

FRAMEWORK CONVENTION FOR THE PROTECTION
OF THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT OF THE CASPIAN SEA –

TEHRAN CONVENTION

“The Path from Origins to Organizing Regional Nature Protection
Cooperation Activities of the Caspian States for the Protection of
the Caspian Sea Marine Environment”

Signed on 4 November 2003 in Tehran, Islamic
Republic of Iran, at the Conference of the
Plenipotentiaries of the Framework Convention for
the Protection of the Marine Environment of the
Caspian Sea.

Entered into force on 12 August 2006.



2025

ANNOTATION

This informational brochure is dedicated to the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea (Tehran Convention), signed in 2003 and entered into force in 2006, and the path it took from its origins to its formation and development, and presents in a short and systematic way a chronology of events and activities under the Tehran Convention.

Prepared by the interim Secretariat of the Tehran Convention with the collaboration of the Convention's Parties, this brochure includes contributions from individuals involved in the development and implementation of the Tehran Convention at various stages of its establishment and advancement.

The materials in this brochure are intended to foster understanding among the public and other stakeholders regarding the role of the Tehran Convention in preserving the marine and coastal environment and achieving sustainable development goals in the Caspian Sea region.

The presentation of the materials in chronological order shows the wide range and scope of the Convention's thematic areas of activity and highlights its importance for solving environmental problems in the Caspian Sea region. The materials of the information brochure can be used by the authorities, the public, and other interested parties of the Caspian littoral states as information and reference material for wider familiarization with the Tehran Convention and its activities in the field of marine and coastal environment protection in the Caspian Sea region.

The brochure draws on materials from diverse events under the Tehran Convention and from international projects that support its objectives. The materials of the brochure have been analyzed, systematized, and summarized by Ms. T. Butylina. Translated from Russian by Z. Muzyleva and K. Russkikh.

CONTENTS

Address by Mr. Mahir Aliyev, Tehran Convention Coordinator	4
Introduction.....	6
Section 1. Tehran Convention – an international legal instrument for nature conservation and regional cooperation in the Caspian Sea Region. A brief overview of the key articles of the Tehran Convention and its protocols.	7
Section 2. Origins of the Tehran Convention. A brief overview of the development, formation, and signing of the Convention by the Caspian states presented in chronological order.....	16
Section 3. Tehran Convention and international projects on its development and implementation. A brief overview of international projects supporting the development and implementation of the Tehran Convention.....	23
Section 4. Tehran Convention – formation and implementation. A brief overview of the main activities and events in the implementation of the Convention presented in chronological order.....	36
4.1. Chronology of the development and implementation of Protocols to the Tehran Convention.....	52
Annex I. The Tehran Convention through the participants` eyes and eyewitnesses.....	65

**Address by Mr. Mahir Aliyev,
Coordinator of the Tehran Convention Secretariat**

The twentieth anniversary of the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea — the Tehran Convention — marks a significant milestone in the journey toward regional cooperation, sustainable development, and environmental stewardship.

At a time when the world faces converging crises, climate disruption, biodiversity loss, and escalating pollution, the Tehran Convention stands as a vital example of multilateralism in action. For two decades, the five littoral States of the Caspian Sea — Azerbaijan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, and Turkmenistan — have worked together to safeguard a unique and fragile ecosystem, recognizing that environmental challenges transcend borders and demand joint solutions.

The Caspian Sea, the largest enclosed body of water on Earth, plays a vital role in the environmental, economic, and cultural life of the region. It supports communities and livelihoods, sustains unique biodiversity, and holds both historical significance and strategic value. The Tehran Convention has provided a robust and enduring framework for cooperation, anchored in science, guided by shared responsibility, and driven by the conviction that protecting natural resources is essential for peace, prosperity, and resilience.

Over the past two decades, this Convention has facilitated progress in pollution prevention, biodiversity conservation, oil spill preparedness, and environmental impact assessment. It has promoted technical collaboration and strengthened institutional capacities. It has demonstrated that despite political differences, countries can unite around a common cause when the health of ecosystems and the well-being of future generations are at stake.

International partnerships and financial support have been crucial. The UN Environment Programme (UNEP) has played an instrumental role in facilitating dialogue, coordinating technical expertise, and supporting capacity-building initiatives under the Tehran Convention. The Global Environment Facility (GEF), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the World Bank have provided essential financial resources and strategic guidance, enabling transformative regional projects that translate policy into tangible local benefits. These achievements underscore the capabilities of the littoral States to find common ground.

Today, the challenges facing the Caspian region are growing complexity. Climate change is altering marine and coastal dynamics. Pressures on biodiversity continue to mount. The dramatic decline in the Caspian Sea's water levels poses a grave threat to its marine ecosystem, serving as a stark warning and evoking the painful memory of the Aral Sea's collapse, a tragedy the international community must not allow to be repeated.

Moving forward, the Tehran Convention must continue to adapt to emerging realities. We must strengthen governance, expand stakeholder engagement to include local communities, civil society, academic institutions, and the private sector, creating a truly inclusive platform for environmental action. We must leverage science and technology, harnessing cutting-edge monitoring systems and early-warning mechanisms to better predict and mitigate environmental risks. We must promote holistic collaboration, aligning with global environmental objectives, notably the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and international climate commitments, ensuring the Caspian region's efforts resonate on the world stage.

As we commemorate two decades of the Tehran Convention, we celebrate more than a legal instrument; we recognize a milestone in regional diplomacy and environmental protection. The cooperation that has flourished under this Convention offers hope that deeper, more

comprehensive forms of partnership can take shape in one of the world's most significant geo-strategic spots.

On behalf of the Tehran Convention Secretariat, I extend my gratitude to all who have contributed to the Convention's success — the Caspian littoral States, our international partners, as well as countless experts, civil society organizations, and community members. The United Nations Environment Programme remains a faithful partner in building a future where cooperation prevails, ecosystems thrive, and the Caspian Sea remains a source of life and connection for generations to come.

We stand by the vision and determination of the Caspian littoral States. Let this anniversary serve not only as a moment of reflection, but as a catalyst for greater ambition and a renewed sense of shared purpose. Together, let us reaffirm our dedication to preserving the Caspian environment and building a bridge to lasting peace, prosperity, and sustainable development for all.

INTRODUCTION

The Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea – the Tehran Convention, was signed by the five Caspian littoral states: the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, and Turkmenistan in Tehran, Iran, on 4 November 2003. The Tehran Convention entered into force on August 12, 2006, following ratification by all Parties. The environmental problems facing the Caspian necessitated international legal support for environmental cooperation among the region's states in the form of a corresponding document – a convention defining specific steps that should be taken by the Caspian states in the field of environmental protection and management of the region's environment.

The content of this document needed to be shaped by the uniqueness of the natural conditions and resources of the region, the geographical and ecological integrity of the Caspian Sea, and the need to balance economic and environmental interests in the exploitation of biological and mineral resources. The Convention became the first international legal instrument regulating the relations among the Caspian littoral states – the Parties to the Convention – in the sphere of environmental protection and rational natural resource management in the Caspian Sea region.

The entering into force of the Tehran Convention established and reinforced the legal framework for further cooperation in addressing the environmental problems of the Caspian. It officially delineated the broad area of shared positions of the Caspian States and their readiness to collaborate in addressing the environmental issues of the Caspian Sea. Consequently, the Convention elevates regional nature conservation cooperation to a new level. The Tehran Convention stands as the first legally binding document on the common environmental challenges of the Caspian and underscores the necessity for interstate cooperation to tackle these issues. It also serves as a common framework, outlining the essential requirements and institutional mechanisms for the protection of the Caspian Sea's marine environment.

The Convention was intended to become a coordinated minimum programme for solving the environmental problems of the Caspian Sea and to create the necessary incentives for the development of environmental cooperation between the Caspian Littoral States in the framework of other multilateral agreements, such as the Agreement on the Conservation and Rational Use of the Biological Resources of the Caspian Sea and the Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Hydrometeorology of the Caspian Sea. The purpose of this booklet is to present in a short chronological format the history of the creation of the Tehran Convention, including the specifics of its formation and implementation with the support of international projects, as well as to show the scope of activities carried out under the Tehran Convention during its elaboration and development.

The provided chronology of events is not a complete overview of the activities of the Tehran Convention and its protocols but only highlights the key stages of their formation and development. It shows the path taken by the Convention and confirms the need to further strengthen its role in cooperation between the Caspian littoral countries in protecting the marine and coastal environment, as well as in involving business and the public in this process.

1. **TEHRAN CONVENTION —** **AN INTERNATIONAL LEGAL INSTRUMENT FOR** **NATURE CONSERVATION AND REGIONAL** **COOPERATION IN THE CASPIAN SEA REGION.**

A Brief Overview of Key Articles of the Tehran Convention
and its Protocols.



The Caspian Sea, situated at the border between two major parts of the Eurasian continent, is a unique natural reservoir on our planet. It is the largest inland body of water distinguished by its lack of connection to the World Ocean. Based on the morphological structure and physiogeographic conditions, the Caspian Sea is conventionally divided into three parts: the Northern (25% of the area), the Middle (36% of the area), and the Southern (39% of the area) Caspian.

The major rivers flowing into the Caspian Sea include the Kura, Gudyalchay, Valvalchay, Lan-karanchay (from Azerbaijan), Sefidrud, and Gorgan (from Iran), Ural and Emba (from Kazakhstan), Volga, Terek, Sulak, and Samur (from Russia). From Turkmenistan, only one river, the Atrek, flows into the sea. Similar to the Gorgan River in Iran, the flow of the Atrek River is used for irrigation and therefore does not have a constant flow into the sea. The Caspian Sea is a brackish water body. The surface water temperature in the sea reaches 24–27°C in summer and fluctuates from 0°C in the north to 11°C in the south in winter.

The Caspian region boasts abundant biological resources, particularly notable as the world's largest spawning ground for sturgeon. Approximately 130 species of sturgeon are found in this area, underscoring its critical importance for biodiversity and marine life. The region is also home to fields of lotus flowers, which are a remarkable rarity. The waterlogged territories of the region function as vital nesting and migration grounds for more than 100 bird species. The Caspian fauna is characterized by the presence of the endemic Caspian seal, the sole marine mammal found in the region.

Oil extraction, as well as fishing and shipping represent the predominant economic activities in the Caspian Sea basin. Trading ports like Baku, Turkmenbashi, and Anzali, Machachkala, Bautino, and Aktau are undergoing reconstruction and expansion to support these activities.

Special international legal instrument regulating cooperation on environmental protection issues in the Caspian Sea and sustainable use of its resources is the **Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea (Tehran Convention)**.

The Convention notes the deterioration of the state of the sea environment of the Caspian Sea of the problem and denotes the main accents of activity to solve them such as:

- Minimizing “pollution arising from various sources as a result of human activities, including the discharge, emission and disposal of harmful and hazardous substances, wastes and other pollutants, both in the sea and from land-based sources”;
- “Acknowledging the need to ensure that land-based activities do not make harm for the marine environment of the Caspian Sea”;
- Minimizing “the danger for the marine environment of the Caspian Sea and to its unique hydrographic and ecological characteristics related to the problem of sea-level fluctuation”;
- Reaffirming the importance of protection of the marine environment of the Caspian Sea.



Photo 1. Physical and geographical map of the Caspian Sea

The Convention also reaffirms “importance of protection of the marine environment of the Caspian Sea” and “preserve living resources of the Caspian Sea for present and future generations”. With the aim to protect and conserve the marine environment of the Caspian Sea the Convention recognizes the importance of cooperation among the Contracting Parties and with relevant international organizations.

The Tehran Convention consists of nine sections:

1. General Provisions, including use of terms, the scope, and objectives of the Convention consisting of the protection of the Caspian environment from all sources of pollution and the protection, preservation, restoration and sustainable and rational use of the biological resources of the Caspian Sea;
2. General Obligations: this part outlines the obligations of the Parties and the principles guiding their interaction, primarily aimed at adopting individual and joint measures to prevent, reduce and control pollution of the Caspian Sea and to protect, preserve and restore the environment of the Caspian Sea. By using the resources of the Caspian Sea in such a way as not to cause harm to the marine environment of the Caspian Sea as well as the principles that the Parties should be guided in cooperation with each other and with competent international organizations for the achievement of the objective of this Convention;
3. Prevention, Reduction and Control of Pollution, including Pollution from Land-Based Sources, Pollution from Seabed Activities, Pollution from Vessels, Pollution Caused by Dumping, Pollution from Other Human Activities, Prevention of Introduction, Control and Combatting of Invasive Alien Species, Environmental Emergencies;
4. Protection, Preservation and Restoration of the Marine Environment, including Protection, Preservation, Restoration and Rational Use of Marine Living Resources, Coastal Zone Management, Caspian Sea Level Fluctuation;
5. Procedures, including environmental impact assessment, cooperation, monitoring, research, and information exchange. This section acknowledges the effectiveness of international cooperation, especially in conducting joint scientific research and establishing a unified methodological basis for environmental monitoring in the region;
6. Institutional Arrangements, including organizational structures, such as the Conference of the Parties, the Secretariat of the Convention;
7. Protocols and annexes to the Convention, including Adoption of Protocols, Adoption of Annexes and Amendments;
8. Implementation and Compliance, including definition National Authority to co-ordinate implementation of the provisions of this Convention in its territory and under its jurisdiction, Reports, Compliance, Liability and Compensation for Damage, Settlement of Disputes;
9. Final articles, including Signature, Ratification, Acceptance, Approval and Accession, Reservations, Entry into Force, Amendment of the Convention or Protocols, Depositary, Authentic texts.

Following the general obligations of the Convention, “the Contracting Parties individually or jointly take all appropriate measures to prevent, reduce, and control pollution of the Caspian Sea”, as well as measures “for the protection, conservation, and restoration of the marine environment of the Caspian Sea” (Article 4 of the Tehran Convention). Tehran Convention includes implementation tools such as Action Plan for the Protection of the marine environment of the Caspian Sea (Article 18 of the Tehran Convention) and National Reports on measures adopted for the implementation of the provisions of this Convention and its protocols, which serve as the basis for providing information within the framework of the Tehran Convention on assessing the state of the Caspian Sea’s marine environment, particularly pollution and its impacts over a certain period (Article 27 of the Tehran Convention).

One of the regional environmental cooperation tools provided by the Tehran Convention is the State of the Environment Reports for the Caspian Sea – SOE (item 10, Article 22 of the Tehran Convention), based on information from the National Reports of the Caspian littoral states, monitoring data, and other information. The Contracting Parties to the Tehran Convention cooperate on a bilateral and multilateral basis in developing protocols prescribing additional measures, procedures, and standards for implementing the Convention (Article 6 of the Tehran Convention).

The Protocol Concerning Regional Preparedness, Response and Co-operation in Combating Oil Pollution Incidents – Aktau Protocol (August 2011, Aktau, Kazakhstan), including the Regional Cooperation Plan for Combating Oil Pollution in Emergency Situations in the Caspian Sea, defines the responsibility of each Contracting Party for preparedness and response in cases of oil pollution incidents. It contains provisions on coordination and cooperation at the regional level. The Protocol envisages the establishment of mechanisms for implementing the Emergency Response Plan.

