

29. September 2021 special session: Water and Peace

Mr Jüri Ratas, on behalf of Estonia

Meeting of Parties to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention)

THEME: TRANSBOUNDARY WATER COOPERATION: A CATALYST FOR PEACE

Questions raised by the moderator Mr TÜRK:

1. How does Estonia see and promote the linkages between water and peace?
2. Based on the Estonian experience in transboundary cooperation, how can we promote effective water cooperation in order to strive for peace in transboundary basins, especially those affected by tensions and conflicts? What is the role of the Water Convention?

First of all, I would like to thank Mr TÜRK for the wonderful introduction of the theme of this panel and for the questions raised.

As we know, Estonia and Russian Federation share the largest transboundary lake in Europe, named Lake Peipsi. It is a unique waterbody with a rich ecosystem. We have a very active transboundary water cooperation with Russia. We have learned the importance of setting up detailed instructions for, and the format of cooperation.

The slight difference of our countries' legal and management frameworks is the most challenging task for us. Here the Water Convention comes into play - countries can rely on their help and expertise. The Water Convention sets principles to cooperate and to hold consultations, exchange information, conclude agreements and establish joint bodies.

As a result of cooperation between our countries we see positive outcomes. For example:

- Pollution is reduced in waterbodies thanks to the implementation of water protection measures taken by both sides;
- Thanks to efficient and well-co-ordinated monitoring activities we have up to date information on the lake's ecosystem.

And all these measures we take are decided by the Estonia-Russian Joint Commission established almost 25 years ago, and it comes together annually.

I also can't leave unmentioned that climate change is global priority. I am glad that in recent years it is also being addressed by our Joint Commission. Good cooperation on transboundary waters ensures that shared water resources are managed commonly in a sustainable manner. This leads to stability and peace, as countries are less likely to enter into intense conflicts over transboundary waters. We do not see big disagreements, which cannot be solved by working together actively.

I would like to highlight that a possible way to promote effective water cooperation is promoting the benefits of transboundary water cooperation.

Estonia believes it is important to define and assess the benefits of transboundary water cooperation. We have lead the activity of promoting and communicating these benefits over the

last 3 years and are eager to continue. The benefits act as a confirmation to countries that transboundary water cooperation is necessary. It also helps to ensure political support and funding.

For example we run several projects targeting Lake Peipsi. Thanks to a project which ended in 2015, we focused on the promotion of sustainable socio-economic and environmental development of the Lake Peipsi area. Several actions were taken which benefitted both Estonia and Russia. The measures have already contributed to the improvement of the environmental condition and the decrease of nutrient load in the Lake Peipsi basin.

Therefore, I am convinced that the joint undertaking of a benefit assessment is an excellent way to build and maintain a relationship of mutual trust and support. We also believe that benefit assessments can contribute towards non-parties' accession to the Water Convention. And maybe in future years, the heads of parliamentary bodies should come together and meet on the topic of the Water Convention!

Thank you!