

Strengthening the legal framework for cooperation – finding common grounds

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On the first glance, the Central Asian States of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have established a remarkable institutional framework for inter-state management of their trans-boundary water resources.

In order to maintain benefits of coordinated management of water (and energy) as experienced in Soviet times, 20 years ago the Inter-State Commission for Water Coordination (ICWC) as coordination forum of the Water Ministers was found by agreement between all five Central Asian States. The ICWC was the first Regional Institution of the five Central Asian States after their independence. One year later, in 1993, by another agreement the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS) was established. In 1999, ICWC and the Inter-State Commission for Sustainable Development (ICSD) were included under the roof of IFAS. Scientific Information Centres of ICWC and ICSD, an Executive Committee of IFAS and their national branches in the Central Asian States, the Amu Darya and Syr Darya Basin Organisations as well as a Regional Hydromet Centre demonstrate a wide-ranging organisational establishment in order to coordinate the management of the region's water resources. On top of that come more than 140 bilateral agreements in the region. Furthermore, the Central Asian States agreed to maintain the Soviet time water quotas for the watercourses of the region.

However, it became obvious that the mandates, regulations and competences of the Regional Institutions require improvement in order to provide for improved and better coordinated work among them.

The 2009 Almaty Declaration of the Presidents / Founders of IFAS took account of the needs for strengthening regional institutions under the roof of IFAS. The Programme "Transboundary Water Management in Central Asia" financed by the German Federal Foreign Office and implemented by GIZ has taken up this task. In the framework of this programme, UNECE has led the Regional Dialogue Process to elaborate in partnership with expert delegations from all five Central Asia States discussion papers and drafts in order to improve the institutionalised regional water management.

Now, in 2012, the IFAS Presidency turns to Uzbekistan and it's Executive Committee will be moving physically from Almaty to Tashkent. Thus, Uzbekistan is expected to

play a crucial role in order to achieve regional accord in the further development of the organisational fundament to manage the joint water resources.