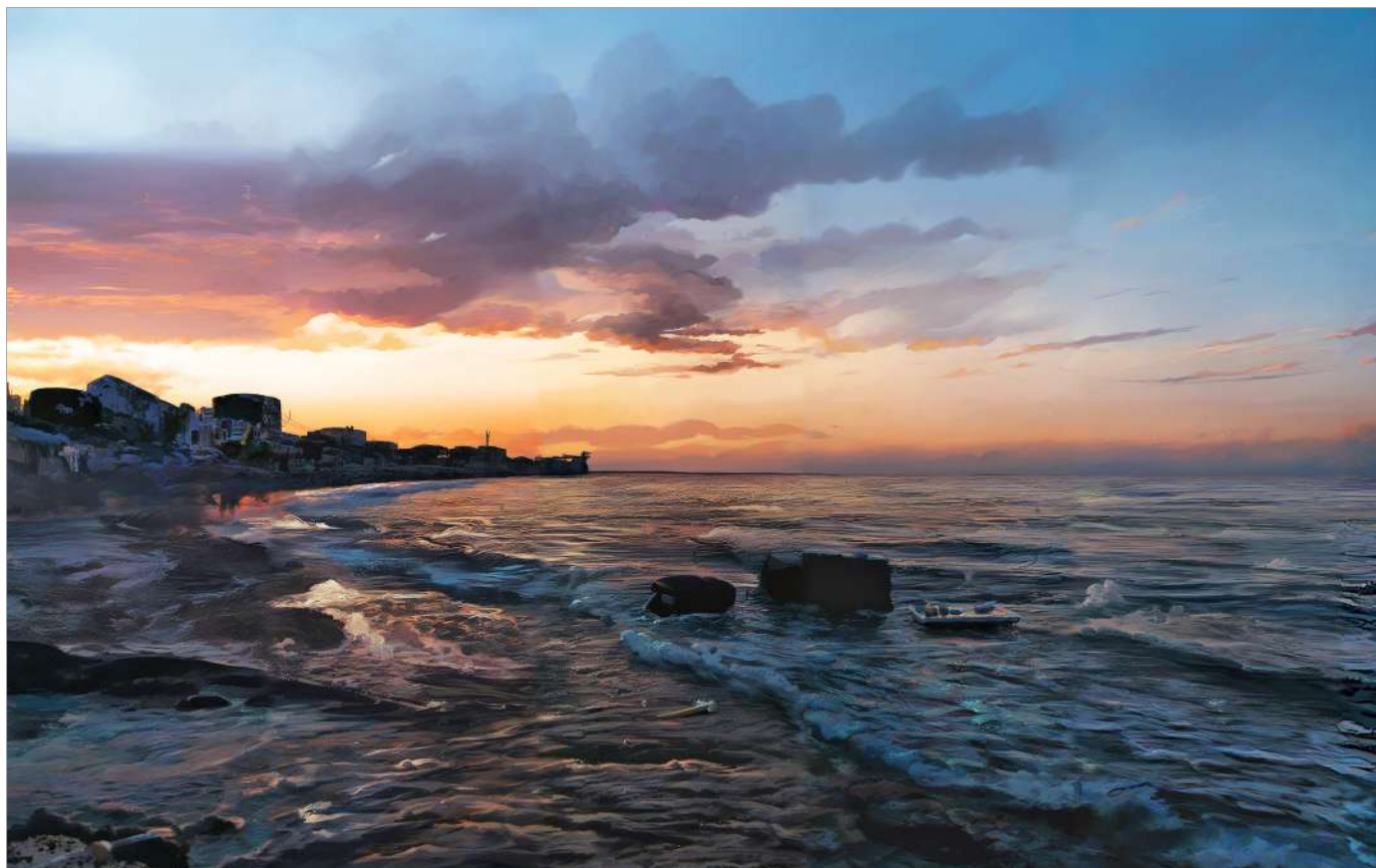
The Protocol for the Protection of the Caspian Sea against Pollution from Land-based Sources and Activities – Moscow Protocol (December 2012, Moscow, Russia) takes all appropriate measures in accordance with the provisions of the Convention to prevent, control, reduce and to the maximum extent possibly eliminate pollution of and other adverse effects on the marine environment and coastal areas of the Caspian Sea from land-based sources and activities (item 1 Article 4 of the Moscow Protocol).

The Protocol for the Conservation of Biological Diversity – Ashgabat Protocol (May 2014, Ashgabat, Turkmenistan) – The Protocol regulates issues related to the protection, conservation, and restoration of the viability and integrity of biological diversity and ecosystems of the Caspian Sea, as well as issues related to sustainable use of biological resources, conservation of species at risk of extinction, and vulnerable ecosystems, protected areas in the marine environment and on land adjacent to the sea (Article 2 of the Ashgabat Protocol).

The Protocol on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context – EIA Protocol (July 2018, Moscow, Russia) is of great importance for the Caspian Sea region in connection with significant transboundary environmental impacts in the region during economic activities, including projects for the development and transportation of hydrocarbon raw materials in the marine environment of the Caspian Sea. The protocol provides effective and transparent environmental impact assessment procedures in a transboundary context to any proposed activity which is likely to cause significant transboundary impact on the marine environment and land affected by proximity to the sea in order to prevent, reduce and control pollution of the marine environment and land affected by proximity to the sea, promote conservation of its biodiversity, and rational use of its natural resources (Article 2 of the EIA Protocol).

The draft text of the **Protocol on Monitoring, Assessment, and Information Exchange to the Tehran Convention** is currently under consideration by the Caspian littoral states. The themes of the protocols to the Tehran Convention align with the primary environmental challenges of the Caspian Sea– pollution of the sea and coastal zone, threats to its biodiversity, including biological resources and changes in the level of the Caspian Sea. In addition, seven articles of the Tehran Convention are devoted to issues related to the **prevention, reduction, and control of pollution**, which are generally the main focus of the Convention and its protocols.

The Convention defines **pollution** as “the introduction by man, directly or indirectly, of substances or energy into the environment, resulting in or likely to result in such deleterious effects as harm to living resources and marine organisms, hazards to human health, hindrance to legitimate uses of the Caspian Sea” (Article 1 of the Tehran Convention). The Convention distinguishes various types of pollution of the Caspian Sea environment depending on their nature and source: Pollution from Land-Based Sources; Pollution from Seabed Activities; Pollution from Vessels; Pollution Caused by Dumping; Pollution from Other Human Activities; Pollution from of Invasive Alien Species; Environmental Emergencies.



Pollution from land-based sources is defined by the Moscow Protocol as pollution of the sea from all types of point and diffuse sources located on land, which enters the marine environment through waterways, the atmosphere, or directly from the shore (Article 2 of the Moscow Protocol). The Moscow Protocol also considers categories of substances based on their hazardous or other harmful characteristics, including marine litter, defined as “any persistent industrial or processed discharged, disposed of, or abandoned solid material” (Section “B”, Appendix I to the Moscow Protocol). To enhance the effectiveness of activities to prevent, control, and eliminate pollution from land-based sources, the Moscow Protocol provides for the development of corresponding action plans (item 2, Article 5 of the Moscow Protocol) and for reducing the influx of pollutants from point sources based on a list of “hotspots”, the development of national action plans is proposed (item 2, Article 7 of the Moscow Protocol).

The Tehran Convention extensively addresses the issue of pollution from sewage discharges (subparagraphs (b), (c), and (e) of item 2, article 7 of the Tehran Convention), including the presence of a licensing system for sewage discharges to control and reduce their quantity, providing for the use of various methods for treating urban sewage (subparagraph e, item 2, Article 7 of the Tehran Convention). The Tehran Convention outlines measures to prevent, reduce, and control pollution of the Caspian Sea caused by land reclamation and related activities such as soil excavation and dam construction. Additionally, it addresses the need to minimize the potential negative impact of anthropogenic activities intended to mitigate the consequences of sea level fluctuations on the Caspian ecosystem (article 11 of the Tehran Convention).

To minimize Pollution from Vessels of the Caspian Sea and to prevent, hindrance, reduce and control pollution of the Caspian Sea caused by dumping from vessels and aircraft registered in their territory or flying their flag the Tehran Convention prescribes to use agreed measures, procedures and standards, taking into account relevant international standards (Article 9 of the Tehran Convention). Pollution caused by oil, as outlined in the articles of the Tehran Convention and its protocols, is associated with the activities of oil companies and the need to assess the impact of oil pollution on biodiversity and biota, as well as to prevent, control, and reduce the level of oil pollution in the Caspian Sea.

The Tehran Convention addresses issues related to the prevention of oil pollution of the marine environment during the implementation of important projects for the extraction and transportation of hydrocarbon raw materials and obliges all necessary measures to prevent, reduce, and control pollution of the Caspian Sea from activities on its seabed (Article 8 of the Tehran Convention). As outlined in Crude oil and hydrocarbons of petroleum origin are listed among the most significant pollutants of the Caspian Sea (Annex I to the Moscow Protocol).

To control oil pollution, the Moscow Protocol categorizes types of activities based on their potential to pollute the marine environment (extractive industries; activities related to oil and gas), and categories of substances determined based on their harmful characteristics (crude oil and hydrocarbons of petroleum origin and used lubricants) (item 2, Sections “A”, “B”, Appendix I to the Moscow Protocol). The Moscow Protocol provides measures to ensure the safety of oil and chemical industry installations, land contaminated with oil that may be threatened by flooding, and measures to decommission obsolete coastal installations and storage facilities (item 2, Article 9 of the Moscow Protocol).

Negative impacts on the Caspian Sea can arise as a result of various incidents involving ships, pipelines, stationary and floating platforms and abandoned wells.

Measures are provided to ensure readiness and response to incidents causing oil pollution (item 1, Article 4 of the Aktau Protocol), as well as the establishment of national systems and emergency action plans for combating incidents causing oil pollution (Article 5 of the Aktau Protocol). To reduce the damage caused by incidents causing oil pollution, it is necessary to take prompt measures, including those related to conducting the necessary assessment of the origin, area of spread, and potential consequences of the incident causing oil pollution or, as the case may be, the type and approximate quantity of oil and the direction and speed of drift of the spillage (subparagraph a, item 1, Article 8 of the Aktau Protocol).

Additionally, each Party shall develop training and personnel preparation programmes to enhance the readiness of authorities responsible for responding to incidents causing oil pollution (item 4, Article 5 of the Aktau Protocol). Each Caspian littoral state takes measures to ensure that each vessel flying its flag has an emergency oil pollution control plan (item 1, Article 9 of the Aktau Protocol), and that operators of Caspian littoral states responsible for maritime installations, as well as authorities responsible for seaports and operators responsible for oil processing facilities, develop emergency action plans for oil pollution. These plans are correlated with the respective national documents and approved in accordance with the procedures established by the competent national authority (item 3, Article 9 of the Aktau Protocol).

Preventing “biological pollution” of the Caspian Sea by alien species is a critical concern linked to the development of navigation, the use of double-hull tankers, and the expansion of connections between the Caspian Sea and the World Ocean. The Ashgabat Protocol provides for the regulation of the introduction of alien species by imposing a ban on those that may have adverse effects on ecosystems, habitats, or species, as well as the regulation of already introduced species that cause or may cause harm (item a, Article 7 of the Ashgabat Protocol). The requirements outlined in both the Tehran Convention and the Ashgabat Protocol are directed towards protecting, preserving and restoration of endemic, rare and endangered marine species, and ensure that marine species are not endangered by over-exploitation.

Parties are required to notify about any situation that may endanger the survival of threatened species or ecosystems of protected areas (subparagraph c, Article 17 of the Ashgabat Protocol) and to provide access to technologies related to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity (item 1, Article 15 of the Ashgabat Protocol). The Ashgabat Protocol focuses on addressing a negative impact on protected species and their habitats (item 1, Article 6 of the Ashgabat Protocol), as well as on management of Protected Areas (Article 10 of the Ashgabat Protocol).

A distinctive aspect in this domain is the systematic adoption of an ecosystem approach to fisheries activities in the Caspian Sea. This approach integrates the development of biological

resource potential with the restoration of ecological balance, and the maintenance of populations of commercial species at levels that allow for maximum sustainable yields, with ecological factors determining these processes. A crucial requirement of the Tehran Convention is to use the natural resources of the Caspian Sea in a manner that does not harm the marine environment and biological resources of the Caspian Sea (item b, Article 5 of the Ashgabat Protocol). Additionally, it specifies measures and activities aimed at “preventing deterioration, degradation, and harm to species, habitats, and ecosystems in accordance with the precautionary principle” (item b, Article 2 of the Ashgabat Protocol).

Conservation of biological diversity of the Caspian Sea region is linked with the aim to ensure conditions in which biological species are not endangered by overexploitation, and they are directed towards the protection, conservation, and restoration of endemic, rare, and endangered biological species. The Ashgabat Protocol aims to reduce the negative impact associated with protected species and their habitats (item b, Article 6 of the Ashgabat Protocol), as well as within protected areas (Article 10 of the Ashgabat Protocol). The negative impact on protected species and their habitats is addressed through regulation of activities to minimize such impacts (item b, Article 6 of the Ashgabat Protocol) and taking measures to control sources of pollution and any activity that cause or may cause a significant negative impact on habitats and species (item j, Article 5 of the Ashgabat Protocol).

The Protocol provides necessary conservation measures and regulates activities that have a negative impact on protected species:

- Designation of protected areas in the marine environment and land affected by proximity to the sea (item 1, Article 9 of the Ashgabat Protocol);
- The prohibition of the dumping or discharge of wastes and other substances is likely to damage the ecosystem integrity of the protected area directly or indirectly (subparagraph a, item 1, Article 10 of the Ashgabat Protocol);
- Inclusion of measures to national emergency response contingency plans respond to incidents, which can cause damage to protected areas, incorporate measures for responding to incidents that could cause damage or constitute a threat to the protected areas (item 3, Article 10 of the Ashgabat Protocol);
- Establishing comprehensive registries of threatened species of flora and fauna and giving protected status to these species (item a, Article 6 of the Ashgabat Protocol);
- Compiling registries of biodiversity and habitats for the purpose of conserving biodiversity and sustainable and rational use of biological resources (item g, Article 5 of the Ashgabat Protocol).

The tasks related to “managing land affected by proximity to the sea” should be carried out through the “development and implementation of national strategies and plans” that take into account the peculiarities of the Caspian Sea region and adapt the activities of socio-economic complexes in the region to periodic sea level fluctuations, shaping and maintaining the uniqueness of its biodiversity and the commercial significance of its biological resources (Article 15 of the Tehran Convention).

To ensure the sustainable management of the marine and coastal environment of the Caspian Sea region, it is essential to identify activities related to the impact on the marine and coastal environment of the region, based on their potential for marine pollution (Annex I to the Moscow Protocol). Relevant national strategies, action plans and programmes should be comprehensive and include the “need for sustainable and rational use of biological resources and the preservation of biological diversity, including habitats” (Article 5 of the Ashgabat Protocol).

To safeguard biodiversity, national land management strategies and plans for areas affected by proximity to the sea should (Article 12 of the Ashgabat Protocol) apply environmental impact assessment procedures as a tool for preventing and minimizing negative impacts on biodiversity in the Caspian Sea marine environment (Article 13 of the Ashgabat Protocol).

The Tehran Convention and its protocols recognize the need for sustainable development of the Caspian Sea coastal areas through an integrated coastal zone management (items g, 2, Article 4 of the Moscow Protocol), including planning that provides for “mitigation measures to reduce negative impacts on the population and infrastructure of coastal areas from natural hazards, such as long-term sea level fluctuations, storm surges, storms, earthquakes, and coastal erosion”, as well as measures to reduce and halt deforestation and land degradation in coastal areas (item 1, Article 10 of the Moscow Protocol).

An important mechanism for integrated management is the designation of protected areas in the marine and coastal areas, where monitoring of ecological systems, habitats, population dynamics, and anthropogenic impact is carried out. Protected areas can be designated in the marine environment and on land affected by proximity to the sea. Measures for planning, management, control, and monitoring of protected areas include the development and adoption of a management plan for the protected area (items 1-2, Article 10 of the Ashgabat Protocol).

To enhance the effectiveness of sustainable management of the marine and coastal environment of the Caspian Sea and the implementation of conservation measures in national and regional plans and programmes, the Tehran Convention provides for procedures and mechanisms, such as environmental impact assessment in transboundary context procedures for any planned activities that may have significant negative impacts on the marine and coastal environment of the Caspian Sea (item 1, Article 17 of the Tehran Convention) and the creation and implementation of relevant individual and/or joint monitoring programmes of the state of the marine environment of the Caspian Sea (item 1, Article 19 of the Tehran Convention).

The primary tool for assessing and managing the state of the Caspian Sea’s marine environment is environmental monitoring. Such monitoring should be comprehensive and maintain a high degree of mutual complementarity among its components. According to Article 19 of the Tehran Convention, the Parties are obligated to regularly conduct, either independently or jointly, the “assessment of the state of the Caspian Sea’s marine environment and the effectiveness of measures taken to prevent, reduce, and control pollution of the Caspian Sea’s marine environment”, as well as develop a “centralized database that serves as the basis for decision-making and a common source of information and education for specialists, administrators, and the public”.



Issues related to monitoring the marine and coastal environment of the Caspian Sea are being addressed in the development of specialized protocol on monitoring, assessment, and information exchange, as well as in the Ashgabat Protocol on the conservation of biodiversity and the Moscow Protocol for the Protection of the Caspian Sea against Pollution from Land-based Sources and Activities.

The Ashgabat Protocol proposes measures for monitoring protected areas, including monitoring ecological systems, habitats, population dynamics, and the impact of anthropogenic activities, (subparagraph b, item 2, Article 10 of the Ashgabat Protocol), guided by the national legislation of the countries participating in the Tehran Convention (item f, Article 5 of the Ashgabat Protocol). It envisages long-term monitoring of endangered species, the nature and scale of threats to their survival, in accordance with agreed common criteria for population dynamics (item g, Article 6 of the Ashgabat Protocol) and the development of unified monitoring systems for specially protected areas of the Caspian Sea and endangered species (subparagraph f, item 2, Article 20 of the Ashgabat Protocol).

