
GLOBALIZATION AND WATER MANAGEMENT: THE CHANGING VALUE OF WATER

AUGUST 6-8 AWRA/IWLRI, UNIVERSITY OF DUNDEE INTERNATIONAL SPECIALTY CONFERENCE 2001

WATER SECURITY FROM MIDDLE EAST TO CENTRAL ASIA: THE ROAD FROM CONFLICT TO CO-OPERATION IN A CHANGING WORLD

Daphne Biliouri¹

ABSTRACT: This paper addresses the issue of a water crisis in two neighbouring regions that over the years have followed a different approach towards water security that has affected the political and economic agenda on a national and international level. On the one hand, the water crisis in the Middle East has been marked by continuous conflict that has contributed to the political tensions in the region amongst the states and it still poses a threat to the stability of the region as a whole. Despite intensive efforts and constant debates over the equitable division of water resources in the Middle East, the issue still remains unresolved and still attracts international attention. On the other hand, distribution of water resources in the Central Asian region has emerged as a political issue and a point of interest for the international community after the break up of the former Soviet Union. Tensions between the Central Asia republics over control of water supplies have been expressed, but there appears to be a stronger interest in solving the water debate through means of co-operation rather than conflict. These signs of co-operation are reflected in the actions on the five Central Asia republics, and they may even extend to the position of outside actors, such as China. The comparative analysis of the water crisis in these regions will establish how water can act as a destabilising factor in the political and economic relations of the states involved, and at the same time it will present the possibilities of further co-operation and joint action regarding water distribution that will enhance stability and development in the regions. After a brief description of how water has evolved to this determining factor in the politics of the two regions, an assessment of the current situation will allow the development of a future perspective. The paper aims to present a policy framework that could be applied to ensure that co-operation over water resources is the way forward for the Middle East and Central Asia. In conclusion, it will be shown that a regional co-operative approach may be the best way to strengthen relations amongst the states. In addition, any action taken at a national and regional level should be facilitated by the constructive involvement of the international community-whether that is in the form of financial aid or institutional reform.

KEY TERMS: Central Asia, water disputes, water conflicts, regional cooperation, Middle East

¹Independent Environmental Policy Consultant, Flat 15 Bryn Derw Stanley Rd. Aberystwyth SY23 1LB, Wales, UK dbiliouri@hotmail.com