



# International Coordination of Water Sector Initiatives in Central Asia

Tatjana Lipiäinen and  
Jeremy Smith

**working paper 15**  
November 2013

## Abstract

Central Asian water resources and their management are a key policy area for the governments of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, as well as for international donors. However, a genuinely regional approach to water management is still lacking. The range of issues and approaches involved, the multitude of donors, and the lack of cooperation among Central Asian governments make coordination in this area a complex challenge. This paper examines the various water sector coordination initiatives that exist in the region and considers their main achievements and shortcomings. Special focus is placed on EU-initiated coordination of water-related projects and programmes. How do European countries intend to organise water management activities together, and on their own, in a region divided by political tensions? What informal and formal coordination mechanisms exist, and which work best?



**MINISTRY FOR FOREIGN  
AFFAIRS OF FINLAND**

### **EUCAM-SD**

This working paper is published as part of the EUCAM-Security and Development project that is implemented by FRIDE and the Karelian Institute of the University of Eastern Finland. EUCAM-SD is a key component of the EUCAM programme and focuses on the links between security challenges in the Central Asian region and the need for development in the broadest sense, including governance, poverty reduction, ethnic tension and social equality. The project aims to offer new insights and creative thinking on Europe's role in promoting security and development in Central Asia. EUCAM-SD is supported by the Wider Europe Initiative of the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

© EUCAM 2013

ISBN (Online): 978-84-614-6870-6

**International Coordination of  
Water Sector Initiatives  
in Central Asia**

*EUCAM Working Paper No. 15*

**Tatjana Lipiäinen and Jeremy Smith**

# Table of Contents

Abbreviations	5
Introduction	6
1. Water management challenges in Central Asia	7
2. European involvement in Central Asia's water sector	8
3. Global and national contributions to coordination	12
3.1 Global involvement	12
3.2 Central Asia's involvement	14
4. Challenges in moving forward	15
Conclusion	17

# Abbreviations

ADB – Asian Development Bank

CAREC – The Regional Environmental Center for Central Asia

CAWSCI – Central Asia Water Sector Coordination Initiative

DCI – Development Cooperation Instrument

DFID – UK Department for International Development

DPCC – Development Partner Coordination Council

EBRD – European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

EECCA – Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia

EU – European Union

EURECA – Regional Environment Programme for Central Asia

EUWI – European Water Initiative

FCG – Finnish Consulting Group

GEF – Global Environment Facility

GIZ – Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit

IFAS – International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea

IFI – International Financial Institutions

IWRM – Integrated Water Resources Management

MDG – Millennium Development Goals

NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation

NPD – National Policy Dialogue

OSCE – Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe

OSF – Open Society Foundations

SDC – Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

UNECE – United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

USAID – United States Agency for International Development

WFD – EU Water Framework Directive

WGF – UNDP Water Governance Facility

## Introduction

Ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the water sector has been the source of a series of ecological, humanitarian, economic and political crises in Central Asia. With the creation of five new states beyond the orbit of central Soviet control, cooperation over trans-border issues has been largely lacking. International actors have been involved in the Central Asian water sector since the early 1990s, but their focus of concern and activity has undergone several changes. First, the disappearance of 90 per cent of the water in the Aral Sea as a result of disastrous Soviet irrigation policies, combined with climate change, turned this ecological catastrophe into a priority. Later, energy began to dominate donor approaches, at the same time that high water consumption, the preservation of fish stocks, and the quality of drinking water increasingly became focus points.

International donors have been involved in water-related programmes much before the European Union (EU) identified water as a key area in its 2007 Central Asia Strategy. Water sector reforms are considered crucial for the region's environment, security and human well-being. According to the European Commission, 'In Central Asia, the environment and water availability are key strategic issues'.<sup>1</sup>

**T**atjana Lipiäinen is a Researcher at the Karelian Institute, University of Eastern Finland.

**J**eremy Smith is Professor of Russian History and Politics at the Karelian Institute, University of Eastern Finland. He has worked extensively on the non-Russian nationalities of the Soviet Union and the post-Soviet states, and is author of *Red Nations: the nationalities experience in and after the USSR* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

Internationally-supported water management actions range from bilateral agreements to geographically-local projects and high-level political meetings. In particular the EU and several United Nations (UN) agencies, as well as the most active states, are involved in each of these types of activities. International involvement is usually not divided according to the scale of the programme or project, but rather follows the national interests of a participating state or the changing priorities and opportunities of an international agency. The

funding constraints and conditions on the ground often seem to define an international actors involvement in, or withdrawal from, water sector reforms.

Given the high number of internationally-initiated or implemented water management actions, it is first important to understand how they are coordinated institutionally. Coordination is necessary at two levels: among the five Central Asian states themselves and among the numerous international organisations and states beyond the region. This raises the questions of how to avoid project duplication and how to ensure the effectiveness of the international input to the Central Asian water sector.

Central Asia currently lacks a single coherent, regional water management organisation. As this paper explains, there exists a combination of various international coordination mechanisms to compensate for the absence of such overarching regional coordination. With the end of centralised Soviet control, the Central Asian states needed foreign assistance to assume regional management of resources such as water. Central Asia's troubled water sector is just one example of how growing international coordination problems are being addressed today. It also offers a good example of the broader issue of international aid coordination in Central Asia.

This paper focuses primarily on the role of the EU and its member states in coordinating water initiatives in Central Asia. The EU and some member states are widely seen as the most active international actors in this area.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, Brussels is notorious for its institutional complexity, which is also reflected in its water policies in Central Asia. The EU is certainly not the only international actor that plays a coordinating role in the region, and several other key international players, notably UN agencies such as the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) will be highlighted, as well as the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and some international financial institutions (IFI) such as the World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). Other organisations, initiatives and states will only be briefly mentioned due to either their significant coordinating roles or their active presence in Central Asia's water sector reforms.

<sup>2</sup> Interviews carried out in Central Asia (May 2012).

<sup>1</sup> European Commission, Development and Cooperation – EuropAid, Central Asia environment, Brussels: European Commission, (undated), available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/asia/regional-cooperation-central-asia/environment/ca\\_environment\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/asia/regional-cooperation-central-asia/environment/ca_environment_en.htm) [Accessed 26 November 2012].

The paper begins outlining Central Asia's water sector and its main challenges. Thereafter, the EU's and European states' policies in the region's water management are discussed. The involvement of non-EU actors will be described in the following section, which will also touch upon the Central Asian states' own organisations and initiatives. The fourth section will focus on the coordination challenges that persist in the region's water sector activities. The final section will sum up the paper's findings and provide some policy reflections.

### *Sources of Information*

This EUCAM working paper is the result of fieldwork in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Finland, in addition to policy document analyses. Over 20 interviews were carried out: in Helsinki during winter and spring 2012 and in Bishkek, Almaty and Astana in May 2012. All interviewees were involved in water-related activities in Central Asia, ranging from university researchers to ministry, embassy and international organisations' representatives.

