

## **Pioneering water cooperation in South Caucasus ENVSEC facilitates negotiations between Georgia and Azerbaijan**

**Southern Caucasus is facing multiple inter-state tensions, hindering potential benefits from the development of cross-border cooperation. Thanks to ENVSEC facilitation, bilateral cooperation on the Kura-Aras river between Georgia and Azerbaijan is developing as an example for the region.**



One of the environmental and security risks identified by ENVSEC in the Southern Caucasus, is the management of the Kura-Aras river basin due to its size and transboundary nature. Cooperation between the South Caucasus countries on quantity, quality and availability of water resources is vitally important. Nevertheless, because of the political situation in the region, cooperation initiatives are easily jeopardized.

ENVSEC support was requested by Georgia and Azerbaijan to help the negotiation of a bilateral water agreement. Georgia also asked for ENVSEC support for its preparation to ratify and implement the UNECE Convention of the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention).

OSCE and UNECE, on behalf of ENVSEC, responded by launching a project in 2009 to strengthen the transboundary water cooperation between Georgia and Azerbaijan.

An assessment of legal and institutional requirements and cost implications of accessioning Georgia to the Water Convention was finalized in 2010. The assessment concluded that Georgia is ready to ratify the convention and added confidence that a bilateral agreement could potentially be negotiated.

The first round of consultations took place between representatives of the Ministries of Environment and Foreign Affairs of both Georgia and Azerbaijan. The outcome was a common framework for the scope and principal provisions for a bilateral agreement.

The second round of consultations built on the agreed framework and resulted in a draft full-text bilateral agreement that was submitted officially to the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan and Georgia in October 2010.

The third round of bilateral consultations is planned to take place in Baku in spring 2011.

So far no immediate stumbling blocks have been identified for the ultimate objective – a signed agreement. The demonstration of the willingness to develop bilateral cooperation

on transboundary water management in Georgia and Azerbaijan is of very high importance and inspiration to the other countries in the region.

ENVSEC is committed to continue its support to bilateral cooperation once the bilateral water agreement is officially in place and operational. Furthermore, ENVSEC, under the leadership of UNDP, is also contributing to the UNDP-GEF project "Reducing transboundary degradation of the Kura-Aras River Basin". A project exploring possibilities for a basin-wide agreement among Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, IR of Iran and possibly Turkey.

**Project title:**

*Implementation of the UNECE Water Convention and development of an agreement on the management of transboundary watercourses shared by Georgia and Azerbaijan*

**Main responsible ENVSEC partners:**

UNECE and OSCE

**Sponsor:**

Canadian International Development Agency

**ENVSEC budget:**

110,038 USD

**Local partners:**

Ministry of Environment Protection and Natural Resources of Georgia

Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Azerbaijan

**Project outcomes:**

1. Preparation of Georgia for ratification of the UNECE Transboundary Water Convention
2. A draft agreement between Georgia and Azerbaijan that establishes a framework for cooperation between the two countries on:
  - prevention and control of water pollution,
  - distribution of water resources,
  - water flow regulations,
  - conservation of biodiversity,
  - emergency situations,
  - monitoring and environmental assessment,
  - data and information exchange
  - public participation
  - a joint commission for protection and rational use of water resources of the Kura River basin

Further information: <http://www.unece.org/env/water/caucasus.htm>