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Presentation

by

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the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes**

at

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“Water governance in the OSCE area
– increasing security and stability through cooperation”**

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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Globally some 70% of water use is for agriculture.

Food security is therefore closely linked to water security, as addressed by Prof. Allan in depth.

Growing populations and economic development are creating a need for greater agricultural productivity.

But for productivity to increase, economic growth needs to be achieved in a sustainable manner.

It must not compromise the state of the environment, including the availability of water resources and the services provided by related ecosystems.

Energy and water policies have various interlinkages with agricultural production and food trade, and hence affect food security too.

To this already complex situation we can add climate change.

Climate change impacts are expected to further aggravate the problems of resource scarcity and competition.

Many climate change impacts on energy and food security propagate through water.

For example, the latest United Nations World Water Development Report demonstrates that energy generation is often vulnerable to climate variability and low flow situations – that’s rather obvious for hydropower, but is also vitally important for nuclear and thermal power generation because they need cooling water.

The relationship between water, food and energy is intricate and poses both challenges and opportunities.

To reduce trade-offs and potential conflicts over water shortages across sectors, it is therefore necessary to improve our understanding of this water-food-energy-ecosystem nexus.

Only then can we increase policy coherence and synergies between water, agriculture, energy and land-management sectors.

That is the reason for assessing the nexus.

There is another complication.

Transboundary basins cover more than 40% of the European and Asian land surface of the UNECE region and are home to about 460 million people—more than 50% of the area’s population.

The transboundary dimension adds a level of complexity to addressing trade-offs between different water-using sectors — notably agriculture and energy — trade-offs that so far have been little evaluated at the transboundary level.

And so we in UNECE under the Water Convention have embarked on assessing the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus in a number of transboundary basins.

We work on this nexus because cooperation is needed across country borders and between sectors, to limit negative cross-sectoral impacts and cross-border tensions.

It is increasingly clear that the water management authorities need to work much more closely and in better coordination with the different sectors of the economy to reduce negative impacts and to seek synergies.

Regional and transboundary cooperation is needed in developing both water and energy resources to achieve sustainable access to water and energy services.

It is possible to reconcile and better accommodate different uses of the same resource, but that requires a willingness to explore and reflect on differing perspectives.

That complex situation shows the need for effective, participatory governance and for policy coherence.

So far we have begun nexus assessments in the Alazani/Ganikh River Basin between Azerbaijan and Georgia, in the Sava River Basin in South-Eastern Europe, the Syr Darya in Central Asia and the Isonzo/Soca between Italy and Slovenia.

The nexus approach helps answering specific questions such as:

- How can we meet common development needs for food, water and energy in a sustainable manner without compromising the availability of natural resources?
- Which technologies and what combination and configurations of technologies are going to help?
- Which policies are going to make this feasible and economically viable – and thereby help reduce future tensions?
- What happens if we do nothing?
- What are the possible implications of climate change on the nexus system and what future challenges will we face?

And in particular:

- How to harmonize the actions of authorities that share the same resources in transboundary systems?
- How to create opportunities for cooperation across riparian countries?

To try to answer these questions we carry out geographical mapping and complex economic modelling.

The assessment also involves an institutional mapping for:

- The identification of the main sectors involved in resource management
- An analysis of the main regulations at the sectoral and intersectoral levels
- An analysis also of the main actors and the nature of the links between them
- The identification of institutional rivalries at local, regional, national and transboundary levels.

But far more important than these technical inputs, the assessment process we employ brings people together from different sectors and across borders.

In each basin, the assessment is kicked off by a workshop involving representatives of the agriculture and energy sectors, water and environment administrations, state companies, utilities, civil society and the private sector.

The workshop programmes are highly participatory, involving much group work.

There is also brief training on intersectoral linkages and on the benefits of an intersectoral approach to water resources management.

The dynamics of the workshops are revealing, with people from the different sectors sometimes meeting for the first time – even if from the same country

And common understandings can emerge from representatives of the same sector but from different sides of the border.

At the workshop for Azerbaijan and Georgia, the participants noted that climate change is likely to increase flooding events as well as the scarcity of water in basin.

They recognized the decisive importance of energy policies for protecting ecosystems and water resources from the negative effects of deforestation.

And they concluded that improving water infrastructure, including for irrigation and wastewater treatment, would be a helpful step in reducing pressures on natural resources and in improving the local economy.

In conclusion we can see that

- It is difficult to paint a picture of the whole situation – and look into the future too!
- We need nonetheless to find a balance between various uses and the protection of the resource
- To achieve that balance we need to coordinate policies, plans and management measures between the riparian countries to avoid negative impacts from unilateral action
- Indeed there are more opportunities for finding benefits by looking at the basin as a whole, and these are only achievable through joint action

To get there we need:

- Increased understanding, dialogue and participation
- Effective institutions and legal frameworks for communication and coordination, but also for setting in place decision-support tools such as monitoring and impact assessments
- Above all, we need sharing, solidarity and political willing

The UNECE Water Convention's central aim is to strengthen measures at the local, national and transboundary levels to protect and ensure the quantity, quality and sustainable use of transboundary water resources.

The Convention also provides a framework and guidance for better reconciling different water uses.

And the Convention takes a holistic approach, based on the understanding that water resources play an integral part in ecosystems as well as in human societies and economies.

The Convention therefore forms a strong basis for water governance across sectors, including fostering food and energy security.

Through the transboundary agreements and joint institutions that it requires its Parties to establish the Convention also locks in the mechanisms for cooperation between sectors and between countries.

I hope that OSCE will continue to support the Water Convention and its protocols as instruments for water governance and water security, including through the Environment and Security Initiative.

OSCE could also encourage those OSCE member States that are not yet parties to join the treaties.

It would also be most useful if the OSCE-supported Aarhus Centres would provide impetus at the national level for implementation of the treaties and for water governance and water security.

Thank you.
