

ENVSEC promotes cooperation in the Dniester river basin

Progress on transboundary water management despite long-term frozen conflict

Pollution and frequent flooding in Moldova and Ukraine affect environment and human security in the Dniester river basin. Thanks to modest funding from the ENVSEC Initiative, the two countries are now joining hands to manage the shared river basin in a more integrated and sustainable way.



The Dniester River, one of the largest East European rivers, influences the environment, economy and politics of the two countries. It starts in the Ukrainian Carpathian mountains, flows through Moldova and reenters Ukraine where it flows into the Black Sea. In Moldova, the river marks the border with the breakaway region of Transnistria.

Upstream water use for hydropower, households, agriculture, the mining industry and the textile industry, so important for the economy of the two countries, are affecting the natural balance of the wetlands ecosystems downstream. Centuries of reliable ecosystem services such as recreation, drinking water, irrigation and commercial fishing are thus under threat.

The combination of conflicting water needs, pollution, economic loss and heavy floods puts livelihoods and environment in both Moldova and Ukraine at risk. The risks contribute to tension and social instability. The need for regional cooperation is evident, but challenging due to deficiencies in the legal and institutional framework.

The ENVSEC partners, OSCE, UNECE and UNEP, and local experts have prepared an assessment that highlighted the need for cooperation between the countries, and the added challenge of the frozen Trans-Dniestrian conflict. Two subsequent ENVSEC projects have leveraged financial support and regional engagement throughout the river basin, counting 12 different national partners. The goodwill generated at regional level has been widespread, as confirmed by more than 45 individual interviews organized for evaluation purposes by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

Thanks to the improved understanding of the nexus between transboundary environmental and security risks in the region, the ENVSEC partners now work closely with local authorities and enjoy strong support from a number of national non government organizations.

Health authorities in the region are working together on a joint drinking water quality monitoring system. Ministers have taken the initiative to launch an additional ENVSEC project to reduce cross-border security risks from climate change, in particular flooding, by improving the adaptive capacity in both countries.

ENVSEC most significant achievement has been to foster cross-border dialogue despite the ongoing frozen conflict, and to build national capacity to manage the Dniester River Basin as a shared resource.

The ENVSEC Dniester projects have demonstrated that international organizations can be an effective catalyst for regional cooperation and stability by bringing a balanced combination of local presence and compatible technical and diplomacy skills. A series of small investments have generated concrete results and sustainable national ownership. There are prospects of additional donor funds for further development, provided that the countries can demonstrate continued commitment and agree on legally binding agreements.

Projects on transboundary cooperation and sustainable management in the Dniester River basin

Dniester I (2004-2005)

Feasibility study funded by OSCE and the UNECE

Funds: 68 000 USD

Main outcomes:

- Transboundary Diagnostic Study for the Dniester River Basin
- Network of stakeholders
- Protocol of intentions regarding cooperation for the environmental rehabilitation of the Dniester river basin

Dniester II (2006-2007)

ENVSEC programme of work funded by the Swedish Environment Protection Agency and Finnish Government and implemented jointly by the OSCE, UNECE and UNEP in close collaboration with Ukrainian and Moldavian authorities and NGOs

Funds: 100 000 USD

Main outcomes:

- Action Programme to Improve Transboundary Cooperation and Sustainable Management of the Dniester River Basin in 2007-10
- Draft regional Dniester river basin agreement
- Jointly adopted regulations on stakeholder participation, sanitary-epidemiological quality control and information management: <http://dniester.org/>

Dniester III (2008-2011)

ENVSEC programme of work funded by the Swedish Environment Protection Agency and Finnish Government and implemented jointly by the OSCE, UNECE and UNEP in close collaboration with Ukrainian and Moldavian authorities and NGOs

Funds: 750 000 USD

Main outcomes are:

- Activities for enhanced public awareness, such as the bulleting “Dniester without Borders”, the annual Dniester Festival for children, tree-planting, and art competitions
- Assessment of transboundary water quality monitoring
- Online Geographic Information System (GIS): http://maps.grida.no/dniestergis_rus/
- Drafting and negotiation of a draft Dniester river basin agreement
- Support to drafting bilateral Agreement on fish conservation and fisheries in the Dniester river basin
- Facilitation of joint water control at transboundary sites and a draft legal framework for such activities