

Proposals on participation of the Caspian Sea region stakeholders in implementation of the obligations under the Tehran Convention

Pursuant to the article 21 of the Tehran Convention “The Contracting Parties shall endeavour to ensure public access to environmental conditions of the Caspian Sea, measures taken or planned to be taken to prevent, control and reduce pollution of the Caspian Sea in accordance with their national legislation and taking into account provisions of existing international agreements concerning public access to environmental information”.

The role of public in addressing the most important problems related to the environment and sustainable development is generally recognized. By providing information and views of independent experts, offering alternatives, the non-governmental sector makes an important contribution to environmental protection activities. The non-governmental organizations (NGOs) of the region being the active force advocating for the environmental protection should support the implementation of the Tehran Convention as the important tool to improve the ecological situation, and should seek solutions to the most pressing environmental issues, and development and implementation of effective environmental policies, improvement of institutional structures. Moreover, the NGOs could use the activity on the Tehran Convention implementation as the means of establishing a cross-sectoral and inter-regional co-operation.

The Strategic (Tehran) Convention Action Programme (SCAP) approved by the 2-nd meeting of the Conference of the Parties in 2008 does consider in the specific section the civil society participation in the Caspian environmental management. It notes that “Public Participation in environment management of the Caspian Sea, including being involved in the decision making, planning, implementation and monitoring of the activities, is especially pertinent for the Caspian Sea where the environmental condition is deteriorating”.

To facilitate the process of the general public involvement to the activities on the Tehran Convention implementation the Strategy for Civil Society Engagement in the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea (Public Participation Strategy – PPS) was developed and adopted during the 3-d Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Tehran Convention in 2011. Its main objectives are to promote the establishment of effective mechanisms for public participation and engagement in the environmental issues of the Caspian Sea in general, and in issues relating to the Tehran Convention, its Protocols and the Strategic Convention Action Program in particular, and to assist the public to be informed and to participate in decision-making processes, in the planning/development and determination of directions for activities as well as in the implementation and monitoring of activities undertaken under the Tehran Convention.

The aforementioned objectives are achieved through capacity building and strengthening of existing institutions, as well as by building new formal and informal institutions for public participation in environmental management of the Caspian Sea. The strategy is aimed as a tool to be used for practical participation of the stakeholders of the Caspian Sea countries within the Teheran Convention process. At this, it is a flexible structure, directed at establishing systems for public participation in the process of restoring and protecting the environment of the Caspian Sea. It is designed to be used by different stakeholders such as governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community based organizations (CBOs), special interest groups, non-organized individuals, and the private sector. The PPS also serves as the guidelines consisting of guiding principles, which can be followed for every concerned activity as part of the ecosystem approach regardless of the type of activities implemented.

There are three forms in accordance with the UNEP approach of the civil society involvement into the activity of the international environmental agreements and conventions:

- Participation of the civil society in the Conferences of the Parties;
- Participation of the civil society in expert councils;
- Participation of the civil society in the implementation of the projects and programmes related to the international environmental agreements.

NGOs could participate in the Conferences of the Parties as the observers. This means that they may attend the meetings as an audience.

There is a variety of technical and economic councils, advisory groups on environmental impact assessment, and scientific councils of experts under the international treaties where NGOs could also participate as the observers.

From the 'strategic' point of view the ecological improvement of the environment is necessary to be considered as a long-term process, which is determined by a lengthy period: its maximum is one (demographic) reproductive generation, *i.e.*, not less than 20-25 years. At the same, speech should go on the relevance of the processes of ecological refinement of the milieu, at the one hand, and spiritual ennoblement of new generations, at the other. The same way as the Caspian Sea marine environment requires radically new attitude to it from the society, the school (primary and secondary) in the Caspian littoral areas of the countries requires a fundamentally new environmental training and education. In this regards, the activities related to the activity of schools and scholars in the Caspian littoral areas and the implementation of specific measures of school environmental education and training are becoming particularly important.

In modern conditions, the public component of the EIA in a transboundary context procedure is one of the most promising mechanisms of interaction between stakeholders in the region to implement the provisions of the Tehran Convention, and is of interest to not only social structures of the Caspian neighbours, but to their state authorities responsible for regional co-operation in the aforesaid area as well.

A significant role in enhancing the effectiveness of public participation could be played by an organization of the channels for feedback from the public and the national authorities for the Convention. Such channels could be the respective web-resources (Network of support of the Tehran Convention in the region), regular publication in regional media, meetings, conferences, thematic social polls etc. An important role in this regard could be played by the existing forms of association of the scientific community in the region, such as the Russian segment of the International Association of Caspian Universities, with their established forms for discussions, debates and publications.

The participation of public structures in the formation and discussion of the achieved results of implementation of the relevant components of the socio-economic development programmes of the Caspian littoral regions of the Parties to the Convention could facilitate the implementation of the obligations under the Convention. The development, with the public participation, of recommendations on measures of economic regulation of selected stakeholders' impact on the environment and their subsequent regulatory clearance, as well as on the stimulation of development of business for environmental services and other elements of environmentally responsible management would be useful for the purposes of establishing the realistic programmes of regional development. A certain contribution to the success of such activity is made by the sponsorship of the most important SHs in the formation and the participation of public structures in the implementation of international projects supporting the Tehran Convention, including the information, research, training, and incentives (*e.g.*, in the grant programmes form) components of such projects.

An important independent task is the development and implementation of the integrated coastal zone management (ICZM) methodology, including the relevant public component. Introduction of a specialized adopted to the Caspian conditions ICZM methodology would facilitate the

provision of environmentally sustainable development of the coastal areas, including the tasks related to the development of recreation and eco-tourism, conservation of full-fledged sylvan, fluvial, lacustrine, and paludal ecosystems, combating land degradation, as well as sustainable and conditional water supply of population and economic activity.

