Transboundary River Governance in Central Asia: Managing Water Conflicts, Cooperation, and Involvement of Third Parties

By Aliia Egemberdieva

CEU eTD Collection

A Master's Capstone
Submitted to
Department of Political Science at Bard College and
International Relations at Central European University in Fulfillment of the Requirements
For a Master's Degree
May 2024

Word count: 5295

CEU eTD Collection

Introduction

Countries in Central Asia relate to each other by transboundary rivers such as Amu-Darya and Syr-Darya. It became a challenge for states to regulate the water resources after independence. The centralized system of water governance in Central Asia (CA) collapsed in 1991, with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Since then, Central Asia struggles to establish stable transboundary water governance. Due to climate change, socio-economic conditions, population growth and unsustainable use of water resources, the conflicts over water have increased in CA.

The water factor is increasingly influencing the nature of relations between states. Water does not recognize political and national boundaries, making states interdependent in terms of water use. Geographical location allows some countries to control water resources and use this opportunity for political purposes. This issue is particularly acute in CA, where water is unevenly distributed among the region's republics. The Amur Darya and the Syr Darya, which are the two major rivers that cross national boundaries in the area, originated in the mountainous regions of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. These rivers flow downstream nations including Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Consequently, the downstream countries are dependent on the upstream countries. As a result, the countries downstream rely on the countries upstream, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, who can control the flow of major rivers in the area. This situation is even more complicated by the different approaches to water use. While the upstream countries require water for energy purposes, the downstream countries, which have significant agricultural resources, require it for irrigation purposes. Agriculture is one of the main sectors of the economies of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, and most of the population of the downstream countries either directly or indirectly depends on irrigated agriculture. Hydropower is of immense importance to Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan: energy production meets more than 90 percent of total demand in the upper parts of the country and also serves as an export commodity. The competing

CEU eTD Collection

industries of agriculture in downstream countries and hydropower in upstream countries have led to major disputes in a region where each country prioritizes its own national interests (Dukhovny *et al*., 2014, p.60).

This led to a disproportionate allocation of the water system, as the collapse of the Soviet Union significantly altered the formerly centralized water management within the region. Throughout the post-independence period, the presidents of the Central Asian republics have been unable to reach a consensus on the water issue in the region. Increasingly, the water issue is seen as an instrument of political influence. As experts have observed, the water problems in Central Asia are not primarily a result of scarcity, but rather the consequence of a complex interplay of political, geopolitical, economic, and social factors (Laruelle,2015).

This study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the challenges associated with transboundary river governance in Central Asia. It evaluates the issues where republics such as Kyrgyzstan utilize water as a commodity and the construction of hydropower plants in the upstream countries act as a source of water conflicts in the region. To address these challenges, a neutral third party must be involved in multilateral treaties. As Shamir (2003) noted, third party intervention usually occurs when governmental negotiations reach an impasse. Historical experience with such negotiations shows that the involvement of a third party as a mediator in water discussions positively impacts the negotiation process and contributes to the resolution of water-related conflicts. Gleick (1993) notes the significant contribution of the United Nations, the World Bank, and the regional water commissions in promoting the peaceful resolution of global water problems. An illustrative example of the World Bank's significant support for the resolution of water conflicts is the Indus Water Treaty between India and Pakistan in the 1960s. In addition, in spite of the involvement of the UN and World Bank, external organizations such as Bond Street Theatre (BST) can have a significant impact in increasing community knowledge on water issues

CEU eTD Collection

and advocating for the sustainable use of water in the region. In 2018, BST successfully concluded a program, financed by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), in which they brought together artists, influencers, and community leaders from India and Bangladesh in the city of Kolkata. Experiential learning played a pivotal role in this project. The project gave the participants an opportunity to visit the India- Bangladesh border and perform at the border areas. The purpose of the workshops was to identify and create positive stories about the contribution of communities living along this border to peacebuilding processes in conflict and post-conflict regions. Therefore, using theatre-based program, BST can contribute to the conflict regulation in Central Asia over water resources.

The study attempts to answer the following questions: What are the core problems driving the disputes over transboundary river governance in Central Asia? How might international cooperation contribute to managing water disputes?

