

## **International projects in support of the Tehran Convention activity**

The Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea (Tehran Convention), signed by all the Caspian littoral states in Tehran in fall 2003 and entered into force in August 2006, is the international legal base for the regional co-operation at the Caspian on the sphere of environmental protection and rational nature use. This Convention is an evidence of recognition the commonality of the Caspian environmental problems and necessity in the interstate collaboration to address them.

The co-ordination of the international environmental activity in the Caspian Sea region was undertaken under the **UN Caspian Initiative**, which organized the **UNDP, UNEP, and the World Bank** experts' mission around the countries of the region in 1995. The follow-up activity of the major UN structures and the European Union on the Caspian environmental topic was based on the findings of this mission.

This activity, in particular, extended the UNEP initiatives on the development of a framework convention for the environmental protection co-operation at the Caspian and was linked to the results of the UNEP-ROE organized in Geneva in 1995 and 1996 meetings of experts from the states of the region on the legal mechanism for the regional environmental co-operation.

At the same time, even in 1993-1994 the decisions of the 4-th and 5-th sessions of the **Interstate Ecological Council of the CIS** identified as a priority in the frameworks of the Agreement on Cooperation with UNEP the issues related to the assistance to the development of the convention to address the environmental problems of the Caspian Sea, what was completely corresponding to the outcomes of the **First meeting of UNEP International Task Force on Impacts of Climate Change in the Caspian Sea Region** held in Moscow in 1994.

Since mid-1997 the implementation of the UNEP project "Integrated Environmental Management of the Volga-Caspian Region" had started. The project was aimed at the support to the development of the legal instrument for the regional environmental co-operation (future Tehran Convention), as well as the development of concept for Caspian Sea environmental monitoring and modern methods of integrated aquatic ecosystems management. The first stage of the support to the development of the framework convention on environmental co-operation in the Caspian was implemented under this project. In 1998 and 2000 the first meetings of the experts from the countries of the region took place, which laid the foundations of the convention down.

Since 2000, the drafting of the convention has been incorporated as an element of activity (the UNEP contribution) into the international Caspian Environment Programme (CEP), which involves the formation of a regional structure to ensure environmental cooperation of the Caspian littoral countries with the support from **UNEP, UNDP, GEF, World Bank** and **EU/TACIS**, as well as the coordination of relevant activities in the region.

The CEP implementation had commenced in 1998 after the agreement of thematic components and institutional structure. The CEP thematic areas included:

- Establishment of institutional capacity and development of regional convention;
- Biodiversity protection;
- Bioresources management;
- Coastal zone management taking into account the water level fluctuations;
- Monitoring and data management;
- Formation of portfolio for priority investments;

- Development and implementation of the Strategic Action Programme;
- Public participation, including its awareness.

**The first CEP phase** (1998-2002) had allow to arrange for the interaction among the Caspian littoral states and their international partners, establish institutional mechanisms and working intercommunications in the shape of 11 Caspian Regional Thematic Centres (CRTC), which gathered the initial information, develop the Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA), regional Strategic Action Programme (SAP) and National Caspian Action Plans (NCAPs).

TDA included: the list of environmental quality objectives (EQOs), preliminary draft SAP, review of the state of the environment of the Caspian Sea and major identified problems, additional materials and causal analysis.

SAP presented the general plan for interaction of all CEP partners, what formed the framework for their political, legal, regulatory, and investment activity for the development of the environmental management of the Caspian.

As part of the SAP, the Strategic Biodiversity Conservation Plan (SBCP) was developed, which, in particular, contained recommendations on major species conservation, control of introduction of alien species and measures to decrease the impact of the *Mnemiopsis* ctenophore on the Caspian ecosystem, treatment of ballast waters, improvement of the regional protected areas system, and restoration of priority vulnerable habitats.

The NCAPs of the countries reflected the actual tasks, the solution of which would also facilitate the transboundary conservation of the marine environment of the Caspian.

The outcomes of the thematic direction of activities under the first CEP phase were the ground for the formation of such mechanisms of the Tehran Convention activity, as the Strategic Convention Action Programme (SCAP), Public Participation Strategy (PPS), National (Tehran) Convention Action Plans (NCAPs). The support to the first round of negotiation process on the development of the relevant protocols was also provided.