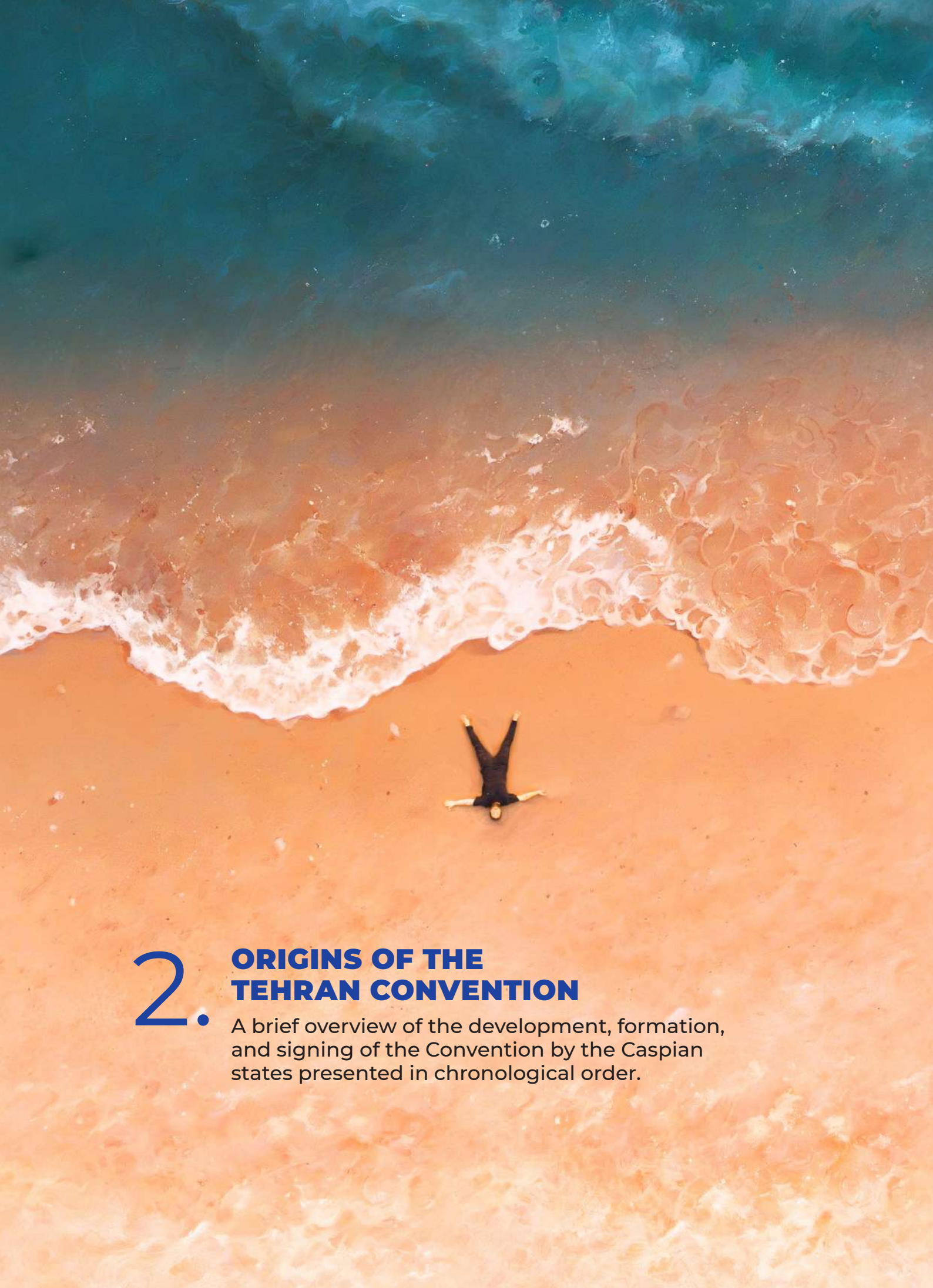
The procedure for assessing the environmental impact of any planned activity that could have a significant adverse effect on the marine environment of the Caspian Sea holds a significant place in the Tehran Convention (item 1, Article 17 of the Tehran Convention). To prevent, reduce, and control pollution of the marine and coastal environment affected by the proximity to the sea, to contribute to the conservation of its biodiversity and the rational use of its natural resources, and to protect human health, it is necessary to conduct effective and transparent environmental impact assessment procedures in the context of planned activities that could have significant transboundary impacts on the marine and coastal environment affected by the proximity to the sea (Article 2 of the Protocol on EIA).

Environmental impact assessment procedures are used as a tool to prevent and minimize negative impacts on biological diversity in the marine environment of the Caspian Sea (Article 13 of the Ashgabat Protocol). Environmental impact assessment procedures are also applied for any planned type of activity or project carried out on land within its territory that may have a significant adverse impact on the marine environment or coastal areas of the Caspian Sea (item 2, Article 12 of the Moscow Protocol).

A critical condition for the environmental impact assessment procedure is to ensure public participation in the EIA procedure in areas of possible impact and to conduct public discussions by notifying the public about the planned activity, draft documentation on environmental impact assessment and other relevant measures (item 1 of Article 8 of the EIA Protocol).

Sustainable use of natural resources should be based on integrated coastal zone management, allowing for the multi-purpose use of biological resources and taking into account the natural dynamics of coastal ecosystems associated with sea level fluctuations (Article 12 of the Ashgabat Protocol). The vulnerability of the marine and coastal areas of the Caspian Sea and their natural resources to various impacts is one of the key factors for comprehensive management of marine and coastal territories. Accordingly, appropriate measures should be developed to implement adaptation strategies.

The effectiveness of managing the marine and coastal environment of the Caspian Sea region is associated with cooperation among the Caspian littoral states in conducting scientific research, developing specialized scientific programmes aimed at addressing problems of Caspian Sea marine pollution, assessing damage caused by pollution, enhancing understanding of the hydrological regime and ecosystem dynamics of the Caspian Sea, including sea level fluctuations and the impact of such fluctuations on marine and coastal ecosystems, among others (Article 20 of the Tehran Convention). A brief overview of the key articles of the Tehran Convention and its protocols reveals that despite being a framework, its provisions encompass the full spectrum of environmental issues concerning the Caspian Sea and outlines measures for their resolution.



2.

ORIGINS OF THE TEHRAN CONVENTION

A brief overview of the development, formation, and signing of the Convention by the Caspian states presented in chronological order.

The origins of the Tehran Convention can be traced back to the early 1990s, when significant concerns about the environmental degradation of the Caspian Sea and its coastal zone surfaced. Issues such as water pollution, regulation of river flow, introduction of alien species, overfishing, and poaching were underscored against the backdrop of sea level fluctuations. This prompted the prioritization of the Caspian region's problems within the framework of regional environmental cooperation among the Caspian littoral states from 1991.

From approximately 1991 to 1995, numerous proposals were put forward for organizing environmental cooperation, often as a part of projects aimed at establishing the modern legal status of the Caspian Sea. Several draft agreements were suggested for the conservation and rational use of aquatic biological resources, cooperation in Caspian Sea hydrometeorology, and mineral resource utilization. Various declarations were adopted at high-level meetings, and forms of regional environmental cooperation with international organizations were explored during this period.

In 1991, there was a pressing need to conserve Caspian biota, particularly sturgeon species, leading to their inclusion in Appendix II of the CITES Convention. Additionally, the conclusion of a corresponding agreement for the conservation and rational use of Caspian biota became prominent issues. These concerns were reflected in the future environmental convention and served as its starting point. In 1992, an Interdepartmental Commission on Water Biological Resources of the Caspian Sea and the Management of Water Biological Resources was established at the level of relevant fisheries authorities.

In 1993, the "Earth Summit" (Rio de Janeiro, 1992) emerged as a significant turning point in the development of international legal foundations for addressing environmental problems such as climate change, biodiversity, and desertification. Building on the decisions of this Summit, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) proposed the organization of an international regional Working Group on Climate Change Impacts in the Caspian Sea Region. It aimed to develop coordinated approaches by the Caspian littoral states to address the region's environmental problems associated with rising sea levels and climate change. In December 1993, Caspian States appealed to UNEP for assistance in developing a relevant convention on the Caspian Sea. Based on this decision, the UNEP Regional Office for Europe proposed conducting a fact-finding mission involving a group of international experts to the Caspian Sea region. The aim was to develop an Action Plan to assist in preparing a convention on cooperation among the region's states to address environmental problems.

On May 26, 1994, a meeting was convened in Almaty, attended by representatives from the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Russian Federation, and Turkmenistan. During the meeting participants emphasized the urgent need for conserving the Caspian Sea's biota, including habitats. Recognizing the significance of this issue, they appealed to the international community to support their joint efforts and assist in advancing an environmental programme. From May 20 to 24, 1994, the **first session of the Working Group on discussing the consequences of climate change in the Caspian Sea region** took place in Moscow under the auspices of the UNEP Regional Seas Programme. At this meeting, representatives of all Caspian states reaffirmed the urgent need for measures to protect and preserve the Caspian region. One of the priority actions proposed was the timely development of a regional legally binding document in the form of a framework convention. This convention would establish common principles and institutional mechanisms for environmental cooperation, taking into account the specific characteristics of the region, legal precedents, models, and experiences accumulated at the global and regional levels, especially the experience of UNEP.

In accordance with the recommendations of this meeting and based on national reports submitted by experts from Azerbaijan (F. Jafarov et al.), Iran (M. Said Hosseini), Kazakhstan



(Zh. Duisenbayev), Russia (A. Amirkhanov, B. Morozov et al.), and Turkmenistan (A. Babaev, D. Lavrov et al.), the UNEP consultant P. Kaplin prepared a regional overview, and recommendations titled “Consequences of Climate Change in the Caspian Sea Region”. In **1995**, a joint mission of UNEP, UNDP, and the World Bank visited the region within the framework of the “UN Caspian Initiative”. The Commission concluded that the preparation of a regional environmental convention was timely. The mission’s results also served as the basis for the formation of the international project “Caspian Environmental Programme” (CEP), which combined contributions from UNEP, GEF and the EU-TACIS to address Caspian Sea environmental issues.

Under the auspices and with organizational and financial support from UNEP, the development of a convention on protecting the water environment of the Caspian Sea began as a fundamental regional legal instrument. To facilitate the development of the future convention, corresponding national experts were appointed by the governments of Caspian states.

In **December 1995, in Geneva**, under the UNEP Region Office for Europe, the first meeting of experts from Caspian states on legislative and institutional support for environmental activities in the Caspian Sea region was held following the “UN Caspian Initiative”. Representatives of Caspian states unanimously agreed that the existing environmental problems of the Caspian Sea required international legal support, defining specific actions that Caspian countries should take to preserve the marine and coastal environment of the Caspian Sea. They also agreed that when drafting such a document, it should consider the uniqueness of the natural conditions and resources of the region, the geographical and ecological integrity of the Caspian Sea, and the need to harmonize economic and environmental interests in the exploitation of biological and mineral resources.

It was suggested to coordinate specific issues within separate protocols, which could be concluded at a later stage. This event marked the beginning of drafting a framework convention for protecting the marine environment of the Caspian Sea. In **1996, during the second meeting in Geneva**, experts from Caspian states reviewed the basic elements prepared by A. Timoshenko, a UNEP consultant. Based on these documents, it was decided to develop a draft of the institutional aspects of the framework convention. Institutional mechanisms were identified as a significant element of the framework convention.

The preparation of the framework convention relied on relevant legal precedents, models, and experiences accumulated at the global and regional levels. Specifically, the experience of existing regional marine conventions (The Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission – also known as the Helsinki Commission, the Kuwait Regional Convention on Cooperation for

the Protection of the Marine Environment from Pollution), as well as principles outlined in the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and the Agenda for the XXI Century, were utilized. The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) was also used to develop future provisions of the convention, given the importance of preserving sturgeon species in the Caspian Sea region.

98

January 19–23, 1998: An International Seminar on the Conservation of Caspian Sturgeon Species was held in Moscow; this item was included in Appendix II of the CITES Convention.

February 1998: The Third Meeting of Experts from Caspian states on the development of the convention took place in Moscow. The first draft of the framework convention, prepared by UNEP consultant A. Timoshenko, was presented. Experts reviewed the main elements of the framework convention. Following a detailed examination of the first draft, amendments were proposed, agreed upon, and corresponding suggestions were made. The section of the convention on institutional mechanisms was decided to be deferred for further discussion. After the third meeting, the UNEP consultant prepared a review of the basic elements of the convention and a commentary on the draft convention, providing a clause-by-clause analysis of the positions of the Parties.

In **October 1998**, the UNEP consultant presented a revised version of the convention text. This version incorporated comments and results of consultations with the Parties. In the revised draft of the convention, definitions, article headings, and their content were edited considering existing precedents, the document's objectives, and the specificity of the Caspian region. Additionally, technical work was done to align the document's structure (numbering of chapters, articles, items, and subparagraphs) with existing precedents.

00

March 6–8, 2000: The Fourth Meeting of Experts from Caspian states on the development of the framework convention took place in Almaty, Republic of Kazakhstan. Proposals and remarks from representatives of all Caspian states were heard. Following lengthy and intensive discussions, the Parties agreed on the text of two articles of the framework convention: Article 2 "Objective" and Article 3 "Scope of Application". Experts representing all Caspian states agreed to submit their comments to UNEP for the preparation of a revised version of the framework convention for discussion at the Fifth Meeting of Experts on the development of the framework convention.

June 21–23, 2000: The Fifth Meeting of Experts from Caspian states on the development of the convention took place in Moscow. A UNEP representative proposed to consider the draft convention clause-by-clause, in accordance with the agreements reached during the Fourth Meeting of Experts in Almaty (March 2000). Participants agreed that it would be appropriate to revisit the convention's title after completing its content.

After prolonged and intensive discussions involving representatives of all Contracting Parties, meeting participants agreed on the text of the draft framework convention up to Article "Monitoring". It was noted that the draft needed scientific, technical, and stylistic editing without affecting the substantive aspects, ensuring consistency between the Russian and English versions of the document. Meeting participants deemed it appropriate to henceforth refer to the event as the "Meeting on the Preparation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea". The revised draft convention, prepared in consideration of the discussions, was sent to the governments of Caspian states and served as the basis for continuing the negotiation process at the next meeting of experts.

October 11–13, 2000: Moscow hosted the Sixth Meeting of Experts from Caspian states to prepare the framework convention for the protection of the Caspian Sea marine environment. After discussions involving all stakeholders, the meeting preliminarily agreed on

the text of Articles 19–38 of the draft framework convention. However, consensus on Section VI (“Organizational Issues”) of the document, except for provisions regarding the functioning of the Secretariat, was not reached.

During the discussion on organizational matters, the meeting appealed to the delegations of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation. It was proposed during intersessional consultations to prepare a coordinated text of Section VI of the Framework Convention and distribute it to all Caspian states before the Seventh Meeting of Experts.

Several provisions of the text remained unresolved:

- Throughout the text of the Convention: [marine] or [environmental] environment;
- Article 3 “Scope of Application”;
- Adoption of protocols and amendments: [unanimous decision] [consensus] [at Council meetings];
- Article 33 “Reservations”;

The meeting recommended holding the next expert meeting for the final agreement on the text of the Framework Convention in 2001 in Iran. This would provide an opportunity to combine the next meeting with the Conference of Plenipotentiaries for the signing of the Convention. A revised version of the document text was prepared for final discussion at the Seventh Meeting.

02 July 15–17, 2002: Tehran hosted the Seventh Meeting of Experts from Caspian states to prepare the framework convention for the protection of the Caspian Sea marine environment. The main goal of the meeting was to finalize the text of the framework convention for its prompt signing.

Regarding the naming of the convention, Azerbaijani representatives supported the use of the term “marine environment”, while Iranian representatives preferred “environment”. However, consensus was quickly reached during the discussion. Concerning the terms used, formulations proposed by the UNEP consultant for the terms “vessel” and “invasive alien species”



were accepted. The most vivid discussion revolved around the definitions of “sustainable development” and “coastal zones”. As a result, the Iranian Party, which strongly advocated for the inclusion of these concepts in the text, agreed to their exclusion, demonstrating readiness for compromise. The issue of defining the “scope of application” of the convention was also resolved, with the exclusion of the term “coastal zone”.

Several proposals were related to removing provisions from the document text concerning possible environmental restrictions on the exploration, development, extraction, and transportation of hydrocarbon resources. Consensus was reached on the formulation of the “Objective” article, including the addition of the concept of “sustainable and rational use” of Caspian Sea living resources, proposed by the Azerbaijani Party. Some issues only affected the Russian-language version of the document and concerned the accurate translation of terms into Russian. For example, regarding the translation of the term “dumping”, the Russian delegation proposed using the term “сброс”, and the term “environmentally sound technology” was agreed to be interpreted as “экологически обоснованная технология”.

Regarding the preparation of protocols to the convention, the Parties agreed that, in line with the Article 24 of the agreed text, “Any Contracting Party may propose protocols to this Convention”, regardless of whether the framework convention’s articles mention the possibility of preparing a protocol on a specific thematic direction (by that time, a Protocol on Cooperation in Emergency Situations had already been prepared within the framework of the Caspian Environmental Programme, discussed during the Second Regional Meeting on the Development of the Regional Plan for Cooperation in Cases of Incidents Causing Pollution in the Caspian Sea (Tehran, April 23–26, 2002).