Water Cooperation in Central Asia

The Aral Sea Basin consists of two main rivers of Syr-Darya and Amu-Darya and covers the territories of all five Central Asian states and portions of north Afghanistan and north-eastern Iran (Djumabaev, 2020). It is home to half the region's population and has interlocked political borders in the Ferghana valley. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are two upstream countries, and Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan are downstream countries. There is currently no basin-wide river governance, which creates room for conflicts of interest between agriculture and hydropower.

Central Asia has a well-developed institutional architecture for water cooperation at the regional level, with multiple interstate organisations that were founded after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 (Janusz-Pawletta, 2015). However, none of them, including the International Fund for saving the Aral Sea (IFAS), have implemented legally binding multilateral

CEU eTD Collection

agreements. There are only a few successfully working bilateral agreements in transboundary river management (Bergesen, 2018, 27). The disconnectedness of current agreements, with different bilateral and multilateral agreements and declarations existing independently from one another, is one of the main challenges to successful transboundary river management in the region (Ibatullin, 2020). IFAS includes all five countries and is the most comprehensive platform for regional cooperation but has significant internal problems, including an unclear legal status, a rotating headquarters, and funding challenges (Janusz-Pawletta, 2015, 8). Resolving these issues can potentially make IFAS a key institution for advancing transboundary water governance in Central Asia.

After the collapse of the USSR, the unified water management complex was destroyed, and the two main rivers became transboundary. The new Central Asian republics were now divided not only by territorial boundaries but also into upstream and downstream countries where they have different economic interests. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan generate electricity, while Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan grow agricultural products. Power engineers are interested in storing water in summer to generate light in winter, while agrarians need water in summer, during the irrigation season (Karajanov, 2018). During the Soviet period in Central Asia, irrigation needs came to the forefront, and irrigation of arid lands became a major activity. Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan were the most suitable for growing crops. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, rich in water resources, supplied water for irrigated farming needs of neighboring republics. In return, downstream countries supplied agricultural products and energy resources to upstream countries. This approach of mutual compensation allowed the most optimal management of water resources in the region. However, the new geopolitical reality required new agreements and arrangements on the use of transboundary rivers. In the first years, the republics agreed to maintain the status quo, i.e., to follow the mechanism put in place back in Soviet times.

CEU eTD Collection

The most significant political step was the initiative of the heads of the national water management departments of the Central Asian states to adopt the Tashkent Declaration in October 1991 (Yalçın *et al.,* 2022). It became the starting point for the negotiation process between the Central Asian states in the field of using the water resources of transboundary rivers. The parties agreed on the joint use of water resources, taking into account the interests of all sides (Zhiltsov, 2015). The declaration adopted key principles of common water use, such as the necessity to take measures to prevent negative consequences associated with the drying up of the Aral Sea, the preservation of the principle of water quota distribution between upstream and downstream countries, the exchange of information on the use of water resources and water use infrastructure, and the joint resolution of all contentious issues regarding water management problems in the region (ICWC, 1991). The next step was establishing a legal and organizational basis for cooperation in water use. In 1992, the Alma-Ata Agreement was adopted (ICWC), which initiated the creation of the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination of Central Asia (ICWC), a body for conducting a coordinated water use policy in the region. The commission was composed of the heads of the water management departments of the five republics. Overall, the agreement recognized the need to preserve the Soviet water distribution scheme. However, many points of the Alma-Ata Agreement contained vague formulations without any obligations and were not implemented in practice. In addition, the interests of the upstream countries were taken into account to a lesser extent, for example, the mechanism for supplying them with cheap energy in exchange for the released water and the compensation mechanism for the exploitation of reservoirs built during the Soviet era were not specified.

The initial signs of conflict became apparent in 1993 when Uzbekistan, citing outstanding debts, cut off gas supplies to Kyrgyzstan (Djumabaev, 2020). In retaliation, Bishkek released water from the Toktogul Reservoir. Kyrgyzstan justified the change in the Toktogul Reservoir's

CEU eTD Collection

operational schedule as necessary to produce electricity during the winter period and for the accumulation of water during the summer period.