Among the organisations we had meetings with are: the Finnish Environment Institute SYKE; the Finnish Water Forum; the Water & Development Research Group; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland; UNDP; EU Delegations in Astana and Bishkek; the OSCE; the Italian Embassy in Astana; EBRD; CAREC; the Open Society Foundations; the Scientific Information Centre ICWC in Almaty; and the Kyrgyz State Agency on Environment Protection and Forestry in Bishkek.

Prior to, as well as after, the interviews, the issue of water programme coordination was examined through official documents obtained in the field and those available online. A draft of the paper was also presented at the Slavic Research Centre of the University of Hokkaido in July 2012, where the authors benefitted from several recommendations from experts on Central Asia. The authors are grateful for all the assistance received from the interviewees and other contributors to the report.

## *1. Water management challenges in Central Asia*

The water sector in Central Asia faces many challenges. Analyses abound on this aspect of the region's environmental development and thus only a brief outline will be provided here on the main challenges as a background to the actual topic of institutional water project coordination.

Water is particularly important for Central Asia as it is heavily used in irrigation for farming and as a source of electricity production. Energy security and food security are therefore tied up to water issues. While none of the five states is known for fish consumption, the ecological dimension of water management

has gained an additional edge due to pollution and climate change, which threaten several water systems, including those that cross international boundaries. The Amu Darya River flows from the Afghan-Tajik border through Turkmenistan into Uzbekistan, and the Syr Darya crosses Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Both rivers used to flow into the Aral Sea, but their over-exploitation – for irrigation through the construction of canals in the Soviet period, as well as for hydroelectricity – has contributed to the depletion of most of the sea's water. Now neither river extends as far as the Aral Sea. While the steady evaporation of the Aral Sea has slowed down, in part as a result of policies implemented under the 1995 Nukus Declaration, the long-term environmental consequences of this catastrophe are still hard to comprehend.

The international political dimension of water in Central Asia is further aggravated by the division of the region into upstream and downstream countries. The upstream states – Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan – possess most of the region's water resources, while the downstream states – Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan – are largely dependent on the former's water provision. Divisions are further complicated by the fact that the two upstream states use water for hydroelectricity, while the downstream states that possess alternative energy resources need water predominantly for irrigation. Soviet-era policies had overcome these divisions by establishing a regional circuit for the distribution of water and other energy resources, such as fossil-fuel based electricity. This was centrally-administered from Moscow. In the post-Soviet context, however, the Central Asian states have decentralised the management of resources, in terms not only of the supply of water for agriculture and human consumption, but also regarding the crucial question of energy provision.

Recent inter-state disagreements illustrate how difficult it is to coordinate the use of resources. Hydropower programmes in upstream countries affect water irrigation in downstream countries, giving rise to cross-border tensions. Uzbekistan has been strongly resisting the construction of the Rogun Dam in Tajikistan, which would give Tajikistan increased control over water flows to its northern neighbour and could potentially have negative effects on Uzbekistan's irrigation of cotton fields. Meanwhile, at the more local level, the pollution of rivers has caused tensions with users downstream. Kyrgyz and Kazakhstani cooperation on cross-border waters

temporarily deteriorated after the Kyrgyz crisis in 2010, and in spite of subsequent agreements between the two governments, water disputes continue to flare up from time to time.

In spite of their geographical proximity and common interests, the five Central Asian states have persistently failed to act as a region. In addition to competing interests, such as in the energy sector, personal rivalries and dislikes among the presidents of the republics seem to underlie the lack of cooperation. Uzbekistan's current isolation, both internationally and regionally following border disputes with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, poses particular difficulties given its location at the centre of the region's water networks.

Due to the Soviet legacy, the Central Asian water sector is inefficiently managed both ecologically and administratively. The so-called Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) aims to correct this. It is a holistic international approach to sustainable water management that attempts 'to balance the water accounts between man and the biosphere so that the human needs are met with minimal harmful effects to the biosphere as well as to other human beings'.<sup>3</sup> Such a goal would be difficult to achieve in most contexts; in Central Asia there are several unique challenges that make implementation of the IWRM all the more difficult there. For example, one general challenge is that 'authorities for water management and environmental protection are separate'.<sup>4</sup> There is a need to reform water-related legislation. Many technical problems associated with an outdated Soviet infrastructure hamper water management – for instance, low irrigation efficiency or degradation of water supply systems and sewage treatment plants.<sup>5</sup> Per capita water consumption in Central Asia is among the highest in the world. In

particular, irrigation-intensive agriculture and a growing urban population are using up significant amounts of Central Asian water resources.<sup>6</sup> The interdependence of water with other ecological challenges, such as the accumulation of salts and pesticides in Central Asian soils,<sup>7</sup> means that the broader environmental legacies are aggravating water management practices. Climate change may also reduce the region's available water resources,<sup>8</sup> a scenario which the Kazakhstani authorities in particular have been examining lately.

Both international and national actors involved in water-related programmes in Central Asia agree that regional coordination efforts are needed, notably for managing cross-border rivers linking the Central Asian states. Nonetheless, water issues are highly politicised, which further complicates the implementation of even the most basic cross-border water projects. Such politicisation is partly due to the existing division between upstream and downstream states that creates a power imbalance. Power divisions in the water sector are all the more striking since it is the smaller and economically more disadvantaged states that have the upper hand in terms of resources. However, their economic disadvantages and other geographical factors do create transport difficulties that can weaken the position of an upstream country like Tajikistan in its dealings with downstream Uzbekistan, for example. Given governance problems in the region, the EU and other institutions such as the OSCE insist on technical aid being presented within an established policy framework.<sup>9</sup> From this perspective, such organisations also contribute to the politicisation of the sector by highlighting the political nature of water management and its interlinkage with other political concerns. In short, even though there is consensus that better regional cooperation on water management would benefit all actors, the concrete means for achieving such cooperation have not yet been agreed.

## *2. European involvement in Central Asia's water sector*

Assistance from the EU's Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI) to Central Asia for 2007-13 amounted to €673.8 million, of which €106.2 million

3 UNDESA, Integrated Water Resources Management, Geneva: UN-DESA, (undated), available at: <http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/iwrm.shtml> [Accessed 8 November 2012]; and Water & Development Research Group, 'IWRM in large Asian river basins – a distant dream or a blueprint to happiness?', Aalto: Water & Development Research Group, (undated), available at: <http://www.wdrg.fi/research/iwrm-in-large-asian-river-basins> [Accessed 19 November 2012].