**The second phase of the CEP** (2003-2007) was implemented with the support from the GEF/UNDP as the project “**Towards a Convention and Action Programme for the Protection of the Caspian Sea Environment, Phase II (CEP-SAP)**”, which provided the support in the implementation of the Tehran Convention, including the process of the development of the protocols to it, and a number of activities linked to the results of the initial CEP stage, including:

1. Implementation of the SAP in the priority directions: biodiversity conservation, invasive species, and persistent toxic substances;
2. Implementation of the regional co-ordination of the NCAPs implementation;
3. Improvement of the state of the environment through the implementation of the small-scale investing, supported by the Small Grants Programme.

The quantitative assessment (preliminary inventory) of the coastal and marine habitats of the Caspian was made. The maps of environmentally vulnerable zones were made, which supplemented the data base on biodiversity and became a part of the regional plan for oil-spills related cooperation.

The guidelines on the protection and restoration of the ecologically vulnerable zones, Caspian Seal Conservation Action Plan, and management plan for adaptation to sea level fluctuations of lagoons with significance for biodiversity.

The All-Caspian eco-net of specialists, institutions, NGOs, and other stakeholders was formed in the course of the second CEP phase.

In coordination with the GEF project on ballast waters the CEP Action Plan on Invasive Species was developed, including the facilitation of the development of proposal for introduction of *Beroë Ovata* jellyfish into the Caspian and/or other means of biological control of *Mnemiopsis*, as well as the recommendations on the establishment of the Caspian regional body for assessment and permitting of species introduction; assessment of amount of invasive species' transfer with ballast water of ships to/from the Caspian Sea took place, as well as studies of ways and means of controlling invasive species in the port of Astrakhan.

The degree of the Caspian Sea pollution was assessed, and its sources were identified. The assessment of distribution and composition of persistent toxic substances (PTSs) in rivers, sediments and coastal waters was performed. The regional and national action plans for monitoring and combating the pollution with PTSs were developed. The use and location of stocks of pesticides were explored.

The assessment of land-based sources of pollution, including the sources of pollution of the coastal area in the major river basins (Kura/Aras, Volga up to Volgograd, Sefidrud, and Ural) was improved, the flux of major pollutants from the Volga Cascade and Mingechaur reservoir was identified. Moreover, the studies of pollution of coastal waters, bottom sediments, marine waters, and assessment of impact of the key transboundary contaminants had been continued, and activities for the national and regional plans for combatting marine litter were developed.

Based on the new data the TDA, SAP, and NCAPs were revisited with particular attention to the transboundary issues.

To promote the stakeholders participation in the marine environment management the following was made:

- The data base of contact points in media and multimedia means for journalists were developed, the CEP bulletins were issued;
- The consultative body with the participation of the International Petroleum Industry Environmental Conservation Association (IPIECA) and a number of local oil-and-gas development, transport and fisheries sector companies was established;
- The public participation strategy was formulated; and
- The next rounds of the environmental small grants and micro grants programmes took place.

The obtained results were used to develop a draft Protocol for the Protection of the Caspian Sea against Pollution from Land-based Sources and Activities and draft Protocol for the Conservation of Biological Diversity to the Tehran Convention, as well as in the future, relevant programme activity of the Tehran Convention.

**The third phase of the CEP (2007-2012)** was implemented in form of the GWEF/UNDP project “**The Caspian Sea: Restoring Depleted Fisheries and Consolidation of a Permanent Regional Environmental Governance Framework “CaspEco”**”. The project activities were aimed at the support to the Tehran Convention activity and adoption by all Caspian littoral states of the eco-system based bioresources management, including the agreement of tasks on the conservation of biodiversity with the tasks in the sphere of fisheries complex.

To facilitate the Tehran Convention in clarifying the recommendations for regulation of invasive species in the Caspian Sea in accordance with the Protocol for the Conservation of Biological Diversity to the Convention the activities on *Mnemiopsis* have been proposed.

One of the important was the activity initiated the process for the development and formation of the Caspian sea Environment Monitoring Programme (EMP), which is currently being developed under the Tehran Convention. These works were based on the TACIS project 'Caspian MAP'. The draft EMP in part of the hydrometeorological monitoring was developed.