Kyrgyzstan was compelled to take certain actions due to objective factors: the severance of economic ties within the region, the rising cost of hydrocarbon resources, and the country's severe economic situation (Zhiltsov, 2015). Water resources became a bargaining chip among the Central Asian republics. Each side prioritized its interests, even if they contradicted those of their neighbors. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan considered the water formed on their territory as a national wealth, whereas Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and especially Uzbekistan viewed water as a common natural resource to which all states in the region have equal rights. Also, water in the region was a natural resource and a powerful lever of influence over neighboring countries. The situation in the region was heating up and complicating already tense relations between neighbors. However, the republics realized that under the prevailing conditions, the management of regional water resources could only be carried out with coordinated actions. In 1995, at a meeting of all the presidents of Central Asian countries, the Nukus Declaration was signed. The declaration recognized the growing water deficit in the region and the need for multilateral cooperation. Moreover, the republics agreed with previously signed water resource agreements (2015). The concluded agreements smoothed the conflict potential only for a certain period. The divergence of interests of the downstream and upstream states gradually deepened, and a certain bias towards the economically more developed downstream states requiring increased water releases during the growing season for their irrigated lands became obvious, which is contrary to the interests of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan seeking to reduce their energy dependence, primarily on Uzbekistan (Boyarkina, 2015, p.68). Due to constant conflicts, especially between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, the Agreement on the Joint Use of Water and Energy Resources in the Syr-Darya River Basin between Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan were adopted in 1998 (Agreement, 1998).

CEU eTD Collection

According to it, Kyrgyzstan undertook to release most of the water to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in the summer, which in turn promised to supply electricity to Kyrgyzstan in the winter. It was planned that the exact amounts of resources would be determined annually through negotiations. The agreement laid down positive principles such as mutually beneficial cooperation, good neighborliness, and compliance with commitments. However, it had some frameworks and many details remained undeveloped. For example, it was not possible to come to a unified tariff policy for several types of energy resources, and definitions for terms such as "additional electricity generated beyond needs" and "necessary annual and multi-year water reserves in reservoirs for irrigation needs" were not defined (Yalçın e*t al.*, 2022). From the very beginning, the parties violated the terms of the Agreement. Each violation was accompanied by mutual recriminations and accusations, and ultimately, it lost its force.

Over the past 30 years since gaining independence, the republics of Central Asia have been unable to establish a mechanism for water distribution in the region. It would seem that the solution to the problem is straightforward: the upstream supplies water in the summer, thus ensuring the irrigation of agricultural lands, and the downstream provides electricity in the winter, thereby preserving the mechanism developed during the Soviet era. However, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, external supranational control was lost, and the hydroelectric balance was disrupted. Now each republic has begun to protect its own interests. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan stopped supplying Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan with cheap energy, forcing these two countries, which were already economically weaker than their neighbors, to consider alternative energy sources, such as the construction of hydroelectric power plants. One of the few examples of successful cooperation between the upstream and downstream republics is Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Those include cooperative management of Chui-Talas River between Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Successful example of legally binding river agreement in

CEU eTD Collection

Central Asia (Bergesen, 2018, 27). Since January 2000, the operation and maintenance costs for the facilities located in upstream Kyrgyzstan, such as dams and reservoirs that are essential for agricultural irrigation would be shared on a *pro rata* basis in accordance with the water volume received by each country (UNECE, 2018). According to the protocol order, "Kyrgyzstan will release up to 300 million kilowatt-hours with the discharge of up to 330 million cubic meters of water through the Uch-Kurgan Hydroelectric Power Plant from June to August" (2020). Kazakhstan will return an equivalent volume of electricity from September to November.

However, as experience shows, the presence of interstate agreements and understandings does not guarantee successful cooperation in Central Asia. At the regional level, there is a common information system and joint approaches to water issues adopted by the countries, which may not be observed in the face of political and economic disagreements (Ormysheva *et al.,* 2016). The question of the effective use of water resources remains one of the most important strategic tasks for Central Asia.

Water as an economic commodity good

In the coming decade, global water consumption is projected to rise. According to a UN report, global water usage has increased sixfold over the last century and continues to grow at a steady rate of 1% annually (WMO, 2012). At this rate, the world may face a 40% global water deficit by 2030 (UNESCO, UN-water, 2020). The water shortage is exacerbated by two primary factors: climate warming and an increase in the Earth's population. According to Schubert, since the 1970s, the recorded air temperature in the region has risen by 0.3–0.4°C. The average annual temperature is expected to increase by 3.7°C by the year 2100 (Schubert et al., 2008, p 271.). According to the UN, the population of Central Asia will reach 82 million by 2050 (Ergashev *et al*., 2013, p.64). The significance of water in the 21st century can be likened to that of oil in the 20th century. However, unlike oil, which has alternatives such as natural gas, wind, solar, and

CEU eTD Collection

nuclear energy, the only alternative for water in industry, agriculture, drinking, and sanitation is water itself (Waslekar, 2017).