4 B. Libert, 'Water management in Central Asia and the activities of UNECE' in M. M. Rahaman and O. Varis (eds) 'Central Asian Waters: social, economic, environmental and governance puzzle', Water & Development Publications, Helsinki: Helsinki University of Technology, 2008, p.36, available at: [http://water.tkk.fi/English/wr/research/global/material/Central\\_Asian\\_Waters-book.pdf](http://water.tkk.fi/English/wr/research/global/material/Central_Asian_Waters-book.pdf)

5 V. Dukhovny, N. Mirzaev and V. Sokolov, 'IWRM Implementation: Experiences with water sector reforms in Central Asia', in Rahaman and Varis, op. cit., pp. 20-3; and Global Water Partnership, 'Regional Review Water supply and sanitation in the countries of Central Asia and Southern Caucasus', Stockholm: GWP, August 2009, p. 42, available at: [http://www.gwp.org/Global/Activities/News/WSSObzor\\_ENG\\_Aug2009.pdf](http://www.gwp.org/Global/Activities/News/WSSObzor_ENG_Aug2009.pdf) [Accessed 15 November 2012].

6 Rahaman and Varis, op. cit., pp. 3-10.

7 Ibid., p.4.

8 Libert, op. cit., p.35.

9 Interviews: European Delegation in Bishkek (22 May 2012), OSCE in Astana (31 May 2012).



was allocated to 'Environment/Energy/Climate' and €55.2 million to 'Agriculture/Rural Development'.<sup>10</sup> While the level of funding is significant, when spread across five states over seven years its impact is limited. The political role the EU plays in the region is of greater significance than the funding it provides. The EU has established delegations in all Central Asian states, except for Turkmenistan. The European Union has also signed Partnership and Cooperation Agreements with four states Central Asian states, the exception again being Turkmenistan.

What distinguishes the EU from many other international donors are its principles, rules and frameworks on water regulation that stem from the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD).<sup>11</sup> The WFD was established in 2000 as a European integrated river basin management approach. It was the first regional coordination initiative of its kind related to water management. Today, the WFD serves as the normative foundation for all other EU water-related activities, including the better-known European Union Water Initiative (EUWI). The WFD aims at improving water quality, involving citizens in the process.<sup>12</sup> Unlike many other international organisations involved in project coordination efforts in Central Asia, the EU can offer an example of how to establish regional coherence in water management based on its own experience. European states have themselves been involved in the creation of regional information sharing networks and common practices, as well as in assisting a country (Romania) improve its clean water supply. These practices could also be applied, at least partially, to the Central Asian region. It is acknowledged within the EU that developing common water monitoring practices on a regional level is a time-consuming process. Therefore, the EU is now focusing more on the quality of cooperation among the five Central Asian states than on the speed of developing new regional partnerships. This is why the EU is increasingly more involved in long-term capacity-building projects in Central Asia as a way to ensure local ownership of development processes.<sup>13</sup>

The EUWI was launched in 2002 'to create the conditions for mobilising all available EU resources

(human & financial), and to coordinate them to achieve the water-related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in partner countries'.<sup>14</sup> The EUWI is a broad policy umbrella that has a regional approach to water management under the Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) working group. The EECCA meets once or twice a year to promote cooperation among the partners, monitor progress made and approve the annual work programmes.<sup>15</sup> The EUWI focuses on 'water supply and sanitation (WSS), including financing of water infrastructure [...] and integrated water resources management (IWRM),<sup>16</sup> including trans-boundary river basin management and regional seas issues'.<sup>17</sup> One instrument for addressing these issues is the so-called National Policy Dialogues (NPDs). The NPDs are based on bilateral consultations between EU and EECCA governments, as well as involving other international actors. These consultations aim at creating 'policy packages' to, among other things, support water sector reforms at national and regional levels.<sup>18</sup> A new NPD began to operate in Kazakhstan in June 2013, where the EU will attempt further to promote water reforms. EU representatives in Central Asia repeatedly note that the NPDs are the Union's main coordination mechanism in the region. This suggests that while the EU participates in many multilateral water management efforts, its coordination efforts have been primarily carried out bilaterally. Given the lack of cooperation among the five countries and their unwillingness to act as a region, bilateral engagement is seen as necessary at least in the short term.

In Central Asia the EUWI remains rather general and declaratory in nature. Interviewees from non-EU organisations, as well as from some European states, were either not familiar with the EUWI or regarded its influence in Central Asia as negligible.

<sup>14</sup> The EU Water Initiative, available at: <http://www.euwi.net/about-euwi> [Accessed 6 November 2012].

<sup>15</sup> The EU Water Initiative, EECCA Component - A mechanism to improve water management in the Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia, available at: <http://www.euwi.net/files/EUWI-Leaflet09.pdf> [Accessed 7 November 2012].

<sup>16</sup> Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) involves structural and legal reforms at country level, as well as the mainstreaming of water concerns into cross-ministerial governmental policies. UNDESA, op. cit.

<sup>17</sup> The EU Water Initiative, EECCA Component - A mechanism to improve water management in the Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia, op. cit.

<sup>18</sup> UNECE, National Policy Dialogues on Integrated Water Resources Management under the EU Water Initiative, Geneva: UNECE, (undated), available at: [http://www.unecce.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/water/publications/brochure/Brochures\\_Leaflets/NPD\\_en\\_web.pdf](http://www.unecce.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/water/publications/brochure/Brochures_Leaflets/NPD_en_web.pdf) [Accessed 7 November 2012].

<sup>10</sup> European Commission, European Union - Central Asia Development Cooperation, Brussels: European Commission, (undated), p. 6, available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/infopoint/publications/europeaid/documents/263a\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/infopoint/publications/europeaid/documents/263a_en.pdf) [Accessed 6 November 2012].

<sup>11</sup> Interview: European Commission in Brussels (20 June 2012).

<sup>12</sup> European Commission, The EU Water Framework Directive - integrated river basin management for Europe, Brussels: European Commission, (undated), available at [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/water/water-framework/index\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/water/water-framework/index_en.html) [Accessed 6 November 2012].

<sup>13</sup> Interview: SYKE in Helsinki (6 February 2012).

While this does not necessarily reflect the actual impact of the EUWI in the region but rather the external perception of the initiative, some EU representatives acknowledged that although the EUWI has been actively implemented in other regions – for instance, in Africa – in Central Asia it still has not played a significant role. While the initiative is yet to make its mark in Central Asia, its lack of visibility can also be attributed to the fact that, compared to other partner regions, Central Asia plays a more peripheral role in the European Union's agenda.

