



Hybrid Diplomacy in a Nexus Approach; Managing Shared Water Resources in Kura-Aras River Basin

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ABSTRACT

In the 21st century, governments have attempted to overcome the limits of their sovereignty in the non-navigational uses of shared water resources through the promotion of water diplomacy. The resolution of water disputes between upstream and downstream states has gone beyond the framework of official diplomatic relations between riparian states, linking with regional and international peace and security, climate, energy, land, and food issues, and incorporating various nexuses in the literature on transboundary water management. While the concept of nexus refers to interconnected components, the concept of "hybrid diplomacy" promotes the participation of new non-state, supranational, and transnational actors, thereby open a new field of diplomatic activity. The official actors in the Kura-Aras River Basin have different economic and political conditions, necessitating the adoption of hybrid diplomacy in the nexus approach to advance water management in the basin, utilizing all capacities. The main question in this regard is, "How can a hybrid diplomacy in the Nexus approach contribute to successful shared water resources management in the Kura-Aras River Basin?" To answer this question, this research examines the hypothesis that hybrid diplomacy enables the management of transboundary water resources in the Kura-Aras basin through stakeholder networking and dialogue initiatives within a nexus framework. The findings of this study demonstrate that this initiative enhances political commitment to capacity building, improves the efficiency and effectiveness of water management through multilateral coordination, and provides a political strategy that enables all stakeholders to pursue their interests in line with current policies.

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Introduction

Given the increasing importance of global freshwater resources and undeniable value of non-navigation uses of international water resources for sustainable development, many countries have been involved in these resources and they have fallen under the conflicting jurisdiction of two or more states, leading to conflicts in their utilization. The transition from island-based approaches of countries to integrated water resource management (IWRM) marked the shift towards joint basin management. IWRM emphasizes coordinated and sustainable water development and management, aiming to maximize economic and social well-being in a fair manner without compromising the sustainability of vital ecosystems. In practice, the lack of integrated water resource management coupled with inflexibility towards various socio-ecological changes became apparent, as IWRM did not demonstrate the capacity for internal change and appropriate adaptation to the complex human-nature interactions within water resource systems. With persistent challenges, water governance emerged to provide a broader and more comprehensive response to water issues, focusing on decision-making processes and relevant institutions regarding water usage. However, a paradigm shift occurred with the emergence of the nexus approach. The nexus approach can be central or non-centralized, meaning that a sector (node) can play a central role with direct connections to other sectors or not. Different types of nexuses are observed, ranging from interactions among four sectors to two, as the priorities of countries in each shared basin differ. Climate-land-energy-water nexus, water-food-energy-climate nexus, environmental-water-climate nexus, land use-climate-energy nexus, water-energy-climate nexus, water-food-energy nexus, water-land nexus, energy-food nexus, water-energy nexus, irrigation-energy nexus are some of the nexus frameworks identified across diverse sources.

In the Kura-Aras Basin, each of the five countries - Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iran, and Türkiye - face challenges in managing their water resources. However, the management of the Kura-Aras Basin has never been jointly considered in terms of establishing rules and accepting international norms. Moreover, the extensive dam projects in Türkiye, coupled with the increasing impacts of climate change, have further exacerbated tensions among basin countries. These challenges persist due to the unresolved political conflicts inherited from the Soviet era, which continue to influence institutional and legal structures, as well as water management and cooperation efforts. Transboundary cooperation on shared water resources remains weak, and competition among countries for utilizing these resources for economic development hinders the establishment of effective and applicable multilateral agreements and the adoption of sustainable frameworks for transboundary water management. However, positive developments can be observed.