Kyrgyzstan is the most active in the region in promoting the idea that water is a commodity good like oil and gas. Bishkek was dissatisfied with having to purchase fuel at high prices from neighbors, particularly Uzbekistan, which the republic was unable to pay for in a timely and full manner. Consequently, the idea of legally recognizing water as a commodity gained traction within Kyrgyzstan's political circles (Janusz-Pawletta, 2015). One of the first initiatives was the issuance of the June 1997 Resolution "On the Interstate Use of Water Resources of Kyrgyzstan by Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan," which discussed the necessity of establishing payment for water flowing from Kyrgyz reservoirs to neighboring republics (Jogorku Kenesh, 1997). In 2001, the Kyrgyz Republic passed the Law "On the Interstate Use of Water Bodies, Water Resources, and Water Management Facilities of the Kyrgyz Republic," recognizing water as a natural resource with economic value and as a commodity good (Ministry of Justice of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2001). Kyrgyzstan justified this by the need to spend money on maintaining its reservoirs and thus wanted the downstream states to share part of the financial burden. The concept of market economy principles to address water issues is primarily promoted by the "upstream" countries, which expect compensation for the water of transboundary rivers in monetary or hydrocarbon equivalent (Iskanderova, 2019).

In the UN Chronicle under the title "Water for Sustainable Development" President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon noted that "…the trends of global development are such that the value of water may surpass the value of oil, gas, coal, and other resources necessary for the sustainable future of each country and region" (2018). Former Kyrgyz President Sooronbai Jeenbekov, at the 73rd UN General Assembly in September 2018, stated that "Kyrgyzstan consistently advocates for the development and implementation of mutually beneficial economic mechanisms in this area

CEU eTD Collection

in Central Asia." However, the downstream countries held a directly opposite point of view. At the same session of the UN General Assembly, the President of Turkmenistan, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, shared the following message: "Our country firmly adheres to the principle that water is the common heritage of all the peoples of the planet, and equal and fair access to clean drinking water is a fundamental human right." From all this, it follows that the upstream countries, being economically weaker, are trying to convince their neighbors to consider water as a commodity. Primarily because the upstream countries lack agricultural potential but possess significant water resources. Water is one of the main riches of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and it is considered as a lever to lift their economies. There are two directly opposite points of view on the issue of water as a commodity in the region. Basic rights to water complicate the process of charging for the right to use water resources. However, the presence of a price on water will send a clear signal that water is indeed a scarce commodity that should be used sparingly. This will encourage conservation, a more careful attitude, and use of water for high-efficiency purposes.

Hydropower Plant Construction as Source of Conflict

The tension in the region increased with the downstream countries' announcement of the resumption of construction of the Kambarata Hydropower Plant in Kyrgyzstan and the Rogun Hydropower Plant in Tajikistan (Bologov, 2012). Such statements were met with sharp negative reactions from the downstream countries, which feared that the construction of hydroelectric stations would lead to a water deficit in their countries. The First President of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, expressed particular concern. For instance, during an official visit to Kazakhstan in 2012, Islam Karimov commented on the resumption of hydroelectric station construction in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (Bologov, 2012). He believed that such decisions should be made with the consent of all countries residing along the flow of rivers in Central Asia, "those who live upstream, I mean Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, are interested in the energy use of the flow. Unfortunately, they forget

CEU eTD Collection

that the Amu Darya and Syr Darya are transboundary rivers. Water resources can become a problem around which relations in the Central Asian region may intensify. It could worsen to the extent that it may cause not just religious opposition but wars" (Sokov, 2015). The President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, supported his position. According to him, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan, being downstream countries of the Syr-Darya and Amu-Darya rivers, need security guarantees. "It is not for us, the presidents, but for our people, our ecological, economic security. It is about the water supply of millions of people," noted Nazarbayev (Lillis, 2010). The neighboring republics' fears are related to the fact that the ability to regulate the flow of the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers will reduce the amount of water received for irrigating their agricultural lands. Moreover, this will strengthen the positions of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in the region, meaning they will be able to use water as a tool of influence in various disputes.