The launch of a new programme – the EU Regional Environment Programme for Central Asia (EURECA) – could suggest that Central Asia is becoming increasingly important as a partner region for the EU. EURECA is the latest action layer to be added under the overall EUWI umbrella. It is coordinated from the EU delegation in Astana. The EURECA 2009 programme aims at improving regional water cooperation and partnership development through four main components: facilitating closer regional cooperation; sustainable use and management of natural resources; trans-boundary river basin management; and environmental awareness raising.<sup>19</sup>

These elements contain a regional focus, in contrast to the NPDs that mainly work at the national level. What is also notable about EURECA is that water concerns are mainstreamed into each of the programme's four components. Instead of treating water sector reform separately from other challenges, EURECA follows a more complex perception of water management. Like human security or gender issues, the water sector is also seen to be closely interconnected with many other development challenges in Central Asia. So, instead of isolating various environmental concerns, EURECA bundles them together according to dominant regional themes.<sup>20</sup>

As a new coordinating mechanism, EURECA is still being developed to support incipient regional partnerships, as well as existing forms of cooperation such as the International Fund for the Aral Sea (IFAS). Indeed, the new programme focuses on strengthening already existing initiatives rather than creating new ones. This is a telling example of how coordination tends

to grow as the number of activities or projects that need coordination increases. Continuity in water programme management was continuously stressed throughout the interviews in Central Asia and Europe.

Coordination work by most international institutions is usually carried out from their secretariats in Europe or elsewhere, not in the country offices in Central Asia. For instance, the EBRD has its water coordinator in Moscow and the UNDP leads from a central office in Bratislava. Similarly, EU member states coordinate their sector-based approaches from their Ministries of Foreign Affairs located in Europe. As an example, Italy has two foreign ministry representatives in Rome who are responsible for coordinating Italian water-related activity in Central Asia. The Italian embassy in Astana acknowledged that it is common practice for states to have their regional coordinators working outside the actual region. Whether this helps or hinders coordination efforts is worth considering and will be further discussed in section 3.1.

Some of the EU interviewees commented that water *per se* is unlikely to be a key policy priority in the future. Rather, it will be treated as an inseparable part of other broader priorities, such as social protection, education and the rule of law. Another rising global policy priority under which water reform is already being placed is climate change. Particularly Kazakhstan, which has experienced increasing desertification in recent years and now has the means to address it, treats water resources as part of the wider climate change challenge. Water is also sometimes included under the security and energy sectors. Water is, for instance, a sub-theme of the UK's foreign policy security priority.<sup>21</sup> This also fits in well with the OSCE's security-based understanding of water's significance. The EU attempts to include environmental concerns in most of its policy areas.

This is also reflected in the private sector, where energy companies like ENI that perform drilling in places such as the Caspian Sea increasingly face the need to accompany their main work with environmental projects, such as the building of a nature reserve along the northern coast of the Caspian Sea. In reality, water is a development-, security-, environmental- and energy-related matter, reflecting four of the seven priorities of the EU in Central Asia. Some of these categorisations can be confusing or artificial, however. The broad

<sup>19</sup> European Commission, EURECA, Brussels: European Commission, (undated), available at [http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/asia/regional-cooperation-central-asia/environment/ca\\_environment\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/asia/regional-cooperation-central-asia/environment/ca_environment_en.htm) [Accessed 20 September 2012].

<sup>20</sup> Interview: European Commission in Brussels (20 June 2012).

<sup>21</sup> EUCAM seminar 'Kyrgyzstan and Europe: A Relationship built on securing development?', Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 23 May 2012.

understanding of 'security' widely used in Europe, which includes also 'soft' security concerns such as water, can be misleading in countries where security is understood more in 'hard' military and police terms. The EU's tendency to overemphasise the links between security and development can weaken local enthusiasm, whereas development and humanitarian involvement on its own would have greater appeal.

But there are grounds to support the view that the European Union is one of the most suitable international actors broadly to coordinate international water initiatives in Central Asia. The EU is seen as less biased than many other international actors. EU funding, although limited, is also significant in that it not only provides budget support to governments – mainly Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan – but it also provides funding to international organisations that are active throughout the region such as UNDP. However, it has sometimes proved difficult for the EU to take advantage of this position in order to improve the coordination of water-related projects. In 2008, the European Commission funded a joint coordination initiative with UNDP. The Central Asia Water Sector Coordination Initiative (CAWSCCI) was meant to act as an online database of all water-related projects carried out in Central Asia. But the initiative failed to attract other agencies to share their information, funds were cut, and UNDP has not continued to maintain the online database.<sup>22</sup> This initiative failed in spite of the fact that many other regional implementers of water projects were tied into the Commission, either because they received funding from it or because they were committed to following its priorities. The EU's position may have become weaker in recent years since its image has been tainted by the economic crisis, while EU representatives are wary of raising high expectations about EU projects.<sup>23</sup>

Internationally-funded or otherwise externally-supported water sector projects are not only carried out on a multilateral basis in Central Asia, but also bilaterally. Some individual European states have initiated their own water sector reform assistance programmes in the region. However, national interests and, perhaps even more importantly, economic capabilities, tend to differ significantly across EU states. This is inevitable given the largely declaratory and general nature of the EU's official policies on water management in the region. Switzerland and Norway also play an active role in water programmes

### *Example of European coordination: FinWater WEI*

Finland has been an active donor in Central Asia's water sector for a long time. In Kyrgyzstan, the Finnish government has provided technical assistance to water quality monitoring laboratories for over a decade. However, the visibility of Finnish assistance has been rather low in comparison to that of other states such as Switzerland. Partly in order to increase its visibility in the region's water sector, a multi-project programme was created under the name of FinWater WEI (Wider Europe Initiative). The programme was designed to last for four years between 2009 and 2013, and €5 million has been allocated for that period. The programme has a rather experimental approach; it is not only limited to Central Asia but extends also to the Caucasus and Eastern Europe. The aim is not to base Finnish workers in Central Asia but to create self-sufficient mechanisms of water management among the local populations through ten different activities.<sup>1</sup> Some activities are limited to specific Central Asian states, while others are regional in their scope. Most of these activities were already operating before the establishment of FinWater WEI, so the programme mainly combined existing initiatives rather than created new ones. It remains to be seen whether genuine synergies will be created.

The short duration of the multi-layered programme and its uncertain continuation are typical of contemporary complex, risk societies.<sup>2</sup> FinWater WEI functions within the normative frameworks of UNECE and the EUWI, and links numerous actors and networks such as: UNECE, the Global Water Partnership, and Finnish partners from the Environment Institute SYKE, the Finnish Water Forum (FWF) and the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>3</sup> As FinWater WEI has not created new activities as such but has rather repackaged existing ones, it is difficult to assess the distinct achievements of the programme beyond the increased branding of Finland's presence in Central Asia's water sector.

1 Interviews: SYKE in Helsinki (February 2012).

2 See for instance: U. Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1992; S. Lash, 'Lebenssoziologie: Georg Simmel in the Information Age', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 22:1, 1-23, 2005.