This activity is aimed at the implementation of the provisions of the monitoring related article of the Tehran Convention (Art. 19) and is linked to the activity of the Caspian Environmental Information Centre (CEIC), whose elaboration has also been commenced under the Project.

A number of project activities was made to facilitate the implementation of strategies and measures on increasing the reproductivity of the Caspian anadromous fish species, including the projects to increase the efficiency of salmon farms in Iran.

The problems of genetic variation in extant populations and sustainable use of sturgeon gene pool were studied in collaboration with FAO. The trial actions aimed at identifying, restoring and/or enhancing access to natural spawning grounds were carried out, the All-Caspian list of natural spawning grounds and habitats of the Caspian sturgeon and salmon are located upstream and below the dam was compiled.

The recommendations for improving the quality of wetlands/spawning grounds during the spring and summer floods were developed and options for fish passages for major anadromous species were considered.

In the context of the implementation of activities aimed at supporting the development and implementation of the relevant provisions of the Protocol for the Conservation of Biological Diversity to the Tehran Convention the activity was initiated on the formation of the Circum-Caspian network of specially protected areas, wildlife habitats and essential fish habitats of the ecosystem of the Caspian Sea, which later became a network of protected areas of the Caspian sea (GYTS), fixed by the provisions of this protocol.

The recurrent round of the small grants and micro grants programmes and their implementation had supported the participation of the coastal communities in the works on the conservation of the Caspian bioresources.

The component of the project “**Strengthening of the regional environmental protection structure of the Caspian Sea**” was in general directed at ensuring the financial stability of the Tehran Convention Secretariat operation and implementation of a number of activities envisaged by the biannual Programmes of Work of the Tehran Convention, such as, for instance:

- Promotion to the coordination at the national and regional levels and institutional support of the Tehran Convention and its protocols;
- Consideration of possibilities for establishing the thematic partnerships and joint programmes in support of the Tehran Convention and its protocols and co-operation with the private sector, including the effective process/mechanism of assistance to identification and financing the investment projects in the region;
- Facilitation to the Caspian littoral countries in revisiting the National Caspian Action Plans (NCAPs) and their translation into the National (Tehran) Convention Action Plans (NCAPs);
- Implementation of the public participation strategy (PPS) with a view to actively support the requirements of the Tehran Convention and its protocols and promotion to the development

of the mechanism for sharing data/information – web-based Caspian Environmental Information Centre (CEIC) grounded on the data on the state of the environment of the Caspian obtained during the CEP implementation period.

The EU/TACIS project “**The Caspian Water Quality Monitoring and Action Plan for Areas of Pollution Concern**” (Caspian MAP) was implemented after the Convention was signed to help countries of the region to organize the preparation of the agreed regional marine environment monitoring programme; provision of information support to national and regional marine environment quality management action plans in areas of major pollution sources, as well as development of the Action Plan to reduce the Caspian pollution (taking into account the studies under the CEP).

The Caspian MAP Project was based on the understanding that the intensive increase in the development of the hydrocarbon fields at the coast and offshore should organically be linked with local socio-economic development plans and programmes. At the same time, the Project had identified the difference in the level of development of the legislative and regulatory documents on environmental monitoring in the Caspian littoral countries.

In addition to the listed projects the Tehran Convention was implemented also through the realization of other international projects in the countries of the region. For instance, in the Russian Federation such UNDP/GEF projects as “**Strengthening the Marine and Coastal Protected Areas of Russia**” and “**Mainstreaming biodiversity conservation into Russia’s energy sector policies and operations**” facilitated the addressing of the problems related to the Caspian biodiversity conservation, with the latter having a number of recommendations specifically oriented at the requests of the Tehran Convention and its EMP.

The implementation of the integrated international projects in the Caspian Sea region promoted the timely identification and addressing of the concrete environmental problems of the region under the conditions of activation of exploitation of the Caspian natural resources from energy and biological to recreational and ecosystem.

The two decades experience of international environmental protection co-operation in the region demonstrated that the agreed implementation of a serial of thematic projects facilitated the progress in the formation and implementation of the Tehran Convention as the most important and effective tool for organization of the regional interaction on resolution of the environmental problems.