The most pressing issue was the construction of the Rogun Hydropower Plant on the Vakhsh River in Tajikistan. The construction of the hydropower plant was started during the Soviet era, but after the collapse of the USSR, construction was frozen. Independent Tajikistan had been looking for investors for its "national project" for a long time. In 2008, due to the lack of other investors, Tajikistan decided to resume work at its own expense (Bologov, 2012). For the Tajik authorities, the construction of the Rogun hydropower plant was not only of economic and political importance, but also of propaganda. After the civil war, Tajikistan desperately needed a unifying idea. The Rogun hydropower plant signaled a bright future for the country. President Emomali Rahmon personally participated in all remarkable events related to the Rogun hydropower plant, such as the ceremony of blocking the Vakhsh River channel and the launch of the first unit (Bologov, 2012). Such activity only increased tensions in the region. The Uzbek side accused the Tajik authorities of trying to build a dam too high and "intercept" all the water, thus establishing control over Uzbekistan's water supply. In turn, the Tajik side accused Uzbekistan of hindering the

CEU eTD Collection

development of Tajik hydropower, as well as periodically cutting off gas supplies and organizing a transportation blockade (Khurramov, 2015). Despite pressure from neighbors, Tajik President Emomali Rahmon is firmly determined to complete the "national project" that represents the pride of the republic. The first unit was launched in 2018 and the second in 2019. When the Rogun hydropower plant is completed, its dam will be the highest in the world (335 meters) (Eurasianet, 2019). The potential for conflict persisted in the construction of the Kambarata HPP in Kyrgyzstan. Uzbekistan was primarily opposed to it. The Uzbek side was extremely dissatisfied with Kyrgyzstan's ambitious hydropower plans. Uzbek President Islam Karimov feared the threat of dam failures in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan since the construction of the hydropower plants (both Rogun and Kambar-Ata-1) was taking place in areas of tectonic faults. In addition, the construction of the HPPs would change the irrigation regime to an energy regime, thus causing severe damage to irrigated agriculture and the ecology of the downstream countries (Boyarkina, 2015). Sharp contradictions heated up the conflict between the upstream countries and Uzbekistan. It was obvious that Islam Karimov's position would remain unchanged, as well as that of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, which could subsequently lead to an escalation of the conflict.

The situation changed with the arrival of the new President of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, who set a course to improve relations with neighbors and reduce the conflict potential in the region (Cassara, 2020, 148). The newly elected President identified Central Asia as a priority in Uzbekistan's foreign policy. To this day, Uzbekistan's position has gotten rid of the emotional component and emphasizes only the importance of considering the interests of all Central Asian republics in the construction of hydroelectric power plants in the region. At the same time, it demonstrates that it is ready for more constructive cooperation in the hydropower sector, stating its readiness to jointly build hydropower plants in upstream countries. Thus, during his visit to Kyrgyzstan in 2017, the President of Uzbekistan said about joint construction of Kambarata

CEU eTD Collection

Hydropower Plant 1: "We will build the Kambarata plant together. Because we need it. Because if we revive and say that history will not forgive us, we must do it in a balanced, reasonable way, so that it would be beneficial for both sides" (Elkeeva,2021). The agreements reached were also confirmed during Shavkat Mirziyoyev's last visit to Bishkek, in March 2021. Uzbekistan's position on the Rogun hydropower plant has also softened. Following their visit to Tajikistan in 2018, the Presidents of the two countries issued a joint statement noting "the importance for Central Asia of existing and under-construction hydropower facilities for solving water and energy problems" (Government Portal Republic of Uzbekistan, 2018).

Water and Conflicts

Central Asia was identified as one of the regions with the highest probability of water conflicts. The main reason for this is the deterioration of environmental and socio-economic conditions along with increasing political tensions. One of the examples is the conflict in Kyrgyz-Tajik border. It shows how governments are failing to resolve concerns over shared water. Over the past ten years, Uzbekistan has faced water-related issues with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan due to the Syr-Darya River and hydropower plants on the basin.