The issue of the official languages of the framework convention was not resolved and was deferred to the meeting of Conference of the Parties. Furthermore, the definition of the ‘Organization for Caspian States Cooperation,’ agreed upon in 1992, has remained in square brackets. This is due to the lack of interest from most Caspian states, which has prevented the realization of the organization. Through intensive consultations, the Parties agreed on the main provisions of the organizational structure of the framework convention, constituting Section VI of the document. Additionally, during intersessional discussions, options for the interim Secretariat’s location were explored. One alternative considered was placing it within the UNEP structure in Geneva.

The meeting successfully completed the agreement on the framework convention’s text at the expert level and decided to hold the Conference of Plenipotentiaries of all Caspian states to sign the framework convention in Tehran in January 2003. However, at the request of the Iranian Party, the conference dates were postponed to a later period.

03

July 14–15, 2003: Astana hosted the Eighth Meeting of Experts from Caspian states to prepare the framework convention. The event was convened at the request of the Republic of Kazakhstan. During the meeting, the comments previously submitted by the Kazakh Party were discussed, leading to several amendments to the document, primarily of an editorial nature.

November 3, 2003, the Conference of Plenipotentiaries of the Caspian Littoral States adopted the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea. The Convention has been open for signature by the Caspian littoral States since November 4, 2003.

November 3–4, 2003: Tehran hosted the Conference of Plenipotentiaries for the Adoption and Signature of the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Caspian Sea Environment. After active negotiations and consultations, the Parties reached an agreement on the text of this crucial international environmental document in the region.

This agreement was formalized by the signing of the Tehran Convention for the Protection of the Caspian Sea Environment on **November 4 by the Plenipotentiaries of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Republic of Kazakhstan, and the Russian Federation. On November 9, the Tehran Convention was signed by the authorized representative of Turkmenistan.** Thus, the Caspian states officially outlined a broad area of convergence of positions and readiness to cooperate in addressing the serious environmental problems of the Caspian Sea.

In the Final Act of the Conference, the Parties called on the Regional Office for Europe of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to continue supporting the Convention processes until the Convention enters into force and to prepare for the first Meeting of the Conference of the Parties. The contribution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which hosted the signing conference of the Tehran Convention, was noted. Iran was entrusted with the functions of the Depository of the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Caspian Sea Environment.

The Tehran Convention became the first multilateral treaty document in the field of environmental protection in the Caspian Sea region. The negotiation process for the Convention project was facilitated by the Regional Office for Europe of the United Nations Environment Programme since 1995. During this period eight expert meetings were held, which enabled the preparation of a comprehensive document addressing a wide range of environmental protection issues concerning the Caspian Sea.

An important feature of the formation of the Tehran Convention as a legal instrument for the preservation of the marine and coastal environment of the region is that it was created in the context of the intensification of the activities of several conventions (CBD, RAMSAR, CITES, ESPO Convention, Bucharest Convention,,), as well as international organizations (UNEP, FAO, WMO, UNDP, IMO). The outcome documents of the Rio de Janeiro Conference in 1992 – Agenda 21 and the Rio Principles – further played a constructive role in facilitating the development and strengthening of the organizational mechanism and legal framework for addressing environmental issues for sustainable development and environmental protection at national and international levels.

This allowed the developers of the Tehran Convention to accumulate a number of provisions and experiences from other conventions and programmes when formulating several articles of the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Caspian Sea Environment. It should also be noted that the organizational and financial support for the development of the Tehran Convention was provided within the framework of international projects.

3. **TEHRAN CONVENTION AND INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS ON ITS DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION.**

A brief overview of international projects supporting the development and implementation of the Tehran Convention.



An essential aspect of the development and implementation of the Tehran Convention is its utilization of the outcomes of international projects. This contributed to the progress in shaping and executing the Tehran Convention. Another equally important feature of the Tehran Convention is its active collaboration with international and regional organizations and conventions during its formation and implementation phases.

Beginning in mid-1997, the UNEP initiated the 'Comprehensive Environmental Management of the Volga-Caspian Region' project. This project was designed to support the preparation of a legal instrument for regional environmental cooperation (the future Tehran Convention) and to develop environmental monitoring and modern methods of comprehensive water ecosystem management in the Caspian Sea. Within this project, the initial phase of support for the development of a framework convention on environmental cooperation in the Caspian was carried out. Expert meetings involving the region's states were held in 1998 and 2000 as part of the project, laying the groundwork for the convention project.

Since 2000, the development of the convention has been incorporated as a key activity element under the UNEP's contribution within the international **Caspian Environmental Programme (CEP)**. The CEP envisaged the establishment of a regional structure to ensure environmental cooperation among the Caspian littoral states with the support of UNEP, UNDP, GEF, World Bank, and EU-TACIS. It also coordinated relevant activities across the region

In May 1998, during the first Meeting of the Steering Committee of CEP held in Ramsar, Islamic Republic of Iran, several agreements were reached. The management of CEP would be overseen by the Steering Committee and its Secretariat, the Programme Coordination Bureau (PCB), which would be located in Baku for the first four years. The coordinators during this period were S. Gunn from EU-TACIS and B. Muradov from UNDP. Subsequently, the Secretariat would move to Tehran with coordinators T. Turner and Kh. Gafarzadeh, and later to Astana with coordinator P. Farsi. There was an agreement on the establishment of national inter-sectoral coordination bodies to implement CEP. Additionally, it was decided to establish Caspian regional thematic centers (CRTCs) in the participating countries".

In 1998, as a part of the first phase of CEP, national reports on the environmental status of the Caspian were prepared by the Caspian littoral states. The contents of the reports allow for a comparative overview of the positions and approaches of the region's states to enhance cooperation in solving the environmental problems of the Caspian Sea.

In 2000, the Steering Committee meeting decided to establish an institutional mechanism in the Caspian littoral states (Administrative-Advisory Group –) composed of representatives of the Caspian littoral states to assist in enhancing the effectiveness of CEP. The Administrative-Advisory Group, subsequently, was transformed into the Institute of National Focal Points/ National Office on Convention Linkages (INFPs/NOCs) within the framework of the Tehran Convention.

The CEP encompassed several key areas:

- building organizational capacity and developing a regional convention;
- biodiversity conservation;
- natural resource management;
- coastal zone management considering sea level fluctuations;
- monitoring and data management;
- development of portfolio for priority investments;
- development and implementation of a Strategic Action Programme;
- public participation, including raising awareness.



Essentially, the CEP was a system of organizational activities enabling the Caspian littoral states to determine a set of joint actions to address environmental problems of the Caspian Sea with the assistance of relevant international organizations. Amidst the unresolved legal status of the Caspian during that period, the CEP facilitated the relevant authorities of the Caspian littoral states to actively participate in addressing issues related to sustainable development and environmental security in the region. One of the primary objective of the CEP was to finalize the expert work on the draft of the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea. Developed under the auspices of UNEP, this convention was intended as a legal tool for protecting the Caspian's environment and sustainably managing its resources.

THE FIRST PHASE OF CEP (1998–2002) was focused on establishing essential institutional mechanisms for interaction of the Caspian states. This phase included conducting Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA), developing a regional Strategic Action Plan (SAP), national Caspian Action Plans (NCAPs), preparing a portfolio of priority investments (PPIs), and pilot projects.

The SAP presented a comprehensive plan for the interaction of all CEP partners, thereby forming a structure for their political, legislative, regulatory, and investment efforts in the development of environmental management in the Caspian region. As part of the SAP, the Strategic Action Plan for Biodiversity Conservation (SAPBC) was developed, which included recommendations for the conservation of key species, controlling the introduction of alien species, measures to reduce the impact of the comb jelly *Mnemiopsis*, ballast water treatment, improvement of the regional system of protected areas, and restoration of priority vulnerable habitats. The NCAPs listed various tasks and solution which would also contribute to transboundary conservation of the Caspian Sea environment.

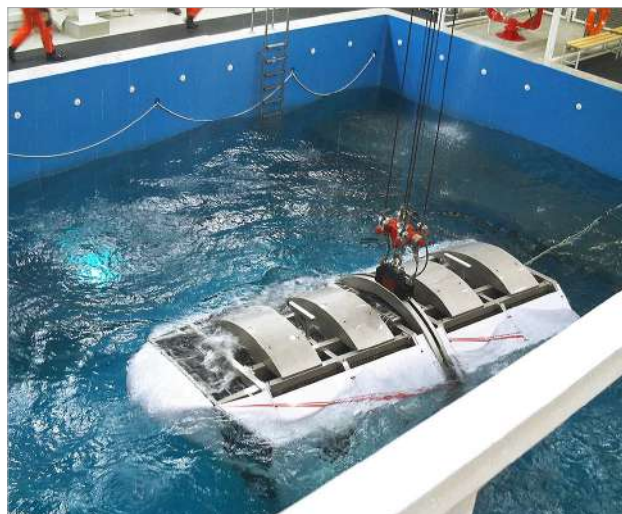
October 2001, Moscow. At the Meeting of the CEP Steering Committee, the preparation results of the Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis were reviewed along with the progress of developing the Strategic and National Action Plans. The meeting also defined the long-term perspectives of CEP and possible forms of its implementation.

Following the recommendations from the first Meeting of the CEP Steering Committee in 1998 in Ramsar (Islamic Republic of Iran) main CEP activities, were carried out by experts and consultants from the Caspian littoral states within the Caspian Regional Thematic Centers (CRTCs) within CEP, located in the Caspian littoral states. These centers played a significant role in collecting, analyzing, and systematizing initial information on the state of the marine and coastal environment of the Caspian Sea. In the subsequent phase of the CEP CRTCs were transformed into Regional Advisory Groups (RAGs) on priority topics.

Within CRTCs and RAGs, the CEP established institutional mechanisms and fostered working relationships with experts and nature conservation structures in the Caspian littoral states. Additionally, within CRTCs, cooperation was established with regional structures as the Coordination Committee for Hydrometeorology of the Caspian Sea (CASPCOM) and its Integrated Programme on Hydrometeorology and Monitoring of Environment in the Caspian Sea Region (CASPAS), as along with the Interdepartmental Commission on Water Bioresources of the Caspian Sea.

CRTC ON POLLUTION CONTROL – CRTC-PC (Republic of Azerbaijan, Baku) operated with the support of TACIS, led by Latifa Guseynova. CRTC-PC was one of the first CRTCs within CEP. Its main objectives were collecting data on industrial pollution in the Caspian Sea; creating a database linked to GIS; and analyzing current pollution prevention activities.

On **November 24, 1999**, the first seminar on pollution control was held in Baku. During this event, the CRTC-PC discussed the work programme of the REM and technical tasks for experts focused on gathering data reflecting the current level of pollution in the Caspian Sea from various sources. In **December 2001, in Baku**: a pivotal seminar took place focused on **anthropogenic impacts on the Caspian Sea**, including oil and gas production. The event, critical for featured discussions on updated information on oil pollution in the Caspian Sea, discussed ecological standards, new technologies, and zero discharge. An overview of CRTC-PC activities was provided, along with recommendations for improving and establishing central laboratories. In terms of pollution monitoring activities, CRTC-PC proposed coordinating its activities with the Integrated Programme on Hydrometeorology and Monitoring of Environment in the Caspian Sea Region (CASPAS).



CRTC ON INTEGRATED COASTAL PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT (Islamic Republic of Iran, Tehran). CRTC-ICPM was operated with the support of UNDP. Its main goal was spatial planning and management of coastal and marine areas. The main task of CRTC-ICPM was to develop and implement pilot projects for coastal and marine area management as well as to develop coastal profiles. CRTC-ICPM activities also involved preparing reviews on the characteristics of the Caspian Sea's marine and coastal zones and comprehensive coastal zone management.

CRTC ON EMERGENCY RESPONSE / POLLUTION MONITORING – CRTC-ER (Islamic Republic of Iran, Tehran) operated with the support of UNDP under the guidance of UNDP consultant Mr. Hildrew. The work within CRTC-ER focused on:

- establishing an early warning system, rapid response, and cleanup of oil spills affecting the quality of Caspian coastal waters based on the use of an automated system for early detection of oil spills and the formation of rapid response forces;
- collecting information on oil spill response capabilities.

One of the main goals of this center was to prepare a Regional Action Plan for Caspian region countries to respond to emergencies, primarily to respond to oil spills.

November 2001, Baku: The first seminar on mutual assistance programmes to combat oil spills in the Caspian Sea discussed national emergency plans for the Caspian Sea. The draft Plan for regional cooperation in combating oil pollution in emergency situations in the Caspian Sea and the draft Protocol as a legal basis for the Plan's implementation, developed by the IMO, were presented. Significant topics also discussed at the seminar included the development of procedures for regional cooperation to ensure readiness and response to major incidents causing oil pollution in the Caspian Sea.

2003: The draft Regional Cooperation Plan for combating oil pollution in emergency situations in the Caspian Sea with appendices and the draft Protocol Concerning Regional Preparedness, Response and Co-operation in Combating Oil Pollution Incidents were agreed upon by experts from the Caspian littoral states and became the basis for the development of relevant documents of the Tehran Convention.

CRTC ON BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION – CRTC-BIO (Atyrau, Republic of Kazakhstan) operated with the support of UNDP. Work with CRTC on biodiversity began in May-June 1999.

The main goal of this CRTC was to study Caspian biodiversity, species inhabiting the Caspian Sea, rare and endangered species, existing threats to biodiversity, the state of biodiversity protection, and the legislative framework. The CRTC's most active year for biodiversity conservation was 2000, which included preparing National Reports of countries and a regional report on biodiversity conservation. Based on the National Biodiversity Status Reports a Regional Report was developed.



The first version of the Regional Report on Biodiversity Conservation was drafted and presented at the **meeting of the Biodiversity CRTCs in June 2000**. Action Plans for habitat conservation were prepared by all Caspian countries. They include descriptions of the main habitats in each country as well as measures taken to preserve them. Priority lists and actions for the restoration of degraded habitats were identified. Based on the national Action Plans for habitat conservation, a “Regional Action Plan for the Conservation of Caspian Sea Habitats” was prepared. It contained general information about the main habitats in the Caspian region, their national and regional significance, principles of priority habitat maintenance, existing and potential threats to them, proposals for habitat inventory and monitoring, and the creation of a habitat inventory considering protected species.

Withing the Biodiversity CRTC, an Advisory Group on Mnemiopsis was formed to address issues related to the status of Mnemiopsis populations in the Caspian Sea. The first Meeting of the Advisory Group on Mnemiopsis (December 2001, Baku) was organized. During the seminar, discussions focused on applying international legislation on alien species to the Caspian Sea region, developing a unified monitoring methodology for Mnemiopsis, crafting a regional strategy on invasive species, and creating a comprehensive database on Mnemiopsis. Additionally, information was shared on laboratory research concerning Mnemiopsis and Beroe conducted in Russia and Iran.

The Caspian Sea Level Fluctuations CRTC (CRTC-Sea Level) operated in Almaty, Republic of Kazakhstan, with support from TACIS and under the leadership of Mr. Evans. **CRTC-Sea Level** had two primary objectives: to support relevant national institutes in all Caspian countries and to bring together national scientists in the fields of climate, hydrology, hydraulics, and water resources. The first meeting of CRTC experts on sea level fluctuations was held in February 1999 in Almaty. The main focus of CRTC activities included: forecasting long-term of Caspian Sea level fluctuations; developing adaptation measures for these fluctuations; and assessing their impact of on the socio-economic conditions of coastal areas.

Caspian CRTC on Sustainable Management of Fishery Resources and Other Commercial Aquatic Resources (Biological Resources) —

CRTC-FR (Russian Federation, Astrakhan, Casp-NIRH) operated with support from TACIS and under the leadership of A. Labon. The main goal of CRTC was to assess the state of fishery resources and the factors influencing them. The primary activity of CRTC-FR was conducting a marine expedition. to assess the abundance and distribution of sturgeon, herring, herring, and mullet in the Caspian Sea. Organized events by CRTC-FR in March and December 1999 in Moscow and Astrakhan, Russia, were crucial for sustainable fishery resource management. These events focused on discussing the current state of the Caspian’s commercial aquatic resources, the natural conditions affecting them, and the organization of an information exchange system and databases



CRTC on Legal, Institutional, and Economic Instruments (CRTC-LEI) — operated in Moscow, Russian Federation, at the Center for International Projects, with support from UNEP under the leadership of **S. Tikhonov**. The main goal of CRTC-LEI was to assist Caspian countries in developing coordinated legal, economic, and regulatory instruments for environmental management and natural resources of the Caspian Sea. To this end, the use of specific thematic proposals prepared by other CRTCs based on their activities’ results was envisaged. **The first expert meeting of CRTC-LEI on the topic “Conceptual Foundations of Activities, Work**

Programme, and Relationships of CRTC-LEI with Other Organizations within the ELC” took place in Moscow on May 21-22, 1999. As part of the CRTC-LEI activities, national reports detailing legal and organizational measures for the protection and use of the Caspian Sea ecosystem were prepared by the participating countries. Subsequently, an international consultant, I. Krasnova, compiled these into a regional overview.