The effective interaction of the parties, interested in addressing environmental problems of the region, is the necessary condition for the achievement of synergetic effect and success of such activity. In modern terms, the trilateral confunction among business, public and authorities seems to be the most successful from the environmental point of view. The public councils/chambers under the executive bodies and/or national representation of local and regional levels, as well as patronized by big business forums and projects, meetings within the EIA procedures and “public hearings”, and even the Caspian Day events could become the “grounds” for such partnerships.

For a long-term cooperation of the public, authorities and business on issues of providing the environmental safety of management in areas that ensure the normal functioning of the Caspian Sea ecosystem and the purity of its marine environment, it is necessary to achieve the parity of importance of these parties in making decisions on economic (or other) development of land and water areas. Such an approach requires the availability of the developed forms of the civil society in the region, financial and ideological independence of its environmentally oriented structures at one hand, and the formation of multilateral partnerships, including the public, business and authorities, as an instrument for regulating interests and preventing conflicts in the implementation of economic projects and searching for ways of environmentally acceptable development of the whole Caspian – at the other.

The all-round facilitation of the formation of actual “grounds” for the stakeholders’ discussions with mandatory involvement of academia to assist the implementation of the provisions of the Tehran Convention and other environmental agreements in the Caspian region to address the concrete environmental problems of the region, it is necessary to include the following topics into the discussions:

1. Establishment of the network of stakeholders on the support to the Tehran Convention, including the public, to ensure the effective interaction. Such a network should promote the building of the relevant capacity of the public support to the international co-operation in the littoral regions of the countries through means of mutual awareness and co-ordination of the corresponding efforts of the stakeholders and taking into account the agreed interests of stakeholders under the formation and implementation of the state and inter-state environmental policy;
2. Facilitation of establishment of trilateral partnerships “business – public – authorities” and development of recommendations on economic and administrative measures of regulating the impact of specific groups of stakeholders on the environmental condition of the Caspian Sea;
3. All-round expansion of participation of regional media in informing the population on the activity of the Tehran Convention, as well as in formation of public assistance to such activity;
4. Organization of campaigns in local media to promote and ensure compliance with environmental legislation in the region, including the provisions of environmental conventions;
5. Support to and facilitation of holding the annual events dedicated to the Caspian Day (August 12), as well as of the Caspian Forum of Public on a regular basis;
6. Organization of a regular (annual) publication of a booklet (information bulletin) on the NGO activity on addressing the Caspian Sea environmental problems and holding of meetings of the public from the region dedicated to the Caspian Day;
7. Development of a review of historic and cultural traditions of nature use in the Caspian region;
8. Inclusion of environmental components into social studies, surveys and other forms of questioning of the region’s population;

9. Recognition as expedient the formulation within the socio-economic development plans of the countries of activities linked to the implementation of the activity under the Tehran Convention;
10. Formation of networks of public environmental monitoring with support to passportization and certification of water bodies, activity of Important Bird Areas etc., as well as holding of actions on clean-up, prevention of juvenile fish kill in residual temporary ponds, on conservation of coastal forests etc.;
11. Organization of various public informational-environmental actions with involvement of scholars and students:
 - extension of provision of information on the Tehran Convention, its features, potential possibilities and actual activities to address the environmental problems of the Caspian Sea in the practice of university and school environmental education;
 - use of possibilities of the regional SPAs, like, for instance, the Astrakhan State Natural Biosphere Reserve, in the formation of environmental imperative of life values of the younger generation;
12. Support to and ensure of the real effectiveness and relevance of the procedures of the public environmental expertise and the public component of the EIA of economic projects likely to have adverse effects for the marine environment of the Caspian Sea and the coastal areas environment;
13. Organization by the actors of the oil and gas business in the Caspian in the frameworks of the support of the Tehran Convention of the contests for the most “environmentally friendly” oil-and-gas company in the region, including the public awareness component. Engaging media and the public to the assessment of such “environmental friendliness”;
14. carrying out of socially and environmentally oriented actions by the business sector that are interested in implementing their own environmental policies, including the introduction of technology similar to “zero discharge”, and in formation of image of environmentally sound activities on the basis of provision of own economic efficiency.

It should also be taken into account that the further implementation of the PPS and its periodic revision for the posterior dissemination in the region would facilitate:

- the establishment of the relevant institutional and legal ground;
- the support of existing and establishment of new responsible, confident in their actions, NGOs;
- active involvement to the public environmental protection activity of individually operating experts (consultants, experts, scientists);
- the establishment of reliable systems for provision and exchange of environmental information for wider public;
- the provision of awareness of coastal communities in the field of emerging environmental problems and their involvement into the decision-making processes;
- the support of operative awareness on the situation in the region and contacts among its actual public forces and the secretariat and other bodies of the Tehran Convention;
- the establishment of partnerships of stakeholders of the region, which ensure the co-operation of public, business and authorities;
- the establishment of partnership among the stakeholders, including the public;
- the provision of openness and public participation in the processes of protection and restoration of the marine and coastal-marine environs of the Caspian, including the procedures of the environmental impact assessment;
- the development and implementation of campaigns on notification and environmental awareness of the public, including the educational programmes on the protection of the environment for the schools;
- the expansion of coverage of the public participation in addressing the Caspian environmental problems and the Tehran Convention implementation in media of the coastal areas of the Caspian littoral countries, including under the frameworks of the annual Caspian Day events.