Gleick's 1993 study focuses on the geopolitical dynamics of transboundary water bodies and emphasizes their historical role in fueling conflicts. The study points to political and military objectives as the root causes of such disputes. The disputes over the Jordan River, which culminated in the 1967 Arab Israeli war, and the Nile River, which is the subject of disputes between countries in Northeast Africa, are examined in detail. The world's growing population and the uneven distribution of water for various developmental needs could potentially lead to a heightened incidence of international water conflicts, particularly in the Middle East, Central Europe and Central Asia. CA is vulnerable to conflict over water resources due to competition and inadequate interstate water management cooperation.

CEU eTD Collection

According to studies done previously in water scarcity, environmental changes could be potential factors of water-related conflicts. As Homer-Dixon (1994) argued that such environmental shifts can cause societal impacts, potentially leading to major disputes. He argues that "ecological scarcity" caused by environmental change, demographic expansion, and inequitable distribution of resources is a contributing factor to water-related conflicts. Moreover, he defines "ecological change" as anthropogenic degradation of water resources, making them scarce or non-renewable. In particular, ecological scarcity in Central Asia, exemplified by the Aral Sea crisis, is caused by the unsustainable exploitation of the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers, a legacy of Soviet practices that has survived to the present day.

According to Homer-Dixon (1994), the lack of environmental resources will negatively affect national sectors and could cause conflict to rise. As the population increases and environmental concerns rise, nations may find themselves with less options to resolve disputes. Even though he discusses Central Asian difficulties in his study, he ignores the possibility that oil and gas resources could compensate the region for its declining agricultural output. Political and economic factors are not fully considered in his study; powerful countries are better equipped to handle resource shortages and conflict resolution. Furthermore, Homer-Dixon contends that, in contrast to the circumstances in Central Asia, environmental shortage is more likely to lead to international or civil disputes than intrastate ones. Here, if a nation feels that it cannot accomplish its objectives and reap the economic rewards, then interstate disputes may break out. Not at the local level, but rather at the national level, such disputes are anticipated. However, his theory agrees with the claim that water scarcity and population pressure affect two of the five Central Asian countries. To prevent interstate disputes along transboundary rivers, third party mediation is needed to promote effective transboundary water management and cooperation, given the inadequacy of the existing legal framework in the region.

CEU eTD Collection

Internship Case Study – Bond Street Theatre

Bond Street Theatre has emerged as a unique yet potentially transformative actor in the realm of border and water conflicts. Bond Street Theatre's mission is to promote peace, human rights, and mutual understanding through arts programming that inspires and informs communities and advocates for social justice (). The work of BST in post-conflict and crisis zones showed that theatre can serve as a powerful tool for communication, community development, conflict resolution and education. Therefore, in the context of Central Asia, the expertise of BST could be leveraged to address the underlying social and cultural dimensions of water governance. It can be developed in the same way as BST did the project in the India-Bangladesh border to resolve the conflict. They could develop performances that depict the shared challenges of water governance in the region by inviting all the activists and leaders of the communities, highlighting the personal stories behind the political and statistical narratives. Such performances could be staged in community centers, schools, and even along riverbanks, drawing diverse audiences from across society. Beyond those performances, BST could facilitate the delivery of workshops with local communities, water managers, and policymakers. These workshops would focus on the development of communication skills, conflict resolution techniques and an understanding of shared water-related challenges. By empowering local actors, BST can help build a group of informed and engaged stakeholders capable of advocating for equitable and sustainable water management.

Currently, BST is developing the program in Uzbekistan together with the Center for Development and Support of Initiatives "NIHOL." It is a wonderful opportunity to work on water related conflicts in the region and engaged target audience in Uzbek-Kazakh borders where they have conflicts over shared water recourses. By using theater-based programs, BST can foster dialogue between conflicting parties. This project can help to build trust and understanding which

CEU eTD Collection

are important for collaboration among the actors in transboundary river governance. As discussed with the NIHOL center this can empower local communities to participate more actively in decision-making processes and to raise their concerns and suggestions.

Overall, there is an immense potential of third parties like Bond Street Theatre on transboundary river governance in Central Asia. Looking back at the program that BST implemented overseas, it can be proved that social theater truly brings impact to the communities. It is one of the creative approaches which can complement traditional mediation efforts. By engaging communities and policymakers through the arts, BST and similar organizations can facilitate dialogue, build trust and promote solutions to the region's water governance challenges.