At the bilateral level, environmental issues in the basin have fostered increased cooperation. At the multilateral level, the involvement of the European Union (EU) as the main actor, based on its neighborhood policy, the UNECE Water Convention, the Water Framework Directive (WFD), and the Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystems Nexus, has played a key role in creating a collaborative framework. The EU has signed agreements with Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, and these countries have committed to aligning their environmental laws closer to EU regulations and collaborating with partner countries in transboundary water management. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the EU Water Initiative have also played a role in this regard. However, the research at hand does not delve into the specifics of different types of water nexuses in various regions, as there is already existing literature on the subject. Instead, the focus of this article is to identify the role of hybrid diplomacy actors in the nexus approach, which are often overlooked in traditional diplomacy. The main question addressed is: How can hybrid diplomacy in the nexus approach contribute to the successful shared water resource management in the Kura-Aras River Basin?

Through a document analysis research method, the hypothesis is examined that hybrid diplomacy, through the formation of stakeholder networks and dialogue initiatives, enables the management of transboundary water in the Kura-Aras Basin using a nexus approach. The research shows that compared to other aspects of diplomacy; limited attention has been given to hybrid diplomacy. For example, in the book "Hybrid Diplomacy with NGOs," the author examines hybrid diplomacy through interactions with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Italy. The book specifically focuses on the participation between governments (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and civil society organizations, which has proven effective in advancing new issues and changing norms in international relations, as Italy has employed this approach over the long term (Marchetti, 2021). In the chapter titled "Hybrid

Diplomacy beyond Classical Diplomacy," the author defines hybrid diplomacy and highlights its differences from classical interstate diplomacy, digital diplomacy, and public diplomacy, as well as hybrid warfare. However, the concept of hybrid diplomacy in the nexus approach to transboundary water resource management has not been employed in any previous research. This study therefore seeks to overcome the analytical impasse resulting from the dichotomy between "old" (state-based) diplomacy and "new" (non-state) diplomacy and provides a space for various actors intertwined in the water-energy-environment nexus in the Kura-Aras Basin, employing hybrid diplomacy.

1. State Actors in the Kura-Aras Basin

The state actors in the Kura-Aras Basin include five countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iran, and Türkiye. These countries have a stake in the Kura-Aras Basin and are considered state actors in the region. Russia is usually not considered a riparian country in the basin since it controls less than 1% of the total basin area. A look at Map 1 of the Kura-Aras Basin illustrates the respective shares of each country in the basin.



Map 1. THE Kura- Aras BASIN

Source: (UNECE, 2007:110)

The Kura-Aras Basin itself encompasses several sub-basins, including the Agstev, Iori, Alazani, Debet, Potskhovi, and Ktsia-Khrami for the Kura River, and the Akhuryan, Arpa, Vorotan (Bargushad), Voghji, and Kotur (Qotur) for the Aras River, as indicated in the following Table 1.

Table 1. Kura- Aras Basin: TRANSBOUNDARY WATERS

Basin/sub-basin(s)	Riparian countries	Recipient	Total area (km ²)	Lakes in the basin
Kura	AM, AZ, GE, IR, TR	Caspian Sea	188,000	
Iori	AZ, GE	Kura	5,255	
Alazani	AZ, GE	Kura	11,455	
Debet	AM, GE	Kura	4,100	
Agstev	AM, GE	Kura	2,500	
Potskhovi	GE, TR	Kura	1,840	Lake Jandari,
Ktsia-Khrami	AM, GE	Kura	8,340	Lake Kartsakhi,
Aras	AM, AZ, IR, TR	Kura	102,000	Aras Arpachay,
Akhuryan	AM, TR	Aras	9,700	Baraji reservoir,
Arpa	AM, AZ	Aras	2,630	Aras Govsaghynyn Reservoir
Vorotan (Bargushad)	AM, AZ	Aras	5,650	
Voghji	AM, AZ	Aras	1,175	
Kotur (Qotur)*	IR, TR	Aras	...	

*The assessment of water bodies in italics was not included in the table (source UNECE, 2007:106)

During the General Assembly's adoption of the resolution on the Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses on May 21, 1997, Armenia, Georgia, and Iran voted in favor, while Türkiye voted against, and Azerbaijan abstained (A/RES/51/229). Armenia and Georgia ratified the Convention in 1999, while Azerbaijan did so in 2003, whereas Iran and Türkiye have not taken any action in this regard (Status of UN Watercourses Convention, 2023).

