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UN 2023 Water Conference Side Event

Water Security and Hydro-diplomacy: Turning the Spotlight on Knowledge-Sharing, Accelerating Cooperative Action, and the Role of Multilateral Forums

March 21, 6-8 pm EST, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung NY Office

Organized by: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) New York and Stimson Center

Background:

On the eve of the UN 2023 Water Conference, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) New York Office and Stimson Center co-hosted an official side event on “*Water Security and Hydro-diplomacy: Turning the Spotlight on Knowledge-Sharing, Accelerating Cooperative Action, and the Role of Multilateral Forums.*” The event commenced with opening remarks from Dr. **Lars Hänsel**, Head of the Department of Europe and North America at KAS. Ambassador **Tanja Miškova**, Ambassador-at-Large for Water Diplomacy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Slovenia, and Dr. **Anders Jägerskog**, Program Manager of the Cooperation in International Waters in Africa (CIWA) Trust Fund and Transboundary Waters Focal Point at the World Bank, then shared their key perspectives in a session moderated by Ms. **Susanne Schmeier**, Associate Professor of Water Law and Diplomacy and Head of the Water Governance Department at IHE Delft. In keeping with the Conference’s multistakeholder approach, the event drew a diverse range of participants from the United Nations system, government, civil society, academia, and private sector. The event also served as a soft launch for [*Water Security: Diplomacy, Global Cooperation, and Effective Management of Shared Rivers*](#), the culminating report from the International Hydro-diplomacy conference organized by the Stimson Center and KAS Multinational Development Policy Dialogue in November 2022, in Brussels. Ms. **Farwa Aamer**, Research Analyst at the Stimson Center, provided an overview of the report as well as the multi-year project which is designed to promote transboundary water cooperation, knowledge sharing, and peer-to-peer connectivity on shared challenges of water scarcity and climate change in water-stressed and conflict-prone regions.

Water Action Agenda

Building on the on-going joint efforts of KAS and the Stimson Center, we commit to promoting and advancing hydro-diplomacy and transboundary water cooperation. We will continue to work with partners, experts, and all relevant stakeholders to provide a platform and pathways for greater dialogue, connectivity, collaborative action on transboundary water cooperation, the implementation of SDG 6, and championing the Water Action Agenda. As a part of our commitment, we have published a [policy paper](#) offering recommendations and pathways to improve transboundary water cooperation and develop collaborative structures and institutions, both at national and regional levels. Our official commitment to the WAA can be accessed [here](#).

Key Issues discussed on the topic of trans-boundary water management:

- How can we safeguard up-stream/down-stream solidarity in an age of enhanced climate distress, demographic pressures and geopolitical tensions? In particular, the International Sava River Basin Commission was highlighted as a successful example of transboundary water management and cooperation among the riparian countries of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, and Slovenia. The Commission has contributed to the maintenance of peace and stability in the once conflict-torn region, and the lessons learned and best practices from the Sava River Basin can be applied to other transboundary contexts and cooperation frameworks around the world. The inextricable link between climate change and water security, one crisis cannot be addressed without the addressing other. The concern for exacerbating climate change and its broad ramifications has been a driving factor behind some advancement in transboundary water cooperation. With the aggravating effects of climate change, issues concerning water supply and safety must be discussed much more on regional level.
- The issue of transboundary water management has to feature more prominently in future water summits. Transboundary water management can be an area for cooperation in zones of conflict but can also aggravate grievances between neighbouring states.
- Transboundary governance institutions for water management often lack control on water-ways or sanctioning capacities.
- The importance of developing a more holistic and inclusive outlook. Water management and cooperation was traditionally seen as a technical element. Now as the water crisis is fast emerging to be a global systemic risk, it is important to consider an integrated and interdisciplinary approach where water-induced conflicts, migrations, and economic issues receive the same level of attention.
- Transboundary water management remains a predominantly governmental process. There is a perennial gap in participation and engagement where certain stakeholders, including inter alia local communities, women, and youth, are often overlooked and undermined in larger policy conversations. To that end, there is a need to strengthen local communities' resilience and capacities to adapt to growing water scarcity.

Solutions to the global water crisis should also be rooted in and driven by the communities affected.

- Overall need for a new concept of peace where water and climate-security risks are featuring more prominently.

Key recommendations for action:

- Continue to raise greater awareness of the dire consequences of water insecurity as well as increased recognition of the importance and benefits of transboundary water cooperation;
- Increased engagement of women, youth, and minorities in transboundary water management decisions;
- Enhance the capacity of regional organizations on transboundary water management and oversight;
- Increased funding and financing to support transboundary water cooperation and to incentivize inclusive processes;
- Improved and more effective financial governance of transboundary water management and cooperation projects, to ensure that project funds directly benefit local communities;