On **March 6, 2001**, a **Consolidated Meeting of experts from CRTC-LEI, CRTC on Sustainable Management of Biological Resources, and CRTC on Biodiversity Conservation was held in Baku.** This meeting was crucial for coordinating the activities across different CRTCs. The meeting reviewed the progress and outcomes of the Caspian Environmental Programme. It also addressed specific issues of project implementation under the CEP, funded by UNDP, UNEP, and the World Bank. There was a focus on ensuring data comparability and interrelation among different CRTCs. Additionally, considerable attention was devoted to organizing the upcoming International Caspian Marine Expedition, scheduled for spring-summer 2001. Discussions covered the experts’ participation, expedition’s programme, sample collection sites and subsequent analyses.

CRTC on Combating Desertification and Coastal Land Degradation (Ashgabat, Turkmenistan) — CRTC-CD operated with the support of TACIS. The main goal of CRTC-CD was to assess the impact of desertification processes on the population. CRTC-CD activities were based on reviewing statistical data from all districts and provinces/regions along the Caspian coast as well as assessing statistical data that could reflect desertification issues. The expertise of Russian national experts from the CRTC-CD at the Institute of Geography of the Russian Academy of Sciences was crucial for addressing desertification. Their activities included evaluating the socio-economic impacts of desertification, identifying and studying desertification hotspots such as the Black Earth region in the Republic of Kalmykia, and researching underground water resources in these areas. Within CRTC-CD, comprehensive reviews were also prepared on the socio-economic effects of desertification processes.

CRTC on Sustainable Population Development and Healthcare (Ashgabat, Turkmenistan) operated with the support of UNDP. The main objectives of this CRTC’s activity were to identify and assess risk factors for the interaction of the environment and population health.



The outcomes of the first phase of the Caspian Environmental Programme (CEP) laid the foundation for key mechanisms like the Strategic Action Programme of the Tehran Convention (SAP), the Public Participation Strategy, and the National Action Plans (NCAP) of the Tehran Convention

The completion of the initial phase of the CEP coincided with the signing of the Tehran Convention in 2003. Early stages of the CEP facilitated this by providing organizational support for a series of meetings among representatives of Caspian states, which helped coordinate the provisions of the Tehran Convention.

The second phase of the CEP (2003–2007) was implemented with the support of the GEF/UNDP in the form of the project “Implementation of the Tehran Convention and Action Plan for the Protection of the Caspian Sea Environment, Phase II (CEP-SAP)”. The project aimed to assist the implementation of the Tehran Convention, including the development of protocols, and to carry out activities related to the outcomes of the initial phase of the CEP.

These activities included:

- Implementation of the SAP on priority areas: biodiversity conservation, alien species, and persistent toxic substances;
- Regional coordination of the implementation of NCAPs;
- Improvement of the environment through small-scale investments supported by the Small Grants Programme;
- Activities of Regional Advisory Groups: on biodiversity and alien species, fisheries, emergency response, pollution, and sustainable coastal zone development.

Within the framework of the second phase of the CEP, special attention was paid to the problems of preserving the biodiversity of the Caspian Sea. An important component of these activities was the development of a Protocol for the Conservation of Biological Diversity to the Tehran Convention (Ashgabat Protocol).

The second phase of the Caspian Environmental Programme (CEP) is particularly notable for the development of the Protocol for the Conservation of Biological Diversity to the Tehran Convention (Ashgabat Protocol). Throughout the projects of the second phase of the CEP, a quantitative assessment (preliminary inventory) of coastal and marine habitats of the Caspian Sea was conducted. This effort resulted in the creation of maps of ecologically vulnerable zones, enriching the biodiversity database and becoming part of the regional cooperation plan for oil spill response.

The report by A. Filippov, titled **“Inventory of Coastal Territories of the Caspian Sea and Identification of Sites of Special Importance and/or Sensitivity to Impact” (2005)**, presents the results of the quantitative assessment of coastal and marine habitats of the Caspian Sea. This report includes a preliminary list of Caspian habitats, offering insights into ecological sensitivity and dominant threats, such as sea level fluctuations. During the Second Phase of the CEP, guidelines for the protection and restoration of ecologically vulnerable zones. Additionally, an Action Plan for the Conservation of the Caspian Seal and a Management Plan for Adaptation to Fluctuations in the Level of Lagoons, crucial for biodiversity preservation, were also developed. Moreover, during the implementation of the second stage of the CEP, an all-Caspian eco-network of specialists, institutions, NGOs, and other stakeholders was formed.

In coordination with the GEF ballast water project, activities were carried out to prepare the CEP action plan for alien species, including assistance in developing proposals for the introduction of the comb jelly *Beroe Ovata* and/or other biological control agents *Mnemiopsis* into the Caspian. Recommendations were made for the establishment of a Caspian regional authority for assessing and permitting species introductions, assessment of the volume of alien species transfer with ballast water to/from the Caspian Sea, and research on methods and means of alien species control in the port of Astrakhan.

An assessment of the Caspian pollution level was also conducted during the Second Phase, identifying its sources. Additionally, an assessment of the distribution and composition of Persistent Toxic Substances (PTS) in rivers, bottom sediments, and coastal waters was carried out. Regional and national action plans for monitoring and combating PTS pollution were developed. Studies on the use and placement of pesticide reserves were also conducted.

Furthermore, an assessment of land-based sources of pollution was carried out during the Second Phase, including pollution sources in the coastal zone of major river basins (Kura/Araks, Volga up to Volgograd, Sefidrud, Ural). The flow of major pollutants from the Volga cascade and Mingechaur reservoir was determined. Research on pollution of coastal waters, bottom sediments, marine waters, and assessment of the impact of key transboundary pollutants continued. Measures were developed for national and regional plans to combat marine litter. Based on new data, with particular attention to regional transboundary issues, TDA, SAP, and NCAPs were reviewed.

To facilitate stakeholder participation in marine environmental management:

- a database of project participants' contact persons, media, and multimedia tools for journalists were prepared; CEP bulletin issues were published;
- an advisory body was established with the participation of the International Petroleum Industry Environmental Conservation Association (IPIECA) and several local oil and gas extraction, transportation, and fisheries companies;
- a public participation strategy was formulated;
- regular rounds of the small and micro grants environmental programme was conducted.

The results obtained were used in the development of drafts for the Protocol for the Protection of the Caspian Sea against Pollution from Land-based Sources and Activities, as well as the Protocol for the Conservation of Biological Diversity as well as in future activities within the framework of the Tehran Convention.

The third phase of the Caspian Environmental Programme (CEP) (2007–2012) was implemented with the support of the GEF/UNDP through the project **“Caspian Sea: Restoration of Fish Stocks and Establishment of a Permanent Regional Nature Conservation Structure, (CaspEco Project)”**. This project comprised two main components: **Component 1 – “Management of Caspian Sea aquatic resources based on an ecosystem approach”** and **Component 2 – “Support for the activities of the Tehran Convention”** following the entry into force of the Tehran Convention.

The project activities aimed to support the activities of the Tehran Convention and to assist Caspian countries in adopting ecosystem-based management methods for biological resources, including aligning biodiversity conservation tasks with tasks in the fisheries sector. Under Component 1 of the project, a comprehensive analysis of assessments of biodiversity throughout the Caspian region was conducted. **Experts R. P. Khodarevskaya and B. N. Morozov prepared a regional “Review of the Ecosystem and Biodiversity of the Caspian Sea” (2010) – (Ecosystem Review)** to identify the full spectrum of Caspian biodiversity – species, habitats, ecosystems, their numbers, condition, and locations. This work was based on previous CEP reviews and assessments of national and regional databases as well as data on biodiversity and pollutants obtained from oil companies' research.

The Ecosystem Review presents the impact of climate change on the state of Caspian biodiversity, particularly on the state of biological resources. Based on the analysis of multi-year data characterizing the ecosystem and resources of the Volga-Caspian basin under conditions of changing water regimes of rivers and the sea, information is provided that the critical level for the ecosystem and resources of the Northern Caspian is sea level minus 28.5 m, and a decrease in the level to minus 29.0 m and below is considered catastrophic. Information is provided on the formation of new islands with a decrease in sea level, for example, Pearl Island in the Northern Caspian.



To assist the Tehran Convention in refining recommendations for regulating alien species in the Caspian Sea in accordance with the Protocol for the Conservation of Biological Diversity to the Convention, activities were proposed for addressing the comb jelly *Mnemiopsis*. One of the most important activities of the GEF/UNDP CaspEco project during the third phase of the CEP was the activity that initiated the process of developing and forming the Caspian Sea Environmental Monitoring Programme (Caspian Sea EMP). The ongoing development of this programme was furthered within the framework of the Tehran Convention, building upon the groundwork laid by the TACIS project 'Caspian MAP'. As part of the third phase of the CEP, a draft version of the Caspian Sea EMP focusing on hydro-meteorological monitoring was prepared.

These activities were aimed at implementing the provisions of article 19 of the Tehran Convention which focuses on monitoring. They are closely related to the activities of the Caspian Environmental Information Center (CEIC), whose development also commenced within the framework of the project.

A number of project activities were aimed at assisting in the implementation of strategies and measures to increase the reproductive capacity of Caspian migratory fish, including projects to increase the efficiency of salmonid fish farms in Iran. In collaboration with FAO, issues of genetic variability in surviving populations and sustainable use of sturgeon gene pools were studied. Pilot actions were conducted to determine, restore, and/or expand access to natural spawning grounds, and All-Caspian list of natural spawning grounds and habitats of Caspian sturgeon and salmon, located above and below the dams, was compiled. Additionally, recommendations were developed to improve the quality of water marshlands/spawning grounds during spring-summer floods, and options for fish passage devices for major migratory species were considered.

As part of efforts to support the development and implementation of relevant provisions of the draft Protocol for the Conservation of Biological Diversity to the Tehran Convention, activity was initiated to form the Circum — Caspian Network of specially protected areas, habitats of wild animals, and key habitats of Caspian fish ecosystems. This initiative later evolved into the network of protected areas of the Caspian Sea (PACS), as stipulated by the Protocol.

The EU-TACIS project within the framework of the CEP “Monitoring the Quality of the Caspian Sea Water and Action Plan for Areas of High Pollution” (CaspianMAP) in the years 2006–2009, was implemented after the entry into force of the Tehran Convention.

Experts were appointed by the participating countries for the project: M. Ganbarov, M. Jabarov, S. Ragimov, F. Imanov — Azerbaijan; S. Akhmedov, G. Umbetalieva, O. Melnik — Kazakhstan; A. Korshenko, I. Zemlyanov, V. Markov, M. Bolgov — Russian Federation; G. Orazdurdyeva, T. Berkeliev, L. Berkelieva, Y. Aronsky — Turkmenistan. Iran participated in the project as an observer.

The project was established to assist countries in the region in preparing the Regional Environmental Monitoring Programme and developing the Regional Plan of Action to reduce pollution in the Caspian Sea while incorporating research conducted during the first and second phases of the CEP. The project also aimed to provide information support for National Action Plans for managing the quality of the marine environment in areas where major sources of pollution are located.

Within the project, National Reviews of the state of Caspian Sea monitoring programmes were prepared, and recommendations were developed for the preparation of the Regional Water Quality Monitoring Programme for the Caspian Sea, as well as strategic goals of the programme were defined. Between 2008 and 2009, marine expeditions were conducted across all sectors of the Caspian Sea, involving ships and specialists from the region's countries. The primary objectives of the expeditions were to conduct comprehensive monitoring studies of marine areas affected by sources of pollution located on land and in the open sea; study the characteristics of marine pollution. The expeditions involved measurements of meteorological and hydrological-geochemical indicators of the marine environment were carried out, as well as sampling of water and bottom sediments.

An essential task was to evaluate the quality of the observations mentioned and to test the laboratories nominated by the countries for possible participation in the future regional monitoring programme. These works were carried out under the methodological supervision of the Marine Environmental Laboratory of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Monaco. The CaspianMAP project is based on the fact that the intensive development of hydrocarbon deposits on the coast and in the sea should be organically linked with local plans and programmes for socio-economic development. At the same time, the Project shows the difference in the level of development of legislative and regulatory documents for environmental monitoring in the Caspian countries.

“On March 16, 2012, in Moscow, the final meeting of the Steering Committee of the GEF/UNDP project ‘CaspEco’ took place. During this meeting, the results of the third phase of the CEP (2007–2012) were summarized, along with the nearly 15-year activity of the CEP (1998–2012), which supported the development and implementation of the Tehran Convention within the framework of international projects”. The completion of the three phases of the Caspian Environmental Programme in 2012 affirm that the participants of this extensive international project have, despite some challenges, succeeded in establishing a functional infrastructure for the CEP across all Caspian countries and have organized an effective information exchange system. Throughout the Programme, an initial volume of information was accumulated, and interaction of experts from the Caspian countries was established. These achievements of the CEP were used in the activities within the framework of the Tehran Convention.

The GEF/UNDP/Japanese Trust Fund project “Ecotoxicology of Caspian Sturgeon” 1999–2002.

Within the Project, a study was conducted on the accumulation of pollutants in the organisms of Caspian sturgeons, seals, and bony fish, and related pathologies. The main pollutants found in the bodies of seals, bony fish, and sturgeons coincide with those identified in bottom sediments. Among the main pollutants, organochlorine compounds (mainly DDT and its breakdown products) were indicated, as well as some heavy metals.

The health of Caspian seals has been undermined by a number of factors, including chemical pollution, canine distemper virus (CDV), and various pathogenic bacteria and parasites.

All fish in the region showed traces of hydrocarbon pollution, but to varying degrees (some in extremely small quantities). The origin of the hydrocarbons that caused the reaction is unknown; they may be the result of natural inflow or the activities of the oil and gas industry. High concentrations of organochlorine compounds were found in sturgeons, especially in beluga. The degree of pollution with organochlorine compounds could affect reproduction.

Project “Addressing the Marine Litter in the Caspian Sea Region” (2018-2020)

At the end of 2018 the project “Addressing Marine Litter in the Caspian Sea Region” was launched, which is implemented by the Public Fund “Water Initiatives Center” – WIC (Republic of Kazakhstan) featuring Caspian experts under the auspices of the interim Secretariat of the Tehran Convention and funded by the Coca-Cola Foundation.

The preparation of the draft Caspian Regional Marine Litter Action Plan (CRMLAP) was undertaken by the national experts from the Caspian Sea littoral states and an international expert. The final draft Caspian Regional Marine Litter Action Plan developed by the National Experts nominated by the Caspian Sea littoral states with the assistance of the International Expert was distributed to the Caspian countries in June 2020. The results of the project will contribute to the implementation of the relevant provisions of the Moscow Protocol.

The GRID-Arendal / BP project “Support for the activities of the Caspian Environmental Information Center” (CEIC) 2017-2018

The objectives of the project were:

- Expanding the network, strengthening cooperation and data exchange between stakeholders in the Caspian Sea region at the national and subnational levels;
- Preparation of the document “Assessment of information holders, existing data and national needs for reports, including a database of national information providers”;
- increasing the network of information and data providers;
- further technical development and optimization of the CEIC portal.

The project presented the results of an analysis of stakeholders in the protection of the marine and coastal environment of the Caspian Sea region in countries, an analysis of organizations related to the protection of the marine and coastal environment of the Caspian Sea as an integral part of the CEIC Network of the Tehran Convention and proposals to expand the CEIC Network, such as the creation of a Forum of organizations related to the implementation of the Tehran Convention.

In addition, a brief description is given of the development of cooperation and data exchange between the stakeholders of the Caspian littoral countries in the Caspian Sea region at the subnational level through cooperation and interaction with the Commission on Aquatic Bioresources of the Caspian Sea and the Coordinating Committee on Hydrometeorology and Pollution Monitoring of the Caspian Sea (CASPCOM).

Within the framework of the project, proposals were developed for further technical development and optimization of the CEIC portal. The formation of the Tehran Convention as the most important and effective tool for organizing regional cooperation between the Caspian states to solve the environmental problems of the Caspian Sea region, including in the context of increased exploitation of the natural resources of the Caspian Sea, was carried out with the support of integrated international environmental projects.

The assistance from various international projects should be acknowledged. These projects supported the development and implementation of the Tehran Convention. Examples of several activities are provided below to illustrate the significance of these projects: the following activities were conducted:

- Institutional support for the Tehran Convention and its protocols;
- Assistance in the thematic activities of the Convention at national and regional levels;
- Facilitation of the establishment of thematic partnerships and joint programmes to support the implementation of the Convention and its protocols;
- Facilitation of cooperation with the private sector;
- Support for the development of National Caspian Action Plans by Caspian countries within the CEP, based on which National Action Plans for the Tehran Convention (NCAPs) were implemented;
- Support for the preparation of the Caspian Regional Action Plan on marine litter;
- Support for the development and implementation of a strategy for public participation in the Convention (PAP) and assistance in the development of a data/information exchange mechanism — CEIC.



