

HYDRODIPLOMACY: A GROUND FOR ACTION TRANSBOUNDARY COOPERATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NESTOS RIVER BASIN, GREECE

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Transboundary water management is one of the most important universal problems in the area of environmental protection and sustainable development. Issues of transboundary water management have been in the focus of interest of many scientists, institutions, and national programs for many years but integrated transboundary water management is not satisfactorily solved even in the countries of European Community, with highly developed and efficient administration.

Transboundary cooperation is essential for the understanding of problems that occur due to different socioeconomic, administrative and legal status between the border countries and as well to differences in the objectives and gains from the management of the “common waters”. Existing treaties, agreements and cooperation institutions related to shared transboundary water resources need to be analysed in order to understand patterns of behaviour and advantages or flaws of each course of action. Sharing river basins and transboundary catchments have a direct impact on the availability of resources, especially for the downstream countries. Both the quantity and quality of the resources can be altered by upstream countries plays thus a decisive role on both economic development and environmental integrity of the region.

Hydrodiplomacy promotes the first basic principal of sustainable development, namely efficiency through the integrated river basin approach, as a part of a national strategy for water resources management. It incorporates qualitative and quantitative aspects of water by developing transboundary monitoring mechanisms, for controlling and assessing the different water parameters and it promotes common water development plans through integrated designing of water projects.

The principle of effectiveness, gives rise to the implementation of a series of economic instruments, and rules for the distribution of costs, rehabilitation, protection and preservation of common water deposits.

The principle of equity and equality refers to fair access to common water resources and to the adoption of rules and measures for the best exploitation and management of common water resources.

Greece is sharing the 25% of her water resources with neighbor countries. There are 5 transboundary rivers crossing N.Macedonia in 4 of which Greece is on the downstream part. Today that both the environmental and economic value of water is worldwide \recognized there is an intensive need for transboundary cooperation in order to preserve development, welfare and peace on the one hand and protection of the environment on the other.

The paper examines the perspectives of transboundary cooperation in the case of

transboundary Nestos/ Mesta river basin between Greece and Bulgaria, and forms a framework for the sustainable economic development of the region.

From all the transboundary rivers of Greece, only Nestos river is supported by a bilateral agreement which encounters a lot of problems in its implementation.

In order to achieve the goal of economic and environmental development in the area an integrated approach is needed. For the Greek part of the river basin, priority should be given to the preservation of agricultural development, the sufficient functioning of the energy production dams, the protection of the delta, and the enhancement of tourism. Special attention should be given to the following :

The quality and quantity of water entering the country from Bulgaria affects important activities in the region, such as energy production from the hydropower stations, agriculture, tourism and the ecosystem of the delta. The economic development of the area depends on the river's status.

The District of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace as a rural area, is poor in infrastructure and mainly economically dependent on the primary sector.

The level of development in the Greek and Bulgarian part of the catchment is different. Priorities in the Bulgarian part consist of alternative development plans for the exploitation of available water resources, new infrastructure namely WWTPs for the environmental improvement of the upper part of the river. Bulgaria's development programs concerning the water use water have a direct impact on water management schemes in Greece.

The construction of the dams for energy production alongside the river pose a threat to the biodiversity of the protected delta of the river. The control of water discharge may cause future problems in agriculture and ecosystems, which depend highly on water flow.

The agricultural development in the river's catchment area depends directly on the existence of a joint integrated framework for the management of the river by both countries.

European principles and priorities concerning sustainable development and joint water management have not yet been adopted by the Bulgarian government.

No common water resource management and environmental protection plan has been established yet. This will be especially hindered by the disparities between national monitoring and legislative systems between the two countries.

Pollution sources along the Bulgarian part of the river are not quantified, creating therefore a risky environment for the management of the downstream part of the river, as well as for the environmental situation of the Nestos delta.

The improvement of the existing legal framework will enhance current transboundary cooperation. A series of issues will be regulated by the agreement, namely water protection and use, institutional arrangements for transboundary water cooperation, management plans, harmonization of programmes and measures, monitoring and research, transfer of know-how and technology, as well as joint projects. The creation of an active transboundary steering Committee will facilitate the communication and cooperation between the two countries. The agreements which have emerged from efforts of "hydrodiplomacy" clearly reflect the "good will" of all interested parties to share responsibility, promote basin wide management and multipurpose development.