Another significant international convention is the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, which was initially opened by UNECE in 1992 for Europe and entered into force in 1996 (UNECE Watercourses Convention, 2023). With the amendment of the Convention in 2003, all UN member states were allowed to accede to it, and with an increasing number of member countries, the amendment became effective in 2016. Among basin countries, Azerbaijan became a member of this convention in 2003. The Convention has two protocols. The Protocol on Civil Liability and Compensation for Damage Caused by the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents has not been implemented to date (Status of Protocol on Civil Liability, 2023). However, the Protocol on Water and Health to the 1992 Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes has been in force since 2005 (Status of Protocol on Water and Health, 2023). Azerbaijan joined this protocol in 2003, and Armenia and Georgia have signed it in 1999. While the signing of the protocol does not impose obligations, according to Article 18 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties:

" A State is obliged to refrain from acts which would defeat the object and purpose of a treaty when: (a) it has signed the treaty or has exchanged instruments constituting the treaty subject to ratification, acceptance or approval, until it shall have made its intention clear not to become a party to the treaty; or (b) it has expressed its consent to be bound by the treaty, pending the entry into force of the treaty and provided that such entry into force is not unduly delayed." (Vienna Convention, 2003)

The table below (Table 2) illustrates the level of participation of countries in the Kura-Aras River Basin in international conventions.

Table 2. Kura- Aras Basin: International Conventions/Protocols

countries	Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses*		Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes**		Protocol on Water and Health to the 1992 Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes***	
Armenia	-	-	-	-	Armenia	17 Jun 1999 (Signature)
Azerbaijan	-	-	Azerbaijan	3 Aug 2000	-	9 Jan 2003
Georgia	-	-	-	-	Georgia	17 Jun 1999 (Signature)
Iran	-	-	-	-	-	-
Türkiye	-	-	-	-	-	-

In the absence of riparian countries' commitments to international conventions in the Kura-Aras River basin, a number of bilateral or multilateral agreements have been signed related to surface water, hydroelectric power generation or environmental issues. Table 3 (see below) illustrates agreements related to surface water and general agreements in the energy or environmental sectors. Agreements in this basin mainly concern water allocation (largely inherited from the Soviet era, with the exception of the 1993 Azerbaijan-Georgia agreement), dam construction and the establishment of systems for hydraulic projects, electricity, as well as environmental cooperation.

2. Actors of Hybrid Diplomacy in the Kura-Aras Basin

Today, international relations encompass a wide range of actors and informal processes that play a significant role, particularly in multilateral diplomacy. The monopoly of foreign ministries and diplomatic bodies of countries in establishing political contacts and pursuing national interests has been challenged. This monopoly has gradually eroded beyond national borders with the communication revolution and the advent of new media in the 20th century. A new realm of diplomacy has emerged, characterized by the amalgamation of various diplomatic factors in the 21st

century, known as hybrid diplomacy. New actors can be identified in various quasi-state, transnational, subnational, supranational, and infranational dimensions. In general, one can speak of a shift towards supra-national and infra-national diplomacy.

Table 3. Kura- Aras Basin: Agreements (Freshwater/Environment/Energy)