3 FinWater WEI, Programme for Finland's Water Sector Support to the EECCA Countries under the Wider Europe Initiative, available at: <http://www.ymparisto.fi/download.asp?contentid=121154&lan=en> [Accessed 19 November 2012]; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, Strategic Cooperation for Finland's Water Sector Support to the EECCA countries 2009-2013.

in Central Asia as European yet non-EU members.

Bilateral relations are mostly managed with specific partner state institutions and ministries. Several European member states are increasing their diplomatic and economic presence in the region. Finland has recently opened an embassy in Astana, the UK in Bishkek and others like Italy are following suit. Italy has played a leading role in the EU's environmental governance and climate change policy in Central Asia – formally heading the political coordination of the EUWI – but the assessment inside the region of its coordinating function is not too positive. Italy also has experience with hydroelectricity and analogous

22 Interview: UNDP in Almaty (25 May 2012).

23 EUCAM seminar, op. cit.

delta river management, but currently lacks the resources to share its expertise in Central Asia. Bilaterally, Italy has thus far mainly focused on its commercial involvement in Central Asia, primarily through companies such as ENI. Participation in large-scale water management assistance is very costly; this in part explains why it is the more wealthy European states like Germany, Finland, Norway and Switzerland are involved in water programmes in Central Asia. However, smaller states such as Romania and Hungary have also played a role in organising debate and planning on water and broader environmental issues. Conversely, there are other European states that do have the financial means but refrain from engaging in Central Asia, one example being Sweden.

Germany has been the most active EU state in Central Asia's water sector. The German Agency for International Cooperation, GIZ, was mentioned by almost all interviewees in Central Asia as a key donor and implementing agency. A notable German initiative in water sector coordination has been the Berlin Process, which from 2008 aims to 'make water a nexus for cooperation in Central Asia'.<sup>24</sup> Even though the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared that the Berlin Process would improve regional cooperation on water, this seems to have remained just a declaration of Germany's national priorities rather than a practical initiative to coordinate European water programmes in Central Asia. A few other EU states' development agencies, like Finland's and the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), are also very active donors and providers of technical assistance.

### **3. Global and national contributions to coordination**

#### **3.1. Global involvement**

The EU's approach to water management is not limited to the European normative framework alone. Most EU initiatives function under even

wider international norms and aim towards broad international coordination. International conventions such as the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness or UNECE normative frameworks like the 1999 Protocol on Water and Health serve as international guidelines for EU activities.<sup>25</sup> In addition to the EU's and individual European states' participation, many local and global actors are involved in state-by-state water management in Central Asia. At first glance, the number of multilateral water efforts and meetings in Central Asia may seem overwhelming, but after some examination, it becomes evident that the same international actors are recurrently the most active participants. In addition to the EU, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), German GIZ, USAID, World Bank and UNDP are seen to play an especially active role in water sector reform. Of course, it is debatable whether these are pragmatically the most influential actors in the region's water management or whether they are merely the most visible or the largest donors. In short, the correlation between presence, donation and impact is not always clear-cut.

The international organisations that have a physical presence in the region tend to establish close partnerships. Although UNECE provides a normative framework for many water projects and is active through the EU's NDPs, the organisation does not have a physical office in Central Asia and is thus not always seen as an equally-active participant when compared to UNDP or the European Commission.<sup>26</sup> In addition to regional programmes and initiatives, many large international organisations have offices in several, if not all, Central Asian states and cooperate actively between them – as well as with their headquarters in Europe or elsewhere. In particular knowledge-sharing (e.g. in the form of workshops) among different country offices is widespread. It is common practice to have only two to three workers focusing on water aspects in a national office. Because there are only few people involved, they tend to be well connected across organisations throughout the region. This means that many institutional resources and expertise are linked through only a few individuals.

International meetings that bring EU member states

24 M. Jungius, 'The Berlin Process to support water management in Central Asia', presentation at the seminar 'The UNECE Water Convention', World Water Week Stockholm, 19 August 2009, available at: <http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/water/meetings/Stockholm-WWW/2009/presentations/Jungius.pdf>, [Accessed 2 May 2013]. According to formal sources, the Berlin Process aims to improve cooperation in the use of Central Asia's scarce water resources to improve joint water and energy management in the long term through its four key activities. The process was initiated in 2007. See Giz, 'A Source of Peace – Transboundary Water Management in Central Asia', Berlin: GIZ, May 2013, available at: <http://www.giz.de/de/downloads/giz2013-en-trans-boundary-water-management-central-asia.pdf> [Accessed 15 November 2012]. However, some interviewees believed the process to be a purely national foreign policy instrument, while others were not familiar with the initiative at all.

25 OECD, Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action, Paris: OECD, (undated), available at: <http://www.oecd.org/dac/aideffectiveness/parisdeclarationandaccraagendaforaction.htm>; UNECE, Protocol on Water and Health to the 1992 Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, Geneva: UNECE, 17 June 1999, available at: <http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/documents/2000/wat/mp.wat.2000.1.e.pdf> [Accessed 15 November 2012].

26 Interview: European Delegation in Bishkek (22 May 2012).

and other international actors together are often organised by the UN agencies. UNDP is one of the most notable and acknowledged UN agencies in Central Asia's water sector. It occasionally plays an important role as an intermediary, especially when donors do not have their own offices in Central Asia. In such cases, UNDP can make recommendations to donors based on its fieldwork with local NGOs and international partners. UNDP also implements water-related projects, for example through the Global Environment Facility (GEF) that provides grants for projects on biodiversity, climate change and international waters.<sup>27</sup> UNDP is also involved in coordinating national level information-sharing about development-related projects. At a regional level, like the EU, UNDP has participated in institutional coordination initiatives such as the Central Asian Regional Risk Assessment (CARRA), an international effort to 'proactively help Central Asia's governments to better manage humanitarian and development risks'.<sup>28</sup> This is a high-level initiative, with one or two conferences per year, where donors discuss coordination priorities, including those on water.<sup>29</sup> UNDP has organised, *inter alia*, training in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in collaboration with local consulting firms.

The OSCE is involved in several water projects, such as the establishment of a training centre in Kazakhstan's Kyzylorda desert in cooperation with the German and U.S. development agencies. However, as a political security organisation, the OSCE is less involved in the water sector as such when compared to the EU or the aforementioned UN agencies, especially in terms of programme coordination.

Cooperation among international agencies can be rather selective in Central Asia. International financial institutions such as the World Bank or even the EBRD, which work closely with the EU, tend to form their own cooperation networks. State development agencies in turn form their own partnerships. For example, the UK's DFID has been cooperating with USAID and UNICEF in Kyrgyzstan for over a decade on several projects. Such networks are largely tied to the organisations' structures. As

loan granting institutions, development banks tend to follow different working procedures to the more political or humanitarian organisations. In the same vein, interviewees noted that it can be difficult for political organisations to cooperate with private companies even when their goals converge.<sup>30</sup> It is disappointing that companies that tend to have the financial resources and the organisations that have the needed expertise or political contacts do not in fact complement each other's work more often in Central Asia. The different working formats tend to impede various international actors from working multilaterally.

Some states also display a predominantly commercial involvement in Central Asia's water sector. Despite their formal involvement in donor coordination meetings, countries like China, Turkey and Russia are seen in practice to be driven mostly by business and/or geopolitical interests in Central Asia. Turkey participates in water management on a commercial basis, but is also the lead implementer of international programmes such as UNDP's Every Drop Matters project, which is in turn funded by Coca-Cola. As in other developing regions, in Central Asia China has been pursuing its national interests in a rather assertive and unilateral manner. For example, trans-boundary water distribution between China and Kazakhstan has created disputes that have required UNDP monitoring of future cross-border construction contracts. Russia's involvement in Central Asia's water sector has been somewhat similar to that of Italy's, though on a much larger scale, emphasising commercial investments as opposed to political engagement. The approach of USAID to water management support differs from many others in that it first categorises water under climate risk management and, second, works through contractors about whom not much information is shared with other organisations.<sup>31</sup> The U.S., China and Russia therefore operate largely outside the existing formal and informal coordination mechanisms, which can sometimes lead to cases of duplication and other inefficiencies. There are also emerging participating states in the region's water sector – most notably, Afghanistan. Some donor states have been active in selected Central Asian countries or in specific types of water activities for a long time, while others are working in all five countries but on a more superficial level.

The defining factor in international coordination

27 Global Environment Facility (GEF), available at: <http://www.thegef.org/> [Accessed 8 November 2012].

28 Central Asian Regional Risk Assessment (CARRA), available at: [http://waterwiki.net/index.php/CAWSCI/Processes\\_and\\_Initiatives#Central\\_Asian\\_Regional\\_Risk\\_Assessment\\_.28CARRA.29](http://waterwiki.net/index.php/CAWSCI/Processes_and_Initiatives#Central_Asian_Regional_Risk_Assessment_.28CARRA.29) [Accessed 15 November 2012].

29 GRIP, Central Asia Regional Risk Assessment Programme (CAR-RA), Châtelaine: GRIP, (undated), available at: <http://www.gripweb.org/gripweb/?q=countries-risk-information/articles/central-asia-regional-risk-assessment-programme-carra> [Accessed 23 October 2012].

30 Interview: OSCE in Astana (31 May 2012).

31 Interview: UNDP in Almaty (25 May 2012).

is often agency compatibility – i.e. who exactly cooperates in a given partnership. It is complementarity, both among actors and with the issue area they are tackling, that has significant impact. For instance, the EBRD contracts selected experts to conduct feasibility studies before a project commences.<sup>32</sup> This is an example of how partnership choice is selected according to expertise, the specific stage of the project and the duration of cooperation. Long-term coordination with everyone on everything would certainly be too costly and, most importantly, not constructive. In selective cooperation, organisations can look for partners that are already working on specific issues so as to complement their activities. For example, UNDP has stepped in several times to continue implementing projects initiated by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, in order to ensure project continuity. It is often Central Asian governments who decide which actors participate in a given project, but international participants can and do invite additional external actors when needed.

### 3.2. Central Asian involvement

One of the most notable regional agencies in Central Asia's water sector is the Regional Environmental Center for Central Asia (CAREC), which focuses on project implementation both locally and regionally. The organisation was initiated by the five Central Asian states, UNDP and the European Commission. It functions both as a governmental and a non-governmental organisation, as it works in close cooperation with the Central Asian governments as well as international donors and civil society. The European Commission has supported the organisation financially for five years, but now it is in need of funding from other international agencies if it is to continue. Many observers in Central Asia see CAREC as the only noteworthy local organisation that implements water-related projects on a regional level. UNDP cooperates mainly with CAREC on water issues and exceptionally includes it in its steering committee meetings. While there are many small-scale NGO projects at the national level, CAREC appears to be the only regional one. The organisation hires local workers to carry out its activities; for example, CAREC has provided resources and training for monitoring water quality or planting tree saplings for and by the locals themselves.<sup>33</sup> The five Central Asian governments are often

seen to be the main beneficiaries of international donors. As several UNDP representatives pointed out, government officials are the ones who invite specific international actors to participate in the programmes prioritised by each state. Governments are the ones who make project initiatives and in this sense function as project catalysts. This is illustrative of the coordinative position assumed by national governments. Of course, not all international agencies work through the Central Asian governments. USAID or OSF often try to donate resources directly to local implementing bodies. Although it does not directly fund water-related projects, OSF has supported, for example, youth initiatives in Kazakhstan that have an environmental focus.

The Central Asian governments themselves rarely provide funding for water projects, although there are some exceptions. The Kyrgyz government has established a fund for environmental protection, which is financed by national pollution taxation. Generally, the Kyrgyz government is seen to be very open to international donors and their recommendations. But that can be largely explained by Kyrgyzstan's heavy dependence on international aid. Central Asian governments are often unaware of all the existing internationally-supported water sector projects, partly due to weak information-sharing among national ministries. In Kazakhstan, three ministries are involved in water management issues (the ministries of Emergency Situations, Environment, and Agriculture), but the Ministry of Agriculture has been unwilling to share information. Some EU states have overcome such hindrances, for

#### *Example of Central Asian coordination: IFAS*

The Executive Committee of the International Fund for saving the Aral Sea (IFAS) is one of the few interstate initiatives of regional cooperation on water. Through IFAS, the five Central Asian states intend to establish joint environmental management initiatives in gradual stages. IFAS receives funding from a large range of organisations, including the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Eurasian Development Bank, as well as a number of individual donor countries. IFAS is widely seen as an exceptional regional initiative, but one which also faces the challenge of participating governments' differing views on cooperation. Initially Kyrgyzstan did not accept the plan for the programme's third stage (ASBP-3), but in May 2012 it was finally approved by all states. Some analysts view the IFAS achievements with optimism, while others believe that cooperation has slowed down. However, there seems to be a consensus over the fact that regional coordination is first and foremost hindered by the lack of political consent among the five Central Asian governments.

<sup>32</sup> Interview: EBRD in Bishkek (22 May 2012).

