

**President Emomali Rahmon
should be widely supported by the West**

My final OSCE report has just been published. I was appointed in 2010 by the Kazakh Presidency of the OSCE as Personal Representative of the Chairman in Office responsible for the ecology and environment of Central Asia. This massive 350 page report covers and looks for solutions to all of the environmental disasters which have afflicted the five Central Asian republics, such as the desiccation of the Aral Sea, the Soviet nuclear tests legacy in the Semipalatinsk region of East Kazakhstan and the uranium tailings dumps. In respect of the highly sensitive upstream/downstream water issues and the role played by Tajikistan, the report is both positive and optimistic.

Skirmishes with drug smugglers crossing illegally from Afghanistan occur regularly, as Tajikistan is the first stop on the drugs route from there to Russia and the West. Tajikistan has also resisted attempts by Islamist rebels to operate training camps on its territory. In my own visit to the country I was impressed by the level of internal security and I believe President Rahmon must be congratulated on his efforts to maintain stability and security and should be widely supported by the West for his efforts to maintain Tajikistan as a strategic buffer state, preventing the incursion of drug smugglers and terrorists from Afghanistan and Pakistan.

I have stated in the report that the mountainous landscape of Tajikistan means that scarce water resources and limited water availability are not a concern. However, as an upstream country, I acknowledge that Tajikistan has responsibilities towards its downstream neighbours. I concluded that Tajikistan takes this responsibility very seriously and indeed I was assured by senior government officials in Dushanbe that it never has and never will withhold water from its neighbours.

In terms of water policies my report notes that the Tajik government has a key objective to increase hydropower capacity and this is the main concern for other states in Central Asia. The Tajik government is currently trying to finish

the Rogun and Sangtuda dam projects on the Vakhsh River. The Rogun project began in the 1980s but was halted during the Tajik Civil War in 1993.

Uzbekistan has vehemently objected to the Rogun project, claiming it would give control of the river's flow to Tajikistan and could cause devastation if breached by an earthquake, but I have noted that such negative reactions are premature. In my report I suggest that Uzbekistan and other downstream nations in Central Asia should await the outcome of a critical analysis of the project by World Bank experts which is due to be published later this year.

I have also pointed out that the Rogun reservoir, with a projected 335 metre high clay and stone embankment, will be broadly similar to the Nurek reservoir, located about 75km east of Dushanbe in the Pamir Mountains. Nurek also has a 300m high earthfill dam, with currently the largest reservoir in Tajikistan, stretching back for 70 km with a surface area of over 98km² and a maximum depth of 220m. Nurek, constructed during Soviet times, has withstood countless major earthquakes over four decades and is still functioning perfectly. I state in the report that I cannot see why Rogun should be any different, but I am happy to leave the final decision on its viability to the World Bank experts.

The Rogun reservoir is upstream of Nurek on the Vakhsh River, approximately 100 km northeast of Dushanbe.

I note in my report that it is common for tensions to arise between the upstream and downstream users of large dams. Some well-known examples include the Attaturk Dam on the Euphrates River and the Pa Mong Dam on the Mekong. I am not surprised therefore, that tension has arisen over Tajikistan's plans for Rogun.

However, I clarify in the report that the upstream countries in Central Asia, (Tajikistan /Kyrgyzstan) possess nearly 90% of the region's water resources and control the heads of Central Asia's major rivers. However, the majority of water in Central Asia is consumed by the downstream countries - Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan - with the latter consuming the most. This upstream-downstream dichotomy has often been a source of tension and it

has been suggested that conflict could ensue if a solution is not agreed upon soon. The key issue is the downstream states' growing consumption of water for summer irrigation mirrored against the upstream states' withholding of water to generate power for winter heating needs.

I conclude in the report that the proper management of water by both the upstream and downstream nations is an essential prerequisite to avoiding future tension and conflict. I therefore seek assurances that the upstream countries will continue to provide a full flow of water during the summer months to enable irrigation to be carried out downstream. But I also call for proper water management in the downstream nations, insisting on concrete lined reservoirs and irrigation channels to prevent water loss and the introduction of droplet irrigation rather than wasteful flooding systems.

Once again my report congratulates the efforts made by President Rahmon of Tajikistan in ratifying a number of international conventions including the UN Watercourses Convention (1997). At the First Asian Pacific Water Summit in December 2007, President Rahmon emphasised the importance of water-related international legal tools in solving trans-boundary water issues in Central Asia, stating that, "elaboration and adoption of International Water Conventions could be one of the important steps in a unification of efforts which would determine universal principles of water policy whilst taking into account the interests of all consumers". Tajikistan initiated the International Decade for Action "Water for Life" (2005-2015) and advocated that greater cooperation is needed among Central Asian states to tackle trans-boundary water-related issues.

I note that President Rahmon's laudable objectives can be realised through the Rogun project which can play an essential role in restoring economic prosperity to Tajikistan through the export of electricity to Pakistan and Afghanistan, while at the same time helping to stabilise economically these volatile neighbouring countries. I mention in the report that I held high-level talks in Dushanbe with the Tajik Foreign Minister Hamrokhan Zarifi, during which we extensively discussed water issues.

The Foreign Minister pointed out that 60% of the rivers which serve Central Asia are sourced in Tajikistan. He told me “We have never and will never restrict water flow to our downstream neighbours. During Soviet times it was calculated that Tajikistan’s justifiable water needs amounted to 15% of the Amu Darya. In fact we have only ever used around 10 to 11% and we will continue to do so even after Rogun is operational.”

“But”, Mr Hamrokhon Zarifi said, “Tajikistan needs energy and Rogun will provide a source of green, environmentally friendly energy which is cheap and plentiful. We have a major problem with melting glaciers. One third of our glacier cover has disappeared in the past 100 years. Water from the Amu Darya and Syr Darya is being used excessively for irrigation and these projects have drained the Aral Sea.”

My report also notes the discussion I had during a constructive meeting in Dushanbe with Shukurjon Zuhurov Chairman (Speaker) of the Majilis. Mr Zuhurov told me “We maintain good relations with the EU which we regard as very important. We have enjoyed close bi-lateral relations since 1989 and many cooperative agreements have been signed. The European Commission opened an office in Dushanbe in 1993. We have many EU joint-programmes involving, for instance, food and medicine support and drinking water quality. The main focus of a framework agreement signed with the EU in 2004 is border control and the fight against drug trafficking.”

“But,” he continued, “Our most important issue is Hydro Electric Power (HEP). When we were part of the USSR, we supplied cotton and the Soviets supplied us with energy. But HEP is the only way to raise our economy. We currently produce 25-30 billion KWs per annum. We have the potential to produce 500 billion KW. So Rogun is a life or death project for us. It was almost completed in 1990, but then the civil war halted all further construction. We need to reconstruct and refurbish Rogun.”

Finally, I congratulate President Rahmon on his key support for The Central Asia-South Asia 1000 (CASA-1000) project. This is a regional project providing for the construction of high voltage electricity transmission lines for

electricity exports from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to Pakistan via Afghanistan. It will help to rebuild the economy of these volatile countries and in so doing, assist in the restoration of peace and stability to this beleaguered zone.

STRUAN STEVENSON,

Member of the European Parliament (MEP)

Struan Stevenson is a Conservative Euro MP representing the United Kingdom in the European Parliament. He is President of the European Parliament's Delegation for Relations with Iraq and President of the influential Climate Change, Biodiversity & Sustainable Development Intergroup.