Iran Armenia	Aras River	Law on Cooperation Agreement between the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Government of the Republic of Armenia on the Construction and Operation of Current Power Plants on the Aras River	2018
Iran Azerbaijan (USSR)	Aras River	Agreement concerning economic and technical co-operation	1968
Iran Azerbaijan	Aras River	Agreement on Construction and Commissioning of Ordubad and Marazad Hydroelectric Power Plants between the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran	2014
Iran Azerbaijan	Aras River	Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Construction, Commissioning, Use of Energy and Water Resources of Khudafarin and Maiden Tower Hydro-junctions and Hydroelectric Power Plants on the Aras River between the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran	2016
Iran Turkiye	environment	Memorandum of Understanding between the Republic of Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran on cooperation in the field of environment.	2015
Iran Turkiye	environment	Memorandum of Understanding on environment between the Republic of Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran	2011
Iran Turkiye	environment	Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Republic of Turkey and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran on Natural Resources and Watershed Management.	2010
Iran Turkiye	environment	Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Environment of the Republic of Turkey and the Department of Environment of the Islamic Republic of Iran	1996
Turkiye (USSR)	boundary waters	An agreement between Turkey and the Soviet Union "Protocol on the beneficial uses of boundary waters"	1927
Turkiye Azerbaijan	environment	Agreement on Cooperation in the Fields of Energy and Mining between the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Government of the Republic of Turkey	2020
Turkiye Azerbaijan	environment	Agreement between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Turkey on cooperation in the field of environmental protection	2004
Turkiye Georgia	environment	Agreement between the Republic of Turkey and the Republic of Georgia on cooperation in the field of environment	1997
Turkiye Georgia	Energy	Agreement between the Republic of Turkey and Georgia on the cooperation in the field of energy.	2015
Georgia Armenia	environment	The agreement between the Governments of Georgia and Republic of Armenia on cooperation in Environmental Protection	1997
Azerbaijan Georgia	environment	Intergovernmental agreement on Environmental cooperation	1997
Azerbaijan Georgia	boundary waters	agreement between the State Committee of Irrigation and Water Economy of the Azerbaijan Republic and Department of management of melioration systems of Georgia, a water volume of 70 mln.m ³ is annually delivered from Georgia to Jandari water reservoir	1993

Traditional bilateral and multilateral diplomacy has gradually merged with the realms of informality, which may or may not involve state-to-state activities. Consequently, new actors challenge the exclusive authority of governments, enhancing the transformative potential within the international system. These new actors seek to possess a form of "diplomacy." This internal incursion into the rifts of the nation-state system amplifies the diverse contemporary challenges to traditional diplomatic concepts through overlaps, mixtures, and broader contradictions, exemplifying a combination of Westphalian and post-Westphalian elements in contemporary global politics. In this regard, actors of hybrid diplomacy are examined as essential analytical components. Where does diplomatic power reside in the modern world and among whom? The answer to this question can be found in quasi-state, supra-national, subnational, supranational, and transnational actors. In the Kura-Aras Basin, there is no actor of supranational nature. Such an actor materializes through the agreement of countries within a specific region. For instance, the European Union (EU) is a notable example of a

supranational actor formed in the geographical region of Europe, where, with the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty in December 2009, the European Commission acquired diplomatic status, and EU diplomats actively participate in various arenas. In the Kura-Aras Basin, such an actor has not emerged, but the EU serves as a player in the realm of informality. Additionally, in this basin, there is no actor of quasi-national nature.

2.1 Transnational Actors

The European Union (EU) has established the European Union Water Initiative (EUWI, 2023) as a framework for cooperation in various regions of the world. The EU Water Initiative for Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia (EUWI-EECCA), founded in 2003, brought together 12 countries of the former Soviet Union (EUWI-EECCA, 2023) to establish close ties with the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia, from the Kura-Aras Basin, participated in this initiative (ENP, 2023). In 2016, the European Union Water Initiative Plus (EUWI+) replaced the previous initiative, including Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, with the three mentioned countries still being part of it (EUWI+, 2021). This initiative is based on continuous water policy reform, relying on the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD) as its cornerstone. The WFD, enacted in 2002, is a comprehensive and wide-reaching water law that reflects the principle of environmental sustainability. The three mentioned countries have accepted to prioritize the adoption and implementation of EU water laws, especially the key policy of the Water Framework Directive (WFD) in their domestic legislation (WFD, 2023). Türkiye is also part of the Mediterranean component of the EU Water Initiative (MED EUWI) (MED EUWI, 2023).