4

TEHRAN CONVENTION – FORMATION AND IMPLEMENTATION.

- A brief overview of the main activities and events in the implementation of the Convention presented in chronological order.

The period of the establishment and implementation of the Tehran Convention, in chronological order, can be divided into two periods: the establishment phase, spanning from 2004 to 2012, and the implementation phase, covering the period from 2013 to 2023.

The period of the establishment of the Tehran Convention (2004–2012) was associated with:

- Preparation of documents on organizational issues of the Convention, including its structures;
- Development of Convention protocols;
- Determination of tools for implementing the provisions of the Convention (NCAPs, national reports, NCAPs);
- Development of procedural mechanisms for the implementation of tasks set forth in the Convention (EIA, monitoring, EMP, scientific research, CEIC);
- Active interaction with international projects of the Caspian Environmental Programme, which supported the activities of the Tehran Convention until 2012. The Tehran Convention utilized the materials of CEP projects, and some activities within the Convention during this period were carried out with the organizational and financial support of the CEP.

The period of the implementation of the Tehran Convention from 2013 till now is marked by:

- Continued cooperation among the Caspian states within the Convention on various issues related to the protection of the marine and coastal environment of the Caspian Sea, including prevention of Caspian pollution, including marine litter;
- Continued work on developing the Protocol for monitoring, assessment, and information exchange to the Convention;
- Intensification of activities under the Aktau Protocol, including the Regional Cooperation Plan for Oil Pollution Response in Emergency Situations in the Caspian Sea.

04 July 19–20, 2004, Tehran: First meeting of representatives of Caspian states signatories to the Tehran Convention. This event laid the foundation for subsequent activities under the Tehran Convention. Discussions during the meeting focused on the organizational functioning of the Tehran Convention, confirming the need for effective development of protocols to the Convention as named in its text.

05 March 9–12, 2005, Moscow. First meeting of Government-appointed experts on Rules of Procedure and Financial Rules. During the meeting, draft organizational and financial documents were discussed, including the Financial Rules and the Rules of Procedure of the Tehran Convention. Additionally, information justifying the establishment of a Trust Fund, prepared by the interim Secretariat, was reviewed

July 5, 2005, Geneva. Ministerial meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Tehran Convention. The meeting affirmed that the Tehran Convention should continue to evolve through protocols in agreed priority areas. It also recognized the importance of Financial Rules for the Tehran Convention and the need for their speedy development and adoption.

06 February 2006, Almaty. Meeting of experts and representatives of Caspian states to prepare for the First Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention. The meeting discussed the draft Rules of Procedure of the Tehran Convention and countries' comments on the document, as well as issues related to the development of priority protocols of the Tehran Convention.

August 12, 2006. The Tehran Convention entered into force after ratification and completion of relevant national procedures by the governments of all Caspian states. The celebration ceremony was organized by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Tehran with invitations to ambassadors of Caspian countries and representatives of environmental ministries. During the ceremony, a proposal was made by the IRI to designate **August 12 as the regional “Caspian Sea Day”**, emphasizing the importance of the Tehran Convention as a comprehensive legal instrument for the protection of the marine and coastal environment of the Caspian Sea.

December 7–8, 2006, Moscow. Preparatory high-level meeting for organizing the First Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Tehran Convention. During the meeting, it was agreed to hold the First Meeting of the Conference of the Parties in Azerbaijan no later than June 2007, adhering to the principle of alphabetical rotation. Discussions also continued on the draft Financial Rules and Rules of Procedure of the Tehran Convention. It was also discussed and agreed to collectively provide a sum of USD 360,000 (USD 72,000 per country) as the calculated annual contribution to the budget of the Tehran Convention for the first financial year.

07 May 25, 2007, Baku. FIRST MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE TEHRAN CONVENTION (COP1)

Key decisions of the First Meeting included:

- **Designation of August 12 as the regional “Caspian Sea Day”**, commemorating the entry into force of the Convention on August 12, 2006. This day aims to raise awareness among the public and other stakeholders about the environmental issues of the Caspian Sea and ways to address them;
- Adoption of the Financial Rules of the Tehran Convention;
- Decision to collectively ensure an amount of USD 360,000 in the budget of the Tehran Convention (USD 72,000 as the annual contribution of each Party);
- Presentation of the first Work Programme of the Tehran Convention for 2007–2008;
- Confirmation of the intention of the Caspian littoral states to continue cooperation in forming four priority protocols to the Tehran Convention (on biodiversity conservation; protection of the Caspian Sea from pollution from land-based sources and activities on land; environmental impact assessment in a transboundary context; and regional preparedness, response, and cooperation in case of incidents causing oil pollution);
- Decision to prepare a review on the interrelation between fishing and the protection of the marine environment of the Caspian Sea;
- Recognition of the need to align the Caspian Environmental Programme (CEP) and its instruments with the objectives of the Tehran Convention and its implementation.

08 May 5–6, 2008, Baku. Meeting on the STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

It was agreed to consider this plan as the “Strategic Programme of Action of the Convention” (SPAC), serving as a comprehensive long-term agenda and framework for the implementation of the Tehran Convention and its protocols over a 10-year period. The implementation of the SPAC was proposed through the Convention Work Programme and National Action Plans of the Convention (NCAPs), which should correspond to the objectives of the SPAC.

September 8–10, 2008, Almaty. Preparatory Committee for the Second Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention

The Convention’s Rules of Procedure were reviewed to reach agreement on some unresolved issues remaining in square brackets. Proposals from countries regarding the SPAC were reviewed and agreed upon after the SPAC meeting in May 2008 in Baku. The document was

agreed for submission to the Second Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention. Discussion took place on the Overview Document on the interrelation between fishing and the protection of the marine environment of the Caspian Sea, prepared by the interim Secretariat in accordance with the Decision of COP1. Proposals regarding the Convention's logo were considered, and a decision was made on the logo to symbolize the Tehran Convention.

November 10–12, 2008, Tehran. SECOND MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE TEHRAN CONVENTION

During the COP2:

- Ten-year Strategic Programme of Action of the Convention (SPAC) was adopted as a long-term agenda and framework for the implementation of the Tehran Convention and future protocols;
- Intention to implement it through National Action Plans of the Convention (NCAPs) was confirmed;
- Rules of Procedure of the Tehran Convention were adopted;
- UNEP-ROE was proposed to perform the functions of the interim Secretariat until an agreement on the permanent Secretariat of the Tehran Convention is reached;
- Financial and organizational support for the UNDP-GEF CaspEco project for the implementation of the Tehran Convention was approved;
- Need for the swift development and approval of relevant protocols to the Tehran Convention was noted;
- Need to continue efforts to prepare an intergovernmental agreement on the conservation and rational use of the Caspian Sea's biological resources was highlighted;
- Establishment and support to National Convention Liaison Officers (NCLOs) in each Caspian littoral State.

March 13–14, 2009, St. Petersburg. Meeting of Civil Society Representatives on the Caspian Sea within the Framework of the Tehran Convention. Expert-level discussion on the “Strategy for Engaging Civil Society in the Protection of the Caspian Sea Environment”.

September 9–10, 2009, Ashgabat. Meeting of Representatives of Caspian States on Environmental Information. Discussion on approaches to environmental information and its elements for the Caspian region, including for the first State of the Caspian Sea Environment Report (SOE1). Information from representatives of the Black Sea Commission, the Helsinki Commission, the European Environment Agency, and the EU-funded TACIS project on Caspian Sea water quality monitoring was presented. Discussion on approaches to organizing the activities of a virtual information center.

May 25–29, 2010, Geneva. Meeting of Senior Officials on Procedural and Institutional Matters of the Tehran Convention. Discussion



on the organization of scientific and technical advisory services based on a document prepared by the interim Secretariat. Agreement on the reporting format for the Tehran Convention and its protocols as a recommended scheme for reporting by Caspian states on activities to implement the Convention and its protocols. Issues related to the preparation of the first State of the Caspian Sea Environment Report (SOE1) were discussed, involving documentation and reports developed within the framework of the Caspian Environmental Programme (CEP). Agreement on the “Strategy for Engaging Civil Society in the Protection of the Caspian Sea Environment” for submission to the COP3.

September 16-17, 2010, Almaty. Preparatory committee for the Third Meeting of the Conference of the Parties. Discussion on organizational and financial issues of the Tehran Convention’s functioning:

- Draft terms of reference for the establishment of a Trust Fund within UNEP and to achieve the objectives of the Tehran Convention and its protocols, including the functioning of the Secretariat;
- Question of the location of the Tehran Convention Secretariat. Issues related to the preparation of the first State of the Caspian Sea Environment Report (SOE-1) and National Strategies for Engaging Civil Society were discussed.

December 2010, Ashgabat. Coordination Meeting on NCAP Development. Discussion on the development of National Action Plans of the Tehran Convention (NCAPs) by reviewing and aligning them with the provisions and requirements of the Tehran Convention and its protocols, previously developed within the CEP framework. A corresponding format was agreed upon, noting that NCAPs should be based on interdepartmental coordination and the need to incorporate them into relevant national policies and development programmes. Issues related to the development of National Strategies for Engaging Civil Society in the Protection of the Caspian Sea Environment as part of NCAPs were also discussed. The main conditions for engaging civil society include compiling lists of stakeholders by country and holding regular meetings and publications on national and regional events related to the implementation of Tehran Convention activities and protocols.

March 15-17, 2011, Ashgabat. Meeting on Developing Proposals for Caspian Sea Environmental Monitoring. Proposals for the future Environmental Monitoring Programme (EMP) were discussed, and the composition of the working group to prepare the EMP from specialists from Caspian states was approved. R. Sheikholeslami of Iran was appointed as the group’s chair. The draft regional **Environmental Monitoring Programme (EMP)** began development in 2009-2012 with financial support from the TACIS and CaspEco projects under the third phase of the CEP in accordance with Article 19 of the Tehran Convention, aiming to establish and implement monitoring programmes for the state of the Caspian Sea marine environment. The main goal of the EMP was to create a mechanism for obtaining necessary data and information on the Caspian environment, including pollution and the state of biological communities, to assess the current state of the Caspian Sea ecosystem and adjacent territories, identify negative processes and trends affecting the health of the population and the economy of coastal regions based on scientific evidence.

August 10-12, 2011, Aktau. THIRD MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE TEHRAN CONVENTION

Key outcomes of the Third Meeting of the Conference of the Parties:

- Adoption and Signature of the Protocol Concerning Regional Preparedness, Response and Co-operation in Combating Oil Pollution Incidents to the Tehran Convention. This Protocol marked the first document adopted 8 years since the signing of the Convention itself in 2003. It laid the foundation for the practical implementation of the provisions of the Tehran Convention.

- Progress was noted in the agreement on draft protocols to the Tehran Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context, on the Conservation of Biological Diversity, and on Protection of the Caspian Sea from Pollution from Land-based Sources and Activities.
- Decision was made on the need to prepare the first national report on the implementation of the Convention and its protocols.
- It was emphasized that National Reports should become an important tool of the Convention, providing information for decision-makers and the public, as well as an informational mechanism for improving the management of the Caspian Sea marine and coastal environment.
- Unified Reporting Format was adopted as a recommended scheme for presenting National Reports on the implementation of the Convention by Caspian states.
- Importance of developing National Action Plans (NCAPs) and Strategies for Engaging Civil Society in the activities of the Tehran Convention through national strategies, which are an integral part of NCAPs, was underscored.
- First State of the Caspian Sea Environment Report (SOE) was presented as an overview document on the implementation of CEP and the Tehran Convention activities, prepared under the auspices of the Convention's interim Secretariat.
- Progress was noted in the establishment of the Caspian Information Center.
- Need for assistance and coordination in the development of proposals for monitoring the state of the Caspian Sea environment was emphasized, and the first proposals for developing the Environmental Monitoring Programme for the Caspian Sea (EMP) were approved, including identifying monitoring programme requirements, technical capabilities of countries, determining priority research areas, and developing indicators of environmental monitoring effectiveness.

November 25, 2011, Ashgabat. Meeting on the Environmental Monitoring Programme (EMP)

Issues related to the EMP were discussed:

- objects of monitoring,
- a list of chemical substances subject to monitoring,
- a list of monitoring stations in the programme,
- a list of biological parameters subject to monitoring,
- hydrometeorological characteristics of the sea.

The first draft EMP prepared by Iranian expert R. Sheikholeslami was presented. The proposed EMP project was based on the results of CEP projects, including the results of the TACIS project from 2006 to 2009.

March 16, 2012, Moscow. Meeting of the EMP to discuss the second version of the EMP prepared by Russian experts. Discussions were held on mandatory and additional observation parameters, lists of stations for observations, and others. Experts agreed that the EMP is of a framework nature. The main objectives of the EMP are to create a mechanism for obtaining necessary data and information on the Caspian environment, including pollution and the state of biological communities, to assess the current state of the Caspian Sea ecosystem and adjacent territories, identify negative processes and trends affecting the health of the population and the economy of coastal regions based on scientific evidence.

It was recommended that the EMP project can only be accepted at the Fourth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Tehran Convention as a basic document requiring development and supplementation.

July 11-13, 2012, Geneva, November 7-9, 2012, Ashgabat. Meetings of the Preparatory Committee for the Fourth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

The texts of the protocols to the Tehran Convention on the conservation of biological diversity, the environmental impact assessment in a transboundary context, as well as on the protection of the Caspian Sea from pollution from land-based sources and activities carried out on land have been agreed upon for presentation at the Fourth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP4). It has been agreed that decisions on the proposals from the Russian (regarding the biodiversity protocol) and Turkmen sides (regarding the protocols on EIA and pollution from land-based sources) will be adopted at COP4.

December 10-12, 2012, Moscow. FOURTH MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE TEHRAN CONVENTION, during which:

- Adoption and signature of the Protocol for the Protection of the Caspian Sea against Pollution from Land-based Sources and Activities to the Tehran Convention (Moscow Protocol);
- importance of the Protocol Concerning Regional Preparedness, Response and Co-operation in Combating Oil Pollution Incidents to the Tehran Convention and the support of the IMO in developing a Regional Oil Spill Contingency Plan were emphasized;
- Environmental Monitoring Programme for the Caspian Sea (EMP) was supported by the Parties as a basis for further development, improvement, and continuation of this activity, as well as for enhancing the potential and development of regional cooperation for monitoring parameters defining the quality of the marine environment;
- decision was made to develop legal frameworks for the EMP in the form of a monitoring protocol to the Tehran Convention;
- virtual Caspian Environmental Information Centre (CEIC) portal was launched, presenting a database and information management system.

December 19-20, 2013, Geneva. Meeting on institutional issues and planning under the Tehran Convention. The event marked the 10th anniversary of the signing of the Tehran Convention. The promotion of protocols to the Tehran Convention, the location issues, and the organizational structure of the Convention Secretariat were discussed. It was agreed to make efforts to further develop EMP within the framework of the Working Group on Monitoring, which existed previously under the CaspEco-CEP project.

December 2013, Geneva. 1st Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) for the Fifth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Tehran Convention. Issues related to the signing of the Ashgabat Protocol, the draft Protocol on EIA, the ratification of the Aktau and Moscow Protocols, issues related to the preparation of NCAPs in countries, issues related to the preparation of national reports as the basis for the State of the Caspian Sea Environment Report were discussed. Issues related to the involvement of the oil, gas, and transportation industries in the implementation of the Tehran Convention were also discussed.

March 26-28, 2014, Ashgabat. 2nd Preparatory Committee for the Fifth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Tehran Convention. Discussions focused on enhancing EMP (Environmental Monitoring Programme) and the need to develop a monitoring, assessment, and information exchange protocol for the Tehran Convention. It was proposed to carry out activities within the Convention on monitoring the Caspian Sea through the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment.



December 10-12, 2012, Moscow. Fourth meeting of the conference of the parties to the Tehran Convention.

May 28-30, 2014, Ashgabat. FIFTH MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE TEHRAN CONVENTION

Key outcomes of the Fifth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Tehran Convention:

- Adoption and signing of the Protocol for the Conservation of Biological Diversity to the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea ("Ashgabat Protocol") by the Caspian littoral states;
- Completion of preparations for the adoption and signing of the Protocol on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context;
- Decision on the Location and Arrangements of the Tehran Convention Secretariat was adopted.

Progress in the second phase of ensuring the full functioning and implementation of the virtual information center based on internet technologies was also noted. The importance of regular State of the Environment Reports (SOE) and of the adopting National Action Plans (NCAPs) in all Caspian littoral states for the implementation of the Tehran Convention and its protocols, as well as the provision of national reports for a three-year period starting from 2014 based on the Unified Reporting Format, was highlighted.