Conclusion

Acute issues on transboundary water governance in the region remain unresolved. The success is very low because of the national interest of each country in Central Asia. At the same time, there was no shortage of political activity. Since independence, many interstate water agreements have been signed, and new institutions have been established to regulate water issues. However, agreements and arrangements are often declarative and remain only on paper. There is still a problem of insufficient cooperation in the region (Zhiltsov et al., 2018). Water use reform is needed. It is necessary to involve all republics of the region in water cooperation. The key component of successful water cooperation in the region is considering mutual interests and third parties' involvement. For this purpose, it is necessary to bring all parties to the negotiating table and establish the process of building a common concept of water resources management. Remove excessive politicization of water issues and focus on socio-economic components. Increase the exchange of data and information, which will lead to increased trust between the

CEU eTD Collection

republics. Since trust is a fundamental component of water cooperation, the process of clarifying misunderstandings and uncertainties regarding water management decisions will be facilitated. In addition, it is important to follow the established agreements. Eventually, water can become a tool for cooperation in the region rather than a tool for political bargaining.

CEU eTD Collection

REFERENCES

Assembly of People's Representatives of the Jogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic. (1997, June 26). *On interstate water use by Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan of water resources of Kyrgyzstan* (Resolution No. 650-1). Ministry of Justice of the Kyrgyz Republic. Retrieved from https://clck.ru/Vwg7r

Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic and the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan on the Use of Water and Energy Resources of the Syrdarya River Basin. (1998). Retrieved from http://www.cawater-info.net/library/rus/gov1.pdf

An article by the President of the Republic of Tajikistan in the UN Chronicle magazine «Water for Sustainable Development». Ministry of foreign affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan 2018. URL: https://clck.ru/TxMit

Boyarkina, O.A. (2015). *Problems and prospects for the settlement of international conflicts in the field of water use in the Central Asian region*. Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation.

Bologov, Petr. 2016. "The ROghun Dam" A Source of Division in Central Asia" Carnegie Endowment for International Peace https://carnegiemoscow.org/commentary/66334

Bergesen, Helge Ole, Georg Parmann, and Øystein B. Thommessen, eds. 2018. "Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes." In *Yearbook of International Cooperation on Environment and Development 1998–99*, by Helge Ole Bergesen, Georg Parmann, and Oystein B. Thommessen, 1st ed., 176–77. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315066547-50

Cassara, Manon, Jelle Beekma, Lucia de Strasser, Oyture Anarbekov, Makhliyo Murzaeva, Sara Giska and Andrei Dörre. 2020. "Local and national institutions and policies governing water resources management" in *The Aral Sea Basin: Water for Sustainable Development in Central Asia*, edited by S. Xenarios, 136-154. Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge

Central Asian countries and international organizations. (1995, September 5). *Nukus Declaration on the issues of sustainable development of the Aral Sea Basin.* Retrieved from http://mkur.uznature.uz/rus/nukusdeklaraciya.html

Djumabaev, Kakhraman, Oyture Anarbekov, Bunyod Holmatov, Ahmad Hamidov, Zafar Gafurov, Makhliyo Murzaeva, Janez Sušnak, Shreedhar Mazkey, Hamid Mehmood, Valdimir Smakhtik. 2020. "Surface Water Rersources." In *The Aral Sea Basin: Water for Sustainable Development in Central Asia*, edited by S. Xenarios, 25-38. Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge.

Dukhovny, V., Sokolov, V., & Ziganshina, Z. (2014). *Integrated water resources management in Central Asia: The challenges of managing large transboundary rivers*. Global Water Partnership: 2014, p.60 https://clck.ru/Vx9t9

Elkeeva, K. (2017). How will Bishkek and Tashkent build hydroelectric power plants? Retrieved from https://rus.azattyk.org/a/28721985.html

CEU eTD Collection

Ergashev, B., & Avliyokulov, B. (2013). *Urbanization in Central Asia: Challenges, Issues and Prospects.* Center for Economic Research.

German Advisory Council on Global Change. (2008). *Climate change as a security risk.* Earthscan.

Gleick, Peter H. (1993). *Water and Conflict: Fresh Water Resources and International Security.* International Security

Homer-Dixon, Thomas F. (1994). *Environmental Scarcities and Violent Conflict: Evidence from Cases.* International Security

Ibatullin, Saghit and Dinara R. Ziganshina. 2020. "The future of water resources." In *The Aral Sea Basin: Water for Sustainable Development in Central Asia*, edited by S. Xenarios, 176-196. Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge.