<sup>33</sup> Interview: CAREC in Bishkek (24 May 2012).

instance, by creating very informal networks across ministries and other significant agencies according to sectors, such as water.<sup>34</sup>

Beyond the well-known state corruption in Central Asia, there appears to be a genuine lack of expertise in the state ministries on water management as well as wider economic development. Many young experts note that Central Asian leaders still tend to favour very large-scale projects, such as building dams, which are both expensive and time-consuming. This is a legacy of the Soviet Union and its large-scale environmental projects, reinforced by the personality cults of incumbent Central Asian leaders. Experts argue for small-scale or short-term initiatives instead which are, arguably, not as prone to corruption because benefits are also smaller. Moreover, small projects tend to involve the local population boosting efficiency since they are the key stakeholders.<sup>35</sup>

Even though many interviewees emphasise the difficulties in establishing regional coordination among projects, coordination at the national level can be equally challenging. Some international actors overcome national challenges by focusing strictly on the implementation of (very) local projects. The inevitable question then is whether such an approach can contribute to addressing the core problems of water management in Central Asia. There is some hope that successful small-scale projects can inspire further similar initiatives or potentially snowball into larger projects, but more often the experience has been that the benefits of short-term programmes are lost once the funding period ends, and a lack of continuity undermines short-term successes.

#### *4. Challenges in moving forward*

Despite the existence of the aforementioned European, international and regional water sector reform initiatives, several significant challenges to decentralised water project management coordination remain.

One of the basic goals behind the EU's NPDs appears to be to bring the most pressing issues to the highest political level in partner states. Through the dialogues, the EU provides information to partner governments on alternative approaches to, for example, environmental management. Interviewed EU representatives have stressed that

the Union seeks to cooperate with Central Asian states on the basis of strictly equal partnerships that involve reciprocal discussions rather than one-sidedly providing recommendations.

However, local analysts highlight the many challenges associated with bilateral cooperation and interstate project implementation in Central Asia. One challenge in particular lies in the fact that Central Asian societies are arguably still over-reliant on their governments to regulate and implement environmental programmes. Many young activists see that it is time to outsource the governments' monitoring activities to the population who is far more interested in maintaining or improving the quality of local water resources.

Representatives of CAREC note that many aspects of water mismanagement can be linked to societal practices and, therefore, society too needs to feel responsible for local resource management. Especially the younger strands of society may be the most constructive partners for upcoming EU projects (e.g. the Open Society Foundation's or CAREC's youth initiatives). This is especially important in Central Asian states where generational, and consequently ideational, differences exist between the Soviet and the post-Soviet era cohorts. The perceptions of the older generation are allegedly outdated on many development-related issues. However, in countries like Kyrgyzstan there are few younger experts with sufficient training either to influence policies or to replace the older experts who are about to retire. This results from a lack of training institutes in the region, as experts were previously mostly trained in Russia, as well as the reluctance of educated young people to pursue poorly rewarded careers in the government sector.

Despite the challenges of working with Central Asian governments bilaterally, EU representatives seem rather optimistic about the ways in which NPDs have been running in the region. The dialogues are seen as successful in bringing all key donors and institutions together at the national level. Other organisations, such as the UNDP and OSCE also evaluate the dialogues rather positively as an exceptional mechanism of international cooperation established and functioning in Central Asia. But of course coordination is only one aspect of the NPDs. One European interviewee in Central Asia pointed out that bilateral cooperation as such is not necessarily an EU strategy but rather the only possible approach towards cooperation in the region. Establishing regional cooperation

<sup>34</sup> Interview: Finnish Water Forum in Helsinki (5 March 2012).

<sup>35</sup> Interview: CAREC in Bishkek (24 May 2012).

mechanisms or direct links to local levels is simply not always possible in the Central Asian context, where governments tend to be excessively protective of their national sovereignty. In this respect, the NPDs could be seen as the EU's coping – rather than coordination – mechanism in Central Asia. Getting Central Asian governments to agree on anything significant ends up foundering not just on personal rivalries but also on the pursuit of national interests. As chair of the OSCE in 2010, Kazakhstan made a priority of the issue of the Aral Sea, which is a crucial body of water for Kazakhstan but not for Tajikistan or Kyrgyzstan. This shows how purely national interests can and do hinder the formation of wider regional interests and approaches. Plans for establishing a regional Water Academy have been disrupted for years due to administrative disagreements, such as that between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan over the physical location of the Academy. Now a rotating directorate is being considered in an attempt to accommodate the interests of all five states.

One view expressed at the EU delegation in Bishkek is that it is still too early to establish genuine regional cooperation in Central Asia, notably due to Uzbekistan's isolation. However, not only Uzbekistan, but all five states display a marked reluctance to share information or engage in frequent talks that could reveal priorities which they prefer to keep to themselves. Several regionally-focused EU projects have already been cancelled and a couple of projects did not produce positive results due to lack of cooperation among the Central Asian states. This is partly why the EU relies on the NPDs to work on the same issues, but separately in each of the five countries. EU officials believe that, for instance, the setting of water monitoring practices on the same starting ground in all Central Asian states would facilitate future regional cooperation on water monitoring. But EURECA's activities (discussed above) may indicate that the bilateral approach could already be moving towards a more regional approach, at least in the sphere of environmental programmes.

Some of the challenges to project coordination stem from the EU itself. For instance, the EU's own representatives have acknowledged that working with the European Commission can be rather time-consuming. The EU delegations in Central Asia have a very lengthy review process of NGO project proposals compared to other donors.<sup>36</sup> In this respect, the EU is not as competitive as other donors that have less bureaucratic decision-making. However, according

to NGO representatives in Central Asia, organisations apply to many different donors with the same project proposals and it is usually the agency that grants the most resources for project implementation that is considered as the best donor, not necessarily the one that grants the money the quickest.<sup>37</sup> There have been instances though where the EU delegation took so long to approve a project that the NGO in question had already started working with non-EU support. Thus, time-consuming bureaucratic decision-making that hampers the EU's work in many issue areas is also present in the water sector.

The creation of joint international water management programmes could entail significant administrative costs. Each organisation has its own mandate and norms, so it is neither easy nor cheap to establish compatible managerial practices. For example, the UNDP office in Bishkek cooperates with the OSCE through their Bratislava office rather than directly within the Central Asian region due to already established administrative procedures. In this way, costly bureaucratic delays and inefficiencies can be incurred.<sup>38</sup> The CAWSCSI initiative of online water sector coordination was halted precisely because the European Commission could not see the portal's added-value since each organisation already has its own website where interested parties can find the information they need. Although a common information portal might be more efficient, more familiar channels of information are preferred. Another important source of institutional inefficiency stems from personal relations. A CAREC representative noted that the organisation's work with several Kyrgyz government officials has been inefficient not so much due to divergent managerial practices, but due to personal disagreements. In fact, the human factor has been emphasised as an important element in international coordination, both at high political levels and lower administrative levels.<sup>39</sup>

Even when the international actors' broader goals of water monitoring and distribution overlap, their concrete means of achieving these goals tend to differ. For instance, all international actors appear to be interested in improving cross-border cooperation on water issues, but some organisations focus on the role of migrants, others on environmental norms and others on the security risks associated with cooperation. On the one hand, such division of

<sup>37</sup> Interviews: CAREC in Bishkek (24 May 2012); OSI in Almaty (28 May 2012).