Significant decisions of COP5 related to further development and improvement of monitoring activities under the Tehran Convention, based on previous projects' monitoring activities. Practical significance in the field of monitoring was attributed to COP5 decisions on establishing institutional monitoring mechanisms in the form of a Working Group on Monitoring and Information Exchange, as well as decisions on developing legal frameworks for joint use of information and monitoring data under the Monitoring, Assessment, and Information Exchange Protocol to the Tehran Convention.

November 24-27, 2014, Baku. 1st Preparatory Committee for the Sixth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Tehran Convention (PrepCom), where, in addition to issues related to the Secretariat, the following issues were considered:

- Proposals for the formation of the first draft Monitoring Protocol;
- Issues related to the functioning of the Caspian Environmental Information Centre (CEIC) with the support of GRID-Arendal;
- Terms of reference for the Working Group on Monitoring and Information Exchange, including its composition;
- Preparation of the Second SOE Report.

May 31 – June 3, 2015, Baku. 2nd Preparatory Committee for COP6

Participants engaged in discussions covering several key topics:

- The composition and terms of reference of the Working Group on Assessment, Monitoring, and Information Exchange;
- The current status of the Caspian Environmental Information Centre (CEIC);
- The major findings outlined in the Second State of the Environment Report for the Caspian Sea;
- Update and review on Secretariat relocation and arrangements; Host country arrangements;
- The draft Protocol on Monitoring, Assessment, and Information Exchange.

August 12-13, 2015, Astrakhan. Event "Tehran Convention and Stakeholder Interaction in Addressing Caspian Sea Environmental Challenges".

Participants delved into the nuances of environmental risks linked to the exploration and transportation of hydrocarbon resources in the Caspian Sea, alongside exploring prospects for future research in this domain. Furthermore, they deliberated on uniform methodologies for EIA procedures, alongside specialized tools to advance environmental standards across all Caspian littoral countries. A compilation of materials titled “Enhancing Stakeholder Interaction in Protecting the Caspian Sea Environment” was subsequently published, drawing from the insights gleaned during the event.

November 10-11, 2015, Baku. 3rd Preparatory Committee for COP6

The discussions encompassed the following matters:

- Determining the scope of work for NCAPs/NSPs for presentation at COP6;
- Defining the scope of work for the Working Group on Monitoring;
- Location, staffing and arrangements of the Secretariat;
- Reviewing the outcomes document from the stakeholder event convened on August 12-13, 2015, in Astrakhan, Russia.

July 25, 2016, Entry into Force of the Protocol Concerning Regional Preparedness, Response and Co-operation in Combating Oil Pollution Incidents (Aktau Protocol)

November 7-11, 2016, Geneva. 4th Preparatory Committee for COP6

The following activities were undertaken:

- Completion and readiness for the signing of the draft Protocol on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (EIA Protocol);
- Execution of the Aktau Protocol, with agreement among Party representatives that its implementation should be fully integrated into the process and organizational framework of the Tehran Convention;
- Finalization of the Regional Cooperation Plan for Oil Pollution Response in Emergency Situations in the Caspian Sea under the Aktau Protocol, along with the procedures for its adoption;
- Engagement of the oil and gas industry in the implementation of the Aktau Protocol;
- Review of outcomes from the event held on August 11-12, 2016, in Aktau, regarding the entry into force of the Aktau Protocol;
- Discussion on the status of the CEIC;
- Preparation of the Second SOE Report.

August 10-11, 2017, Astrakhan. “The Role of the Tehran Convention in Achieving Environmentally Sustainable Development in the Caspian Sea Region and Interaction on UN Sustainable Development Goals” – Second Public and Stakeholder Participation Event in Addressing Caspian Sea Environmental Issues

Representatives of the Caspian littoral states discussed:

- the role and mechanisms of the Tehran Convention and its Protocols for achieving sustainable development of the Caspian Sea region, taking into account the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals;
- the importance of the Tehran Convention and its Protocols for promoting optimal decisions on the conservation of the marine and coastal environment, aquatic biological resources of the Caspian Sea and achieving environmental safety of the region, including during the operation of oil and gas fields.

April 16-20, 2017, Bandar Anzali. Meeting on the Implementation of the Aktau Protocol, Meeting of the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment, Meeting on the Draft Protocol on Monitoring, Assessment, and Information Exchange

Topics addressed comprised:

- Progress on implementing the Aktau Protocol;
- Continued coordination of the Regional Cooperation Plan for responding to oil pollution emergencies in the Caspian Sea under the Aktau Protocol;
- Key areas of collaboration with the private sector within the Tehran Convention framework.

During the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment (WGMA) meeting, conversations revolved around regional quality standards for seawater, sediment, and biota in the Caspian, alongside protocols for data exchange. Furthermore, deliberations and consensus were reached on the provisions of the draft Protocol on Monitoring, Assessment, and Information Exchange.

November 3-17, 2017, Geneva. 5th Preparatory Committee for COP6

- Deliberating on drafting the Protocol on EIA for endorsement by Convention Parties;
- Scrutinizing the text of the Protocol on Monitoring, Assessment, and Information Exchange;
- Finalizing the Scope of Work for NCAPs/NSPs for approval at COP6;
- Reviewing the Unified Reporting Format for adoption at COP6;
- Exploring an international initiative to tackle climate change and Caspian Sea level fluctuations;
- Assessing the progress in preparing the Second SOE Report;
- Evaluating the activities of the Working Group on Monitoring.

February 5-7, 2018, Baku. Meeting of the Tehran Convention Contracting Parties on Secretariat Organizational Structures and Protocol Finalization. Representatives of the Convention Parties:

- Engaged in discussions and reached consensus on various outstanding provisions of the draft Protocol on EIA;
- Persisted in discussing and reaching agreement on the provisions outlined in the draft Protocol on Monitoring, Assessment, and Information Exchange.

July 19-20, 2018, Moscow. Extraordinary Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Tehran Convention. Adoption and signature of the Protocol on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context to the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea (EIA Protocol).

September 24-28, 2018, Baku. 6th Preparatory Committee for COP6

The following topics were addressed:

- Status updates on the ratification of the Moscow and Ashgabat Protocols.
- Outcomes of the Extraordinary Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Tehran Convention in Moscow, Russia, held on July 19-20, 2018.
- Progress on the agreement regarding the Regional Cooperation Plan for addressing Caspian Sea oil pollution in emergencies under the Aktau Protocol and its annexes.
- Ongoing discussions concerning the provisions of the draft Protocol on Monitoring, Assessment, and Information Exchange.

During the 6th Preparatory Committee, the 4th Meeting of the Working Group on Monitoring, Assessment, and Information Exchange (WGMA) took place. Discussions revolved around the Scope of Work and composition of the WGMA for presentation at COP6. The presentation of the Second State of the Environment Report for the Caspian Sea occurred, along with the coordination of the report summary and the submission of final corrections by countries for its inclusion. It was agreed to develop a new methodology for future State of the Environment reports. GRID-Arendal provided updates on the internet-based Caspian Environmental Information Centre (CEIC). Representatives of the Convention Parties continued their discussions regarding the organizational structures of the Tehran Convention Secretariat.

September 16-20, 2019, Baku. 7th Preparatory Committee for COP6

The discussions covered several key areas:

- Continued work on finalizing the draft Protocol on Monitoring, Assessment, and Information Exchange.
- Management and administration of the Tehran Convention Secretariat.
- Updates on the ratification status of the Moscow and Ashgabat Protocols, as well as the Protocol on Environmental Impact Assessment.
- Review of the provisions of the Regional Cooperation Plan for addressing Caspian Sea oil pollution in emergencies under the Aktau Protocol, with ongoing efforts in this regard.
- Information was shared regarding the publication of the second State of the Environment Report for the Caspian Sea.
- Discussions were held on the status of the Caspian Environmental Information Centre (CEIC), leading to an agreement to merge the Tehran Convention website and the CEIC website under the web address: www.tehranconvention.org.
- Suggestions were made regarding the adoption of the Unified Reporting Format as the standard for reporting under the Tehran Convention.
- Projects supporting the activities of the Tehran Convention were reviewed and prepared.
- A parallel meeting of the WGMA took place, focusing on additional proposals for the Scope of Work of the WGMA.
- Continued discussions among representatives of the Convention Parties on administrative matters and the organizational structures of the Tehran Convention Secretariat.

Since 2017, there has been an intensification of activities within the framework of the Tehran Convention, particularly in the development and promotion of international projects involving various international organizations supporting the Convention's implementation. An example of such a project is the "Urbanization and Climate Change in the Caspian Sea Region", developed with the financial support of UN-Habitat-UNEP-Adaptation Fund (GCF)..

February 25, 2020. Consultative online meeting to discuss the conceptual note for the development of the project "Urbanization and Climate Change in the Caspian Sea Region".

June 9, 2020. Videoconference of Ministers of Environmental Affairs of Caspian States, dedicated to the International Day for Environmental Protection on June 5.

The event was initiated by the Republic of Azerbaijan with support from the interim Secretariat of the Tehran Convention. During the speeches by representatives of the Convention Parties, significant emphasis was placed on the Tehran Convention and its protocols, highlighting their crucial role in enhancing cooperation in regional environmental monitoring, scientific research on biodiversity conservation, and pollution reduction efforts for marine and coastal environment of the Caspian Sea.

October 7, 2020. Online meeting on optimizing the activities of the Caspian Environmental Information Centre (CEIC). The structure of the updated Tehran Convention website was presented.

January 19, 2021. Online meeting on the “rolling work programme of the Tehran Convention”. This meeting, prepared by the interim Secretariat of the Convention, aimed to consolidate the efforts of the Caspian States in implementing the provisions of the Tehran Convention and its protocols. Additionally, it sought to coordinate their actions to address both national and regional transboundary environmental issues of the Caspian Sea.

February 9, 2021. Online meeting to optimize the activities of the Caspian Environmental Information Centre (CEIC). The meeting aimed to discuss the current development of the updated Tehran Convention website, which involves the integration of information from both the Tehran Convention website and the Caspian Environmental Information Centre.

March 5, August 28, and October 12, 2021. Technical meetings within the Environmental Monitoring Programme in online format. The meeting delved into the outcomes of previous sessions conducted under the Working Group on Monitoring from 2015 to 2019. Key areas of focus included:

- Establishing regional water quality standards for the Caspian Sea, drawing from a comprehensive list of maximum allowable concentrations of pollutants in surface waters.
- Assessing the quality of sediment within the Caspian Sea.
- Outlining procedures for minimal control over the quality of monitoring data.
- Exchanging information concerning revisions to the Caspian Sea Environmental Monitoring Programme 2012 (EMP).

Central discussions revolved around determining the parameters to be measured within the EMP, coordinating the station network for EMP, and outlining subsequent steps for updating the programme.

The session also addressed the distribution of the Questionnaire outlining the core provisions of the EMP.

October 25, November 11, and December 7, 2021. Regional consultative meetings to discuss proposals for the Adaptation Fund “Urbanization and Climate Change Adaptation in the Caspian Sea Region”. The aim of these events was to deliberate on the regional aspect of the upcoming project titled “Urbanization and Climate Change Adaptation in the Caspian Sea Region”.

October 27-28, 2021. International Scientific Conference on Climate Change in the Caspian Sea Region, organized under the auspices of the Coordination Committee for Hydro-meteorology of the Caspian Sea (CASPCOM) and the interim Secretariat of the Tehran Convention. The conference showcased the effective collaboration between CASPCOM and the Tehran Convention. Its primary objective was to review the findings of contemporary research concerning climate change and its consequences on the Caspian Sea region.

February 1 and 9, 2022. Consultative meetings to discuss proposals for the Adaptation Fund “Urbanization and Climate Change Adaptation in the Caspian Sea Region”. Discussions on the list of activities within the regional component of the project.

February 24, 2022. Online meeting on optimizing the activities of the Caspian Environmental Information Centre (CEIC). The meeting aimed to address the ongoing development of the updated Tehran Convention website, particularly focusing on the integration of information from both the Tehran Convention website and the Caspian Environmental Information

Centre. Additionally, it sought to introduce participants to the internal aspects of the updated Tehran Convention website, outlining its objectives and functional capabilities. Throughout the discussion, a User's Guide for the Tehran Convention website was presented, providing insights into the fundamental aspects of utilizing the website's functionality.

April 12, 2022. Technical meeting within the Environmental Monitoring Programme.

The event centered on discussing the observation parameters, both mandatory and optional, to be monitored under the Environmental Monitoring Programme of the Caspian Sea (EMP) by all Caspian littoral states. It was highlighted that initial proposals for the development of EMP, such as identifying requirements for the hydrochemical monitoring programme and assessing the level of marine environmental pollution within the technical capabilities of the countries, determining priority research areas, and developing indicators for monitoring the effectiveness of environmental efforts in the Caspian Sea, were presented and endorsed at the Fourth Meeting Conference of the Parties to the Tehran Convention (2012, Moscow, Russia). Participants reached a consensus that EMP should be enhanced to function under the purview of the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment.

September 22 and 28, October 12, 2022. First, second, and third meetings of the 8th Preparatory Committee for the Sixth Meeting of the Tehran Convention Conference of the Parties (COP6). Issues related to the implementation of decisions and proposals on the location and organizational structure of the Tehran Convention Secretariat, coordination of the draft Protocol on Monitoring, Assessment, and Information Exchange, and proposals from the Convention Parties' representatives on the items of the Ministerial Statement and Decisions for COP6 were discussed.

October 19-21, 2022. Baku, Azerbaijan. SIXTH MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE TEHRAN CONVENTION was a significant milestone in the implementation of the Tehran Convention, which summarized the formation and development of the Convention and outlined further steps within the document.



High-Level Segment of COP6, 21 October 2022, Baku, Azerbaijan

Key decisions of the Sixth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Tehran Convention:

- Ensuring the early ratification of the previously signed protocols of the Tehran Convention;
- Need to ensure the finalization of work on the Protocol on Monitoring, Assessment and Information Exchange to the Tehran Convention for its further adoption at COP;
- Continuation of negotiations to reach agreement on a Plan for regional cooperation to combat oil pollution in cases of emergency in the Caspian Sea (Aktau Protocol Plan);
- Continuation of the submission of national reports on a three-year basis, starting in 2014 in accordance with the updated Unified Reporting Format;
- Approval of the Terms of Reference and composition of the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment (WGMA) and the Terms of Reference of the National Convention Liaison Offices/Officers (NCLOs);
- Approval of the Second State of the Caspian Sea Environment Report and development of guidelines for future State of Environment Reports;
- Updating the Strategic Convention Action Programme (SCAP), adopted at COP2 in Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran, on November 12, 2008, as a long-term agenda for further consideration by the Contracting Parties and possible adoption at the COP;
- Adoption of the Tehran Convention's Work Program for 2023-2024;
- other solutions.

23

February 21, 2023. Online meeting to discuss the content of the “Documents” and “Stakeholders” sections of the open part of the Tehran Convention website.

November 7, 2023. Online meeting of the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment (WGMA). The results of previous activities in the field of environmental monitoring were reviewed, discussions were held on a preliminary list of indispensable monitoring parameters, as well as the next steps to finalize and implement the EMP. It was agreed that the EMP could now be based on national monitoring programmes, including the currently observed parameters of the marine environment, geographical coverage, station location, frequency of observations, and national methods for ensuring data quality control.



Ministerial Consultations of the Caspian States, 21-22 September 2023, Geneva, Switzerland



Tehran Convention at COP29 UNFCCC, 18 November 2024, Baku, Azerbaijan

March 11, 2024. Online meeting of the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment (WGMA). Discussions took place on the structure and key principles to be included in the new version of the Caspian Sea Environmental Monitoring Programme. The titles of the Programme and its sub-items, as well as the main content of the Programme sections, were agreed upon. The new version of the EMP should be based on the EMP-2012 but taking into account the current monitoring capabilities of the Caspian Littoral States.

June 12, 2024, Baku. Meeting of the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment (WGMA) to review the draft of a new Environmental Monitoring Programme of the Caspian Sea.

June 18-19, 2024. First meeting of the Preparatory Committee for the Seventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP7) to the Tehran Convention.