The Water Framework Directive (WFD) is a part of the EU water law adopted in 2002. It obliges member countries to develop and implement River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) and Programmes of Measures (PoMs) aiming to improve the status of surface water, coastal water, and groundwater resources (Baaner, 2011). The insufficiency of these actions gradually led the European Union, along with other institutions, towards a Nexus approach. The Nexus approach emphasizes the interdependency of water, energy, food security, and natural resources, including water, soil, and land, and considers the mutual reinforcement of water, energy, and agricultural policies. In this way, the integration and sustainability of ecosystems are preserved. The water-energy-food Nexus signifies a shift in international development programs towards a holistic utilization of resources to achieve long-term economic, environmental, and social goals in a green economy, rather than sectoral development. Furthermore, transnational actors refer to interactions among government entities at national borders. Political relations are not solely directed by official intermediaries and certain sectors of national bureaucracies that have foreign policy interests have become increasingly influential. This is particularly evident in the European Union. Permanent representations of member states in Brussels are filled with bureaucrats from various government institutions, thus other government officials are increasingly invited as diplomats. In summary, foreign affairs ministries have lost their traditional role as the sole managers of government communications within countries.

The activities of specialized international agencies within or beyond the United Nations system have led to the strengthening of cross-border linkages between governmental ministries and organizations that operate outside the control of foreign ministries. By eroding the exclusive authority of foreign ministries and diplomats to act on behalf of the governments, these new actors have the potential to bring about transformational changes in the 21st century. This phenomenon demonstrates a diplomatic dynamism that transcends territorial integrity and challenges the efficacy of political power structures.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is actively involved in strengthening international cooperation on transboundary waters and shared water resources. In Iran, the Regional Centre on Urban Water Management (RCUWM) is one of the 26 second-category UNESCO centers related to water. Established in Tehran since February 2002, under a contract with the UNESCO General Conference, it is headed by the Minister of Energy of Iran (RCUWM, 2021). The third agreement between Iran and UNESCO regarding the activities of this center for the 2019-2024 period has been renewed, signed, and exchanged. Through capacity building, knowledge sharing, and research at the international and regional levels, the Regional Centre on Urban Water Management contributes to water-related projects in UNESCO's strategic program. Sixteen countries and nine

international organizations are members of this council. The member countries of the Board of Governors during the new activity period include Iran, Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Egypt, Germany, India, Iraq, Lebanon, Oman, Pakistan, Switzerland, Syria, Tajikistan, and Türkiye. It is worth noting that UNDP, FAO, UN-HABITAT, WMO, ECO, IsDB, JCCME, and the Oman Water Society are members of international and regional organizations. This center has organized programs within the framework of the sixth to eighth phases of UNESCO's International Hydrological Programme in countries such as Oman, Afghanistan, Germany, Lebanon, Türkiye, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, etc. Countries in the Kura-Aras Basin including Iran, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Türkiye are also present in this institution. Moreover, Tehran is the regional center for the capacity building network, the International Drought Initiative (IDI), which was approved by the Nineteenth Intergovernmental Council of the International Hydrological Program in Paris in July 2010. The aim of the IDI is to provide a platform for networking and dissemination of knowledge and information among international institutions active in the field of drought (IDI, 2021). Iran, within the framework of UNDP, and Azerbaijan are also engaged in national programs to combat drought and utilize the capacity of this international initiative, such as the Drought Resilience, Adaptation, and Management Policy (DRAMP) initiated by UNESCO in 2019 (Tsegai et al., 2021). In addition to regional institutions, in Iran, the Water Commission (which exists in various forms in some agreements related to transboundary and shared rivers) and Water Commissioners collaborate with other stakeholders beyond Iran's borders, breaking the monopoly of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as the sole manager of government communications in other countries. Certain departments of the Ministry of Striving (Jihad) for Agriculture play a direct role in water resource management in Iran and neighboring countries. The Border Rivers and Shared Water Resources Office and the International Affairs and Diplomatic Coordination Center for Water and Power in the Ministry of Energy are also active in the field of water diplomacy.

2.2 Actors in Subnational Diplomacy

Traditional diplomacy requires centralized control over interactions across state borders. However, nowadays, terms like micro-diplomacy and paradiplomacy are used to refer to the cross-border activities of subnational entities. For instance, the entry of cities as international actors and their increasing direct involvement in diplomatic activities can be observed. In 2004, The World Organization of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) was founded. The historical background of UCLG dates back to 1913 when a group of mayors and city managers in the Belgian city of Ghent made the innovative decision to continue their collaboration in a more permanent and structured manner, thus giving birth to the Union Internationale des Villes (UCLG, 2023a). (<https://www.uclg.org/en>). UCLG represents the voice of local and regional governments. The first World Assembly of Regions was held in Barcelona in 2021, and countries such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia were categorized within the Eurasia region, while Iran and Türkiye were classified within the Middle East and West Asia region. The capacity of UCLG as a hybrid diplomacy actor in the Caspian-Black Sea Basin is noteworthy. Several cities in Iran and Türkiye are members of The Global Network of Major Cities and Metropolitan Spaces, and addressing climate change is one of its priorities. Metropolis operates as the metropolitan section of the United Cities and Local Governments since its constitution in 2004 (UCLG, 2023b).

Some major cities, with their diverse range of activities, have a greater capacity to increase their political influence and participate more actively in international relations. Public diplomacy, treaty-making, supranational engagements, and participation in organizations and multilateral networks are examples of diplomatic activities undertaken by these supranational entities. These activities are still relatively marginal, but an expected increase in their role in 21st-century diplomacy is anticipated. Various initiatives have been undertaken in city diplomacy, including the designation of sixty-eight cities worldwide as "Messengers of Peace" by the then Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Javier Perez de Cuellar, during the International Year of Peace (1986). The International Association of Peace Messenger Cities was subsequently formed based on this designation (A/RES/40/3). Another significant initiative in establishing city-to-city relations is city twinning. Twinning of important Iranian cities with cities in the Caspian-Black Sea Basin facilitates closer relations and the exchange of information. In this context, the possibility of activating city diplomacy is also viable. The table below (Table 4) illustrates the important twinned cities of Tabriz in Iran with other countries in the Caspian-Black Sea Basin.

Table 4. Sister cities of Tabriz in the Kura- Aras Basin

	country	City
1	Iran	Tabriz
2	Azerbaijan	Baku
3	Azerbaijan	Ganja
4	Türkiye	Istanbul
5	Türkiye	Erzurum

2.3 Non-state Actors

Non-state actors are individuals and groups that operate across national borders but are not controlled by the government. These actors include non-governmental organizations or civil society organizations, support networks, political parties, humanitarian foundations, multinational corporations, and similar entities.

Non-state actors (TNA) are increasingly being granted access to various diplomatic forums. For instance, compared to 41 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in 1948, there are now over 5000 NGOs with consultative status with ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council) in 2019 (E/2019/INF/5). In the mid-1980s, international negotiations on ozone layer depletion attracted only a few NGOs, and even an environmental NGO was absent from the signing of the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer in 1985. In contrast, in the early 2000s, NGOs were more involved than governments in key negotiations related to climate change. In addition to accessing diplomatic arenas, non-state actors can fulfill diplomatic roles through informal networks. Prominent examples of networking between governments, NGOs, and international organizations are observed in processes leading to international environmental commitments. In the list of non-governmental entities from five riparian countries that hold consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, none of them are allocated to activities in the field of international shared waters, except for Armenia. However, the other basin countries have non-governmental entities with consultative status in the environmental field (NGO Branch, 2021).

Another example that falls outside the framework of intergovernmental or non-state actors relates to the diplomatic role of legislatures and parliamentary representatives. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) was established in 1889 as a network of like-minded parliamentary representatives but has evolved into a global organization of national parliaments. The IPU previously collaborated with ECOSOC as a non-governmental organization with consultative status but acquired permanent observer status in 2002 and was described as a "unique intergovernmental organization." The IPU has played a crucial role in facilitating parliamentary participation in global governance. Following the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the IPU brought together speakers from all neighboring countries of Iraq, who provided recommendations for crisis resolution. Inspired by these discussions, several months later, the United Nations Security Council accepted some of these recommendations as part of its decision to expand the UN's role in Iraq. In the new millennium, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), by erasing the distinction between global and domestic governance, present significant potential for enhancing "parliamentary diplomacy."

The Islamic Consultative Assembly of Iran actively pursues parliamentary diplomacy through the presiding board and its counterparts in other countries worldwide. Parliamentary communications in the realm of shared water resource management can contribute to increased cooperation. At a secondary level, parliamentary friendship groups are prominent, engaging with neighboring countries through reciprocal visits as part of parliamentary diplomacy. At a tertiary level, the utilization of international, Asian, and Islamic inter-parliamentary unions is emphasized as platforms for exchanging ideas and fostering cooperation. Iran played a pivotal role in establishing the Asian Parliamentary Assembly, with its Secretariat located in Tehran. Additionally, Iran is a founding member of the Parliamentary Union of the OIC Member States, facilitating collaborations among Islamic nations. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning the role of parliamentary committees in establishing connections with their counterparts in other countries, highlighting the parliamentary diplomacy potential of the Islamic Consultative Assembly in cooperation with countries in the Caspian Sea and the Aras Basin region (Kora-Aras).

3. Hybrid Diplomacy and New Targeting in the Basin: Creating Networks and Dialogue Initiatives at Various Levels

The utilization of the capacities of various stakeholders in international transboundary water sectors is a participatory process that aligns supra-national, sub-national, and non-governmental entities to coordinate their activities in the field of water and development. Country officials are encouraged at different levels to engage stakeholders and the general public in the decision-making process and to organize planning and management activities on a selected nexus scale. The establishment of actor networks and water initiatives among basin countries not only reevaluates discourses and water management approaches in the basin but also contributes to the transfer of respected international norms and standards. Finding effective solutions to the water-energy-environment nexus and addressing challenges such as inefficiency, inequality, and pollution lies at the heart of this initiative, and the participation of all key stakeholders are critical to achieving a change that meets different local and regional needs.

In the Kura-Aras Basin, this initiative emphasizes various aspects of sustainable development based on selected readings from the different ecological, political and social contexts of each country. It discusses different nexus perspectives but a closer look at the predominant subject of agreements between basin countries (Table 3) indicates that the water-energy-environment nexus has a higher chance of being chosen by the basin countries. The establishment of networks and dialogue initiatives in this context, by involving different actors in water diplomacy, contributes to greater political commitment. Collaboration in various nexus sectors can thus lead to longer-term and more sustainable development, enabling the capacity for internal change and adequate adaptability in the face of human-natural system interdependencies of water resources. Furthermore, national institutional capacity on water management is insufficient and requires improvement and greater support from the actor network of hybrid diplomacy to address the challenges ahead in this region. Economic development is an apparent priority for the basin countries, but efforts must be made to ensure the protection of water resources and the environment is not disregarded for long-term and sustainable growth. Particularly, considering infrastructure development projects, ecological flows must be taken into account to prevent strained relations between countries and ensure the sustainability of water resource utilization towards sustainable development.