Interstate Commission for Water Coordination of Central Asia. (1991). *Statement of heads of water economy organizations of Central Asian Republics and Kazakhstan*. Retrieved from http://www.icwc-aral.uz/statute2.htm

Interstate Commission for Water Coordination of Central Asia. (1992, February 18). *Agreement between the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Republic of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and the Republic of Uzbekistan on Cooperation in the Field of Joint Management on Utilization and Protection of Water Resources from Interstate Sources*

Iskanderova, A. (2019). *Will the Central Asian region face an ecological catastrophe?* Institute for Central Asian Studies.

Janusz-Pawletta, Barbara. 2015. "Current Legal Challenges to Institutional Governance of Transboundary Water Resources in Central Asia and Joint Management Arrangements." *Environmental Earth Sciences* 73 (2): 887–96. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12665-014-3471-7.

Khurramov, Kh. K. (2015). *The political aspect of water and energy problems in Central Asia*. Post-Soviet Issues, 4, 100-108.

Kyrgyz Republic. (2001, July 23). *On interstate use of water objects, water resources and water management constructions of the Kyrgyz Republic* (Law No 76). Ministry of Justice of the Kyrgyz Republic. Retrieved from http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/483

Karajanov, Z. (2018). *There is a desire in the countries of Central Asia to solve the water problem, but there are no ready-made recipes*. Retrieved from http://www.ritmeurasia.org/news–2018-10-12–u-stran-centralnoj-azii-est-zhelanie-re-shit-vodnuju-problemu-no-net-gotovyh-receptov-38991

Laruelle, M. (2016). *The over-securitization of water issues in Central Asia.* In Women and Water in Central Asia and South Asia. Retrieved from https://www.caa-network.org/archives/6905

CEU eTD Collection

Lillis, J. (2010). *Uzbekistan: Nursultan Nazarbayev reached a diplomatic compromise with Islam Karimov.* Eurasianet. Retrieved from https://russian.eurasianet.org/node/58099

Mirziyoyev, S., & Rahmon, E. (n.d.). *Joint statement of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the President of the Republic of Tajikistan on strengthening friendship and neighborliness.* Retrieved from https://www.gov.uz/ru/news/view/15249

Ormysheva, T.A., & Kukeyeva, F.T. (2016). *Central Asian states cooperation to solve the issue of trans-boundary rivers: Analysis of the main agreements.* International Relations and International Law Journal, 73(1), 65-69

President of the Republic of Tajikistan. (2018). *Water for Sustainable Development.* UN Chronicle. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan. Retrieved from https://clck.ru/TxMit

Rogun slightly advanced, but not enough money. (2019). Retrieved from https://clck.ru/Tx-RyV

Reuters. (2012, September 7). *Uzbek leader sounds warning over Central Asia water disputes.*

Sokov K. (2015*). Is Central Asia threatened by a war for water?*

Sputnik Kyrgyzstan. (2020). *Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan agreed to exchange electricity.* Retrieved from https://sptnkne.ws/C6Cx

UNESCO, UN-Water. (2020). *United Nations World Water Development Report 2020: Water and Climate Change.* UNESCO.

Waslekar, S. (2017). *Water is more than a strategic resource.* World Economic Forum. Retrieved from https://www.weforum.org/agen- da/2017/01/water-water-everywhere-so-why-dont-we-pay-it-more-attention/

World Meteorological Organization (WMO). (2012). *Technical Material for Water Resources Assessment*. WMO. Retrieved from https://library.wmo.int/idurl/4/48668

Yalçın, R. & Imagambetova, A. (2022). Problems of sharing transboundary water resources in Central Asia. *Akademik Yaklaşımlar Dergisi, 13* (2), 546-566.

Zhiltsov, S.S., & Bimenova, A. (2015). *Central Asian politics regarding water use of transboundary rivers.* Central Asia and the Caucasus, 18, 90-100.

Zhiltsov, S.S., Zhiltsova, M.S., Medvedev, N.P., & Slizovskiy, D.Y. (2018). *Water Resources of Central Asia: Historical Overview*. In The Handbook of Environmental Chemistry (Vol. 85, pp. 9-24).

CEU eTD Collection