

## **International Waters and Bio-Diplomacy**

Bio-diplomacy can prove decisive in the management of international water resources. Since most European countries share water resources (lakes, rivers, seas, etc.), complex environmental challenges arise. The international and multifaceted nature of the development of waterways constitutes a key concern for policy planners and decision-makers, throughout Europe and world-wide. The successful resolution of potential conflicts – especially in view of the prospective enlargement of the European Union – is an area deserving special attention and a major opportunity for the enhancement of international co-operation.

Easy access to water is not an end to itself for any society, but a means to other ends: health, industrial and agricultural production, economic development, to name a few. Pressures coming from population growth, such as greater demands for irrigation and greater resource needs world-wide, increase the competition for freshwater. Nowhere in the world is that competition more intense than in the arid and semi-arid parts of the world, where water scarcity has been, and still is, a chronic phenomenon which has played a major role in forming the political, social and economic relations in these regions for thousands of years. While water scarcity can increase because of rapid population growth, overutilisation of water resources – both surface and underground – and the pollution of water systems can also cause much concern.

According to hydrologists, countries with annual water supplies of 1000-2000cm per person are regarded as water stressed, while countries with annual supplies of 500cm per person are under the category of absolute scarcity, which means that lack of water has economic and social effects on those countries, such as less food production, social and economic underdevelopment, ineffective protection of the natural environment and employment of expensive methods in order to augment water supply. While basin-wide co-operation regarding international water resources is the best possible development and the greatest challenge for policy makers, control of water resources in an environment of water scarcity will always be a means by which a state can exert political pressure on others. Despite efforts for resolution of water disputes based on confidence-building measures, water cannot be separated from broader political contexts.

The protection of natural resources and biodiversity requires first and foremost a deeper and effective integration of environmental protection strategies in water management. Full implementation of the pertinent legislation is imperative, and international agreements must emphasise water protection as a priority. In addition, agriculture, landscape, forestry and marine policies must be coupled with new integrative initiatives – such as developing a soil strategy for Europe – to prevent water pollution. The European Community's 6<sup>th</sup> Environmental Action Programme has already stated that more attention will be given to protecting the marine environment.

Bio-diplomacy can prove decisive in international water management. The promotion of co-operation and understanding among nations in favour of the environment can lead to a convergence of the aspirations of individual states in pursuit of multilateral long-term plans for viable water resource management and protection. (See [Cross References](#))

### **Danube River Bonds**

Focusing on the Danube river as an international water management model, the Biopolitics International Organisation (B.I.O.) held a major international conference in Bratislava, Slovakia, in June 1997, with the participation of leading scientists, diplomats and government representatives from all the Danube countries and other parts of the world. The conference promoted new mechanisms for redress of the environmental pressures resulting from water pollution and the uncontrolled use of the land and sea, and also emphasised the international character of sustainable water management and its key role in conflict prevention and resolution. Stakeholders and citizens were encouraged to take more ownership of efforts to protect the environment and to be actively involved in international co-operation and bio-diplomacy for the protection of water resources. [Click here to view proceedings.](#)

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