

Water, Energy, Cooperation, and Conflict in the Kura-Araks Basin of the South Caucasus

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Abstract

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Kura-Araks Basin (KAB) became an international river basin with respect to the South Caucasus states of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. However, there are no agreements regarding water allocation, water quality, or ecosystem maintenance among the aforementioned riparians. The main water problems in the basin include not only water quantity and quality, but also the lack of joint management.

The aforementioned countries share many similar circumstances: location in a politically unstable but strategic region bureaucratic and structural issues; and more importantly, ongoing ethnic and related conflicts. Despite these obstacles, the countries recognize that they depend greatly on the basin, whose waters they must share. To that end, they proposed and participated in the joint NATO-OSCE *South Caucasus River Monitoring* (SCRMP) project between 2002 and 2009. The SCRMP sought to investigate and characterize the surface water quality in the KAB by providing equipment and training to all three countries. Several years' worth of water quality data were collected in the KAB: major ions; heavy metals; POPs (persistent organic pollutants); and radionuclides;

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (primary funder) and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe supported the SCRMP not only to build capacity but also to promote cooperation and minimize conflict over water and other resources, thus providing a measure of security for Europe and other regions. The South Caucasus is a strategically-important region, functioning as a bridge between Asia and Europe. Energy-rich Azerbaijan seeks to become a key player in trade by serving as a transportation and energy hub between the energy and mineral-rich Central Asian KUT countries (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan) and Western Asia, Europe, and other areas.

The presentation will summarize the scientific results of the SCRMP, elucidate the regional water-energy-security nexus, discuss future work in the region, and explain why the world needs to be concerned about the KAB and the entire South Caucasus.

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