Climate change, particularly in terms of water scarcity and river drying, is anticipated to have unfavorable implications, which have been observed in recent years. The increasing summer temperatures, reduced winter precipitation, fluctuating streamflows, and the risk of severe weather events, alongside increasing natural disasters such as landslides and floods, are perceived as common challenges in specific regions of the Kura-Aras Basin. Some countries within the basin have enacted laws regarding climate change, primarily aligning with international norms within the framework of accepting international conventions. All the basin countries are members of the Kyoto Protocol (Status of Kyoto, 2013), and all except Iran have submitted their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to the Paris Agreement (UN Climate Change, 2023). In accordance with Article 4, paragraph 12 of the Paris Agreement, NDCs communicated by Parties shall be recorded in a public registry maintained by the secretariat. In Iran, the Council of Ministers, in its meeting on 18 /01 /1395 (7 January 2017), authorized the Environmental Protection Organization to sign the Paris Agreement, and with the coordination of the Deputy of Legal Affairs of the President's Office and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it initiated the necessary legal procedures until final approval (Laws and Regulations portal of Islamic Republic of Iran, 2023). However, the name of Iran is not found in the Nationally Determined Contributions Registry.

Conclusion

The transfer and implementation of water policy norms require legal frameworks. At the basin level, countries are gradually reforming their environmental laws, and progress is being made. Stronger environmental laws regarding water have been established in all the basin countries, with the expectation of reducing the adverse environmental impacts on water resources. The natural flow of available water in the basin is highly variable, with abundant resources seen in mountainous areas, while water scarcity is evident in some plain regions. Population growth and economic development have led to increased water consumption. Construction of dams, hydroelectric power plants, and

irrigation networks is continuing, and it is expected that hydropower projects in Türkiye, such as the DAP project, will have significant effects on the flow rate of the Aras River during reservoir filling periods. The increasing share of hydropower in the basin raises concerns about changes in natural river flow regime characteristics and other detrimental effects on river dynamics and sediment accumulation and transport.

In the absence of commitment to international water conventions and compliance with their rules, bilateral treaties appear insufficient and cover limited areas of cooperation. In such circumstances, the adherence of countries to customary international law is influenced by their political strategies to achieve national interests. Establishing networks and initiating dialogue among regional countries provides a framework for regular exchange of views and learning, better sharing of best practices, and initial understanding. Planning for organized events can encourage convergence of opinions on joint water resource management in all these countries, although it may not be legally binding. This initiative, relying on the basin countries' experiences throughout the dialogues, helps all countries, and in this regard, the role of hybrid diplomacy actors in various matters such as legislation, joint project development, drafting and implementation of management plans, public participation, as well as data monitoring and management, technical support, institutional twinning, and increasing public awareness will be crucial. Riparian countries in the Kura-Aras Basin, namely Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and Türkiye, have committed themselves to bilateral agreements for the proper regulation of their water relations. However, official diplomatic actors need a greater political will to progress towards effective water management, cooperation, and information sharing. The main challenge of cross-border cooperation in the sub-region is the lack of an institutional framework for sustainable and long-term multilateral collaboration among all countries in the basin.

The initial discussion is based on the premise that hybrid diplomacy, through the formation of networks and the initiative of dialogue, enables the management of transboundary waters in the Kura-Aras Basin, with a nexus approach. By examining several actors of hybrid diplomacy, it has become evident that a topical nexus is not sufficient for managing transboundary waters, and a form of actor complementarity is also required. Hybrid diplomacy provides the necessary framework for this purpose. A network of various actors and the dialogue among them is a good starting point to achieve convergence on a flexible interpretations of water management principles in the social, political and environmental fields in the basin countries. Each of these explanations emphasizes different aspects or manifestations of their underlying principles: environmental, economic, and social. The lack of sustainable and long-term multilateral cooperation in the Kura-Aras River Basin is the main challenge for cross-border cooperation in the sub-region. Comprehensive dialogue initiatives facilitate the transfer of knowledge, skills, values, and principles, as well as gradual legal formulation in partner countries. The spectrum of actors in 21st-century diplomacy is broader and more diverse than in the past, with an increasing tendency for participation by non-state and sub-state actors. In this "hybrid diplomatic arena," a diplomat must be the "director" of a wide range of voices and interests. Interactions require shifting from a "club" model to a network-based model of diplomacy. Therefore, diplomacy is evolving into "complexity management" in ways that were previously unforeseen.

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