<sup>38</sup> J. M. Keynes, 'The General Theory of Employment', *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* (1937) 51(2), pp. 209-23.

<sup>39</sup> Interviews in Helsinki and Central Asia (2012).

<sup>36</sup> Interview: European Delegation in Bishkek (22 May 2012).



labour helps address several different challenges. On the other hand, thematic specialisations can make multilateral cooperation even more challenging.

Not every agency necessarily benefits from better water project coordination. Small local NGOs that compete for international funding might actually lose out, as better coordination might reveal project overlap or replication and, consequently, halt some micro-scale activities. Some local actors may thrive on inefficient international project coordination. To provide an example, donors play a very important role in the Kyrgyz economy and the EU finds it difficult to monitor exactly how its money is spent.<sup>40</sup>

Corruption is widespread not only in Central Asian governments, but also in civil society. International organisations are thus not only preoccupied with monitoring the quality of water, but also the quality of project implementation and resource usage. Given the difficult environment for externally-funded projects, in the end it might turn out wiser to accept a certain amount of wastage than to insist on strict monitoring standards.

It is difficult to identify the concrete impact of funds allocated to water-related issues.<sup>41</sup> Perhaps programmes such as FinWater WEI could help to clarify the practical aims and track the achievements of a particular state initiative. In addition to the vagueness of international contributions, multilateral projects also lack continuity. Precisely because of the different working formats, administrative costs and distinct working mandates, when different international actors cooperate they tend to do so for a limited time only. Most multilateral water projects mentioned throughout the interviews or available at the organisations' websites tend to have a duration of between two to five years. This may be one of the crucial limitations associated with international coordination: the wider the synergies become among actors and activities, the shorter lived they get. This trend is not limited to Central Asia's water sector; the logic of short-term project work is now a global one that penetrates most sectors.

## Conclusion

International project coordination in Central Asia is rarely the most optimal choice; instead, it is the result of necessity combined with the only available options. Despite the relatively low level of resources the EU is able to commit to Central Asia, the Union is well placed to improve the effectiveness of international donor programmes concerning the water sector. The EU and its member states are already heavily involved in both formal and informal coordination mechanisms, and work well with some of the major international organisations, notably UNDP. But the EU must overcome major challenges in order to offer a coordinated and effective approach. One of the greatest difficulties in this sector, as in many others, is a series of mismatched approaches. The EU as a body, its member states, and other international organisations and governments do not all share the same priorities, diverging even on the fundamental question of whether water should be treated primarily as a security, economic, environmental or welfare issue.

The EU's institutional preference for treating Central Asia as a region is reinforced in this case by the numerous cross-border issues involving water. However, accepting the political reality that cooperation among the five Central Asian states is hard to achieve, the EU has opted for applying a region-wide policy but in practise enacting it through the NPDs at the national level. The assumption here is that a common programme will be helpful in the future should relations among the Central Asian states improve, but there is little prospect of this happening in the short term. It might then be preferable to make explicit at the policy level what already prevails in practise – adopt separate programmes for each state (or at least for Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan where the EU and its members are most active), while creating *ad hoc* fora for discussion and negotiation under European or UN auspices where cross-border disputes arise.

The fact that EU member states have different priorities and in many cases act independently of the EU presents another obstacle which affects EU external action. The prospects of agreed and coordinated action could be improved through the formulation of separate programmes for each Central Asian state with more concrete objectives than the current largely declaratory programmes. The EU's involvement in Central Asia's water sector could also

<sup>40</sup> Interview: European Delegation in Bishkek (22 May 2012).

<sup>41</sup> For example an interview with the Scientific Information Centre (ICWC) representative in Almaty (28 May 2012).

be more effectively coordinated by states that have a history of activity in the sector, such as Finland or Germany.

The EU's focus on individual Central Asian states not only comes at the expense of regional initiatives, but it also means that local involvement and awareness is less than what it could be. More local cooperation not only would contribute to better identification of the needs of communities, but is also likely to improve efficiency and effectiveness. There is also an urgent need to educate young people in Central Asia about water issues, both in the broader sense of improving awareness and in the narrower technical sense of providing a new generation of experts who will soon be needed to replace the older generation and whose attitudes may be more in line with those of the EU. This can be achieved by including water as a specific area in existing EU educational initiatives.

From the quality of everyday water consumption to the major environmental challenges facing the region, water is an area where, in most respects, governments and the population can benefit directly from international expertise and investment. Where there is controversy – notably over the construction of dams and other issues affecting cross-border water flows – international diplomacy can play an important role. The European Union and many international agencies have a good record in all of these areas, and it is precisely the humanitarian side of water management that appeals to donors. The multiplicity of agencies involved, however, presents challenges and reduces effectiveness, and up to date information on who is funding what is not always easily accessible. By improving project coordination, recognising that bilateral programmes are more effective than regional ones, and linking water issues with another EU strength area – education – the EU can ensure that the limited resources at its disposal can make a real difference in the quality of life in Central Asia.



Established in 2008 as a project seeking to monitor the implementation of the EU Strategy for Central Asia, EUCAM has grown into a knowledge hub on broader Europe-Central Asia relations. Specifically, the programme aims to:

- Scrutinise European policies towards Central Asia, paying specific attention to security, development and the promotion of democratic values within the context of Central Asia's position in world politics;
- Enhance knowledge of Europe's engagement with Central Asia through top-quality research and by raising awareness among European policy-makers and civil society representatives, as well as discuss European policies among Central Asian communities;
- Expand the network of experts and institutions from European countries and Central Asian states and provide a forum to debate on European-Central Asian relations.

Please follow our work on [www.eucentralasia.eu](http://www.eucentralasia.eu). If you have any comments or suggestions, please email us at [email.eucam@gmail.com](mailto:email.eucam@gmail.com)



FRIDE is a European think tank for global action, based in Madrid, which provides fresh and innovative thinking on Europe's role on the international stage. Our mission is to inform policy and practice in order to ensure that the EU plays a more effective role in supporting multilateralism, democratic values, security and sustainable development. We seek to engage in rigorous analysis of the difficult debates on democracy and human rights, Europe and the international system, conflict and security, and development cooperation. FRIDE benefits from political independence and the diversity of views and intellectual background of its international team.



Founded in 1971, the Karelian Institute is a unit of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Business Studies of the University of Eastern Finland. It engages in basic and applied multi-disciplinary research, supports the supervision of postgraduate studies and researcher training, and participates in teaching. It focuses mainly on three thematic priorities: Borders and Russia; Ethnicity and Culture; and Regional and Rural Studies.

“The views expressed by the authors do not necessarily reflect the opinion of EUCAM.  
If you have any comments on this document or any other suggestions, please email us at [eucam@gmail.com](mailto:eucam@gmail.com)”