The main issues discussed during the meeting:

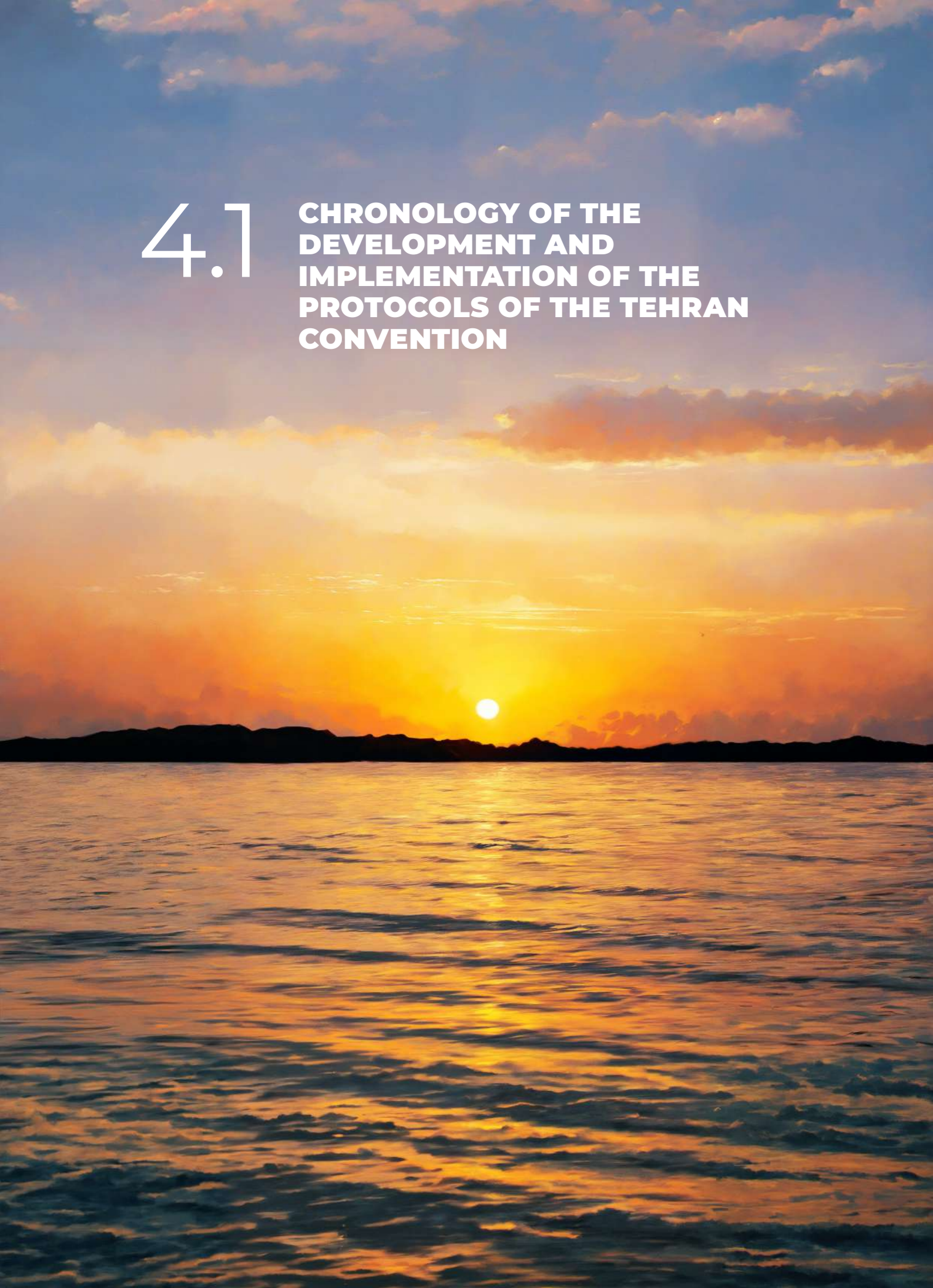
- Priority actions under the signed protocols to the Tehran Convention (Ashgabat Protocol, EIA Protocol);
- Priority actions under the Moscow Protocol, which entered into force in November 2023;
- Preparation for the implementation of projects supporting the activities of the Tehran Convention;
- Updating the Environmental Monitoring Programme;
- other issues.

October 7, 2024. Online meeting of the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment (WGMA)

Continuation of the discussion of the new version of the Environmental Monitoring Program (EMP).

4.1

CHRONOLOGY OF THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROTOCOLS OF THE TEHRAN CONVENTION



December 1995. For the first time, representatives of the Caspian states in Geneva expressed the need to develop protocols to the Tehran Convention during the initial meeting of experts from the Caspian Sea littoral states on legislative and institutional support for environmental activities in the Caspian Sea region. The development of protocols until 2012 was carried out by experts from the Caspian states with organizational and financial support from the CEP projects, running parallel to the formation of the Convention. The final documents of the CEP projects were used for thematic justification of the formulations of a number of protocol articles.

During the development of the draft protocols, mechanisms for the development of the Tehran Convention itself were utilized, and provisions of a number of global and regional conventions were adapted for the Caspian Sea region, including CBD, CITES, Espoo Convention, Bucharest Convention, Helsinki Convention, GESAMP¹.

July 15-17, 2002, Tehran. The seventh Meeting on the Preparation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea. Representatives of the Parties to the Convention reached an agreement on mechanisms and a scheme for the development of protocols.

July 19-20, 2004, Tehran. The first meeting of representatives of the Caspian Sea littoral states that signed the Tehran Convention. The decisions made in July 2004 in Tehran during the meeting were pivotal for advancing the development and implementation of the Convention's protocols. Additionally, it was decided to form expert groups comprising specialists from all Caspian littoral states, who will be responsible for drafting the protocols in specific thematic areas.

Recognizing the framework nature of the Tehran Convention, representatives from the Caspian Sea littoral states concurred that the Convention's protocols should be specific and thematic in nature, ensuring practical applicability for all Caspian littoral states. It was emphasized that when preparing these protocols, opportunities for complementarity and direct interaction should be considered. Moreover, such protocols should also facilitate the promotion and practical implementation of other regional sectorial agreements.

The following priority thematic areas for the elaboration of Convention protocols were agreed upon:

- Conservation of biodiversity
- Pollution from land-based sources
- Cooperation in case of emergency situations
- EIA in a transboundary context

It was also decided to develop a protocol on the conservation of biodiversity, despite Article 14 of the Tehran Convention already calling for the development of a protocol on the protection, conservation, and restoration of biological resources. The meeting participants agreed that such a protocol should primarily regulate issues related to the management of biological resources, the conservation of biological and landscape diversity, the prevention and control of the introduction of alien species, the conservation of critical habitats, and the organization of specially protected territories and aquatic areas, including transboundary ones.

¹ CBD – Convention on Biological Diversity

CITES – Convention on the International Trade of Disagreeing Types of Wild Fauna and Flora

Espoo Convention – Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context

Bucharest Convention – Convention on the Protection of the Black Sea against Pollution

GESAMP – Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-Based Activities

Helsinki Convention-Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area

Attention was drawn to the development of an additional protocol on cooperation in ecological monitoring, which would facilitate obtaining comparable data on environmental status and changes.

Participants of the first meeting of the Tehran Convention signatories welcomed the CEP's efforts to develop a protocol on regional cooperation in emergency situations. The plan, developed and approved by representatives of the Caspian states in 2003 within the framework of the CEP, was agreed to be legally based on the appropriate protocol.

Important for promoting the formation of protocols to the Tehran Convention was the **meeting on protocol harmonization held on January 21-26, 2008, at UNEP/ROE in Celi-gny, Switzerland**. The Contracting Parties successfully agreed on the harmonization of the protocol articles with each other and their alignment with the provisions of the Tehran Convention. These provisions primarily addressed issues such as institutional structures, definitions, scope of application, procedural provisions, and the supply and exchange of data and information.

THE PROTOCOL CONCERNING REGIONAL PREPAREDNESS, RESPONSE AND CO-OPERATION IN COMBATING OIL POLLUTION INCIDENTS (Aktau Protocol)

In 2001, the governments of the Caspian states decided to begin developing a document on regional cooperation for large-scale oil spills in the Caspian Sea. This initiative was supported by the CEP (the UNDP/GEF-CEP project – Phase 1) and the International Maritime Organization, which assisted the governments of the Caspian states in developing the Caspian Sea Plan Concerning Regional Cooperation in Combating Oil Pollution in Cases of Emergency.

April 23-26, 2002, Tehran. A regional seminar on the development of the Caspian Sea Plan Concerning Regional Co-operation in Combating Oil Pollution in Cases of Emergency. Experts of the CEP of the Caspian states discussed the main provisions of the Plan.

May 2003. The Caspian Sea Plan Concerning Regional Co-operation in Combating Oil Pollution in Cases of Emergency. The Plan was developed and approved by representatives of the Caspian states in 2003 within the framework of the CEP (first phase) with the assistance of IMO. It was agreed that the appropriate protocol should be its legal basis. The Tehran Convention was chosen as a suitable “legal platform”. The development of the Protocol to the Tehran Convention worked in parallel with the elaboration of the Plan. The draft protocol on oil pollution incidents under the Tehran Convention was based on the Plan developed earlier within the framework of CEP.

July 19-20, 2004, Tehran. Participants in the first meeting of representatives of the Caspian Sea littoral states that signed the Tehran Convention welcomed the work on the development of the draft protocol and agreed on the need for further actions to prepare the draft protocol on Oil Pollution Incidents for signing.

2005, Baku. A meeting of government-appointed experts to negotiate on draft Protocol Concerning Regional Preparedness, Response and Co-operation in Combating Oil Pollution Incidents (Aktau Protocol Plan). Most of the substantive articles of the draft Protocol on regional cooperation in combating oil pollution in cases of emergency were considered. It was agreed that the Protocol would be applied in case of incidents causing oil pollution and should be clearly correlated with the Plan.

September 2005, Tehran. An expert meeting to negotiate on the draft Protocol Concerning Regional Preparedness, Response and Co-operation in Combating Oil Pollution Incidents. During the meeting, work on the draft Protocol was completed and the text was agreed upon in principle. The Protocol of the Tehran Convention (subsequently known as the Aktau Protocol) stipulates that the Plan under the Aktau Protocol was developed based on “national systems and contingency plans for combating oil pollution incidents” (Article 5 of the Aktau Protocol) and taking into account “oil pollution emergency plans on board ships, on off-shore units, in seaports, and at oil handling facilities” (Article 9 of the Aktau Protocol).

The draft Protocol on Oil Pollution Incidents determines the liability of each of the Contracting Parties in terms of readiness and response in the case of incidents that cause oil pollution. It contains provisions on coordination and cooperation at the regional level. The draft Protocol on Oil Pollution Incidents also provides for the creation of organizational mechanisms for the implementation of the Plan.

November 10-12, 2009, Astana; January 26, 2010, Moscow. Meetings of government-appointed experts to negotiate on the draft Protocol Concerning Regional Preparedness, Response and Co-operation in Combating Oil Pollution Incidents. In the course of the meetings, full agreement on the text of the draft Protocol was reached.

August 10-12, 2011, Aktau. Adoption and signature of the Protocol concerning regional preparedness, response and co-operation in combating oil pollution incidents to the Tehran convention (AKTAU PROTOCOL) by the Contracting Parties.

June 2012, Baku; March 2013, Almaty. Meetings on Plan Concerning Regional Co-operation in Combating Oil Pollution in Cases of Emergency in the Caspian Sea under the Aktau Protocol. During several discussions, requirements for implementing the Plan under the Aktau Protocol were identified. Provisions related to the obligations of the Contracting Parties within the Plan were discussed. These primarily involved developing national emergency action plans, enhancing countries’ capacity to address pollution, sharing information about emergency situations with other Parties, reporting all oil pollution incidents and measures taken, and providing assistance upon request from other Parties.

July 5, 2016. The protocol concerning regional preparedness, response and co-operation in combating oil pollution incidents (Aktau Protocol) entered into force.

August 11-12, 2016, Aktau. During the event commemorating the entry into force of the Aktau Protocol, discussions centered around implementing its provisions. A list of priority measures for Aktau Protocol implementation was agreed upon, which included the development of the Plan Concerning Regional Co-operation in Combating Oil Pollution in Cases of Emergency in the Caspian Sea under the Aktau Protocol. It was decided that the updated Aktau Protocol Plan should incorporate effective measures to address major maritime incidents causing pollution or potentially impacting the Caspian Sea negatively.

February 18, 2020. On-line meeting to continue discussion on the text of the draft Regional Emergence Plan under the Aktau Protocol. During the meeting, discussions revolved around the formulation of the “Regional Mechanism” for the purposes of the Plan as outlined in Article 13 of the Aktau Protocol. Additionally, proposals concerning the official languages of the Plan were deliberated upon.

November 1-3, 2021. During on-line meeting of executive and operational bodies on the Aktau Protocol. During the discussions, there was ongoing deliberation regarding the uncoordinated provisions of the Plan concerning the use of English or English/Russian languages

in operational activities (section 2.2 of the Plan – “Information exchange”), the interpretation of the “Regional Mechanism” concept within the document, and the financing of activities under the Aktau Protocol Plan. Additionally, meeting participants reached consensus on a long-term agenda for exercises within the framework of the Plan and a two-year programme of activities under the Aktau Protocol.

July 14, 2020. ALPHA command-and-staff exercises in online format.

October 12, 2020. ALPHA command-and-staff exercises in online format. The event included discussions on matters related to organization, communication, and logistics in the context of transboundary response, as outlined in Annex 9 to the Plan.

March 16, 2021. The third ALPHA/BRAVO command-and-staff exercises within the framework of the Plan Concerning Regional Co-operation in Combating Oil Pollution in Cases of Emergency in the Caspian Sea under the Aktau Protocol. The exercises aimed to facilitate discussions and enhance operations related to organization, communication, and logistics for transboundary response actions, as outlined in Annex 9 to the Aktau Protocol Plan. Discussions also covered procedures for reimbursing expenses for assistance provided in line with the Aktau Protocol and Aktau Protocol Plan, as well as international regulations.

August 3, 2021. Command-and-staff exercises “The Caspian Sea-BRAVO”. Discussions revolved around training the management bodies and forces of the state civil protection system to effectively carry out their functional duties.

August 11, 2021. During command-and-staff exercises “The Caspian Sea-BRAVO”. Procedures for reimbursement of expenses for assistance in the context of the oil spill were considered.

April 5, 2022. The fourth ALPHA/BRAVO command-and-staff exercises. These exercises focused on discussing and enhancing organizational, communication, and logistical aspects of transboundary response actions, as outlined in Annex 9 to the Aktau Protocol Plan.

November 13-17, 2023. The fifth “The Caspian Sea-BRAVO” exercise was held within the framework of the Aktau Protocol Plan. The exercise was organized in accordance with Annex 9 to the Plan and conducted under the leadership of Turkmenistan. The purpose of the exercise was to discuss and work out issues related to the organization of communications and logistics in the framework of transboundary response actions in accordance with annex 9 to the Plan.

October 8-10, 2024, Aktau, Kazakhstan. Implementation and Operational Authorities Meeting under the Aktau Protocol. Work on the draft Caspian Sea Plan Concerning Regional Cooperation in Combating Oil Pollution in Cases of Emergency (Aktau Protocol Plan) has been completed, and the command and staff exercises “Caspian Sea – ALPHA” have also been conducted.

THE PROTOCOL FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE CASPIAN SEA AGAINST POLLUTION FROM LAND-BASED SOURCES AND ACTIVITIES TO THE FRAMEWORK CONVENTION FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT OF THE CASPIAN SEA (MOSCOW PROTOCOL)

2004. The development of the **Moscow Protocol** was initiated in accordance with Article 7 of the Tehran Convention, which addresses Pollution from Land-based Sources. Beginning in

2004, the Protocol's development was supported by the UNDP/GEF – CEP project – Phase 2 and Phase 3. The initial draft protocol was prepared by a UNEP consultant, drawing on and adapting provisions from the Bucharest Convention, Helsinki Convention, and GESAMP for application in the Caspian Sea region.

May 2006, Ashgabat. At the meeting of government-appointed experts to negotiate on the draft Protocol for the Protection of the Caspian Sea against Pollution from Land-based Sources participants emphasized the necessity of a precise and unambiguous definition of the “Scope of application” to ensure alignment with the Tehran Convention. Special focus was placed on Article 3, which addresses the “Scope of application”. The primary unresolved matter revolved around whether the Protocol should exclusively address land-based sources of pollution or also encompass activities potentially impacting the marine environment of the Caspian Sea. Regional consensus on this matter was not achieved. Consequently, only partial discussion of Annex 1 to the draft Protocol, titled “Activities and Categories of Substances of Concern”, took place.

January 21, 2008, Geneva. Meeting of experts appointed by the Governments of the Caspian littoral States to agree on a draft protocol on pollution from land-based sources. Consensus was reached on several articles of the protocol, except for the “Scope of application” (Article 3) and Annex 1 (item 15 of section B).

September 7-8, 2009, Ashgabat. Meeting of experts appointed by the Governments of the Caspian littoral States to agree on a draft protocol on pollution from land-based sources. The coordination of the text of the draft protocol on pollution from land-based sources continued, with countries' proposals regarding Article 2 “Use of terms” on definitions such as “Best available technologies”, “Dispersed sources”, and “Emissions” being discussed. Additionally, proposals for the formulation of item 1 of the Article 3 regarding the “Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea” were considered.

November 9, 2009, Astana. Meeting of experts appointed by the Governments of the Caