water shortages are a potential cause for claims and conflicts, which need enhanced international cooperation at sub-regional and regional level.

## The OSCE Centre in Astana

- has prioritized the issues of efficient water management in a national and trans-boundary context,
- has attributed specific attention to the introduction of the Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) as a major tool for addressing substantial environmental security threats in Central Asia.
- To that end, a number activities have been carried out in partnership with the national water authorities, the specialized UN agencies, and other international and regional organizations.

## GROUND WATERS MANAGEMENT

- Workshop, organized by the OSCE Centre in Astana in partnership with UNESCO Cluster Office (Almaty, 28 May 2009).

Outcome: the reviewed information on transboundary ground waters in Central Asia and the Caucasus was included in UNESCO's world inventory of trans-boundary underground waters and the trans-boundary waters assessment of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE);

- Workshop, held by the OSCE Centre in partnership with the UNESCO Cluster Office in Almaty and the International Hydrological Programme (IHP) (Almaty, 12 September 2011).

Outcome: specific measures to adapt to climate change and the expected increase in water consumption and other challenges in the management of trans-boundary aquifers were singled out and recorded;

- Seminar, organized by the OSCE Centre in Astana, the UNECE, UNDP and Kazakhstan's non-governmental Centre for Sustainable Development Co-operation (Almaty, 29 May 2012).

Outcome: recommendations for improvement of the regulatory, institutional and methodological frameworks for integrated management of trans-boundary underground waters at multilateral level were filed.

## SURFACE WATERS MANAGEMENT

- The level of activities of the OSCE Centre in Astana on surface water IWRM fall in the scope of the following tasks:
  - a) to improve skills, competence and expertise on IWRM of the water basin councils members and their partners;
  - b) to enhance the communication and cooperation between the eight water basin councils, the regional water authorities, and other parties with vested interests;
  - c) to introduce IWRM principles at national level and extend its application to other regions of Kazakhstan.
  
- The urgency of full-scale IWRM introduction in Kazakhstan was communicated directly to the Presidential Administration Office, and specific proactive measures have been undertaken practically immediately by the President's and Prime Minister's administrations in mid-2010.
  
- Similar steps were made at other high level bilateral meetings and at best practices events on efficient water management:
  - 1) Round Table on the Promotion of IWRM in the Ili-Balkhash basin (Almaty, 11 October 2010),
  - 2) Preparations for publishing an IWRM brochure for Central Asia, developed in partnership with UNDP, UNEP, GIZ and the Kazakh-German University based in Almaty, Kazakhstan. The book will help to contribute to improved understanding of IWRM concepts and their application.

## ARAL SEA/SYRDARYA RIVER BASIN

The Aral Sea was a top priority for the 2010 OSCE Chairmanship of Kazakhstan. The commitments to the Aral Sea issues opened the door for the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the OSCE Centre in Astana and the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS) Executive Directorate for Kazakhstan in November 2009.

This MoU encouraged the efforts of the OSCE Centre to support activities and initiatives for preservation and restoration of the resource potential of the Lesser Aral Sea and Syrdarya River, such as:

- Wetlands monitoring in the Lesser Aral Sea/Syrdarya River Delta with impact on biodiversity and economic activities. As an outcome from the project, the Kazakhstan's Lesser Aral Sea and the Delta of Syrdarya River site were added to the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance in October 2012;
- The establishment, as of 15 October 2012, of an OSCE-supported Training Centre on IWRM and Aral-Syrdarya water management in Kyzylorda City under the auspices of the Kyzylorda Oblast of Kazakhstan, the Aral-Syrdarya Basin Council Inspection and the Kyzylorda State University "Korkyt ata". The OSCE-supported Training Centre already enhanced the capacity and the reach of modern water management in the area, providing several trainings per year in the region for a third year running.

## THE AARHUS CENTRES AND THE UNECE WATERCONVENTIONS

The role of Aarhus Centres in the improvement of water management may be very significant. OSCE facilitates environmental activities of Kazakhstan's Aarhus centres in water management, which promote access to information, access to justice and public participation in decision-making on environmental matters.

Following the issue of drinking water and safe water quality in the oil-rich Caspian Sea area, the OSCE Centre in Astana supported a pilot project of the Zhaik-Caspian Aarhus Centre in Atyrau for a wide public discussion of the national drinking water programme in its Atyrau region part. The outcome of the project was the establishment of a Working Group of interested stakeholders.

The example may be followed by other of the 13 Aarhus centres as of today, acting in the regions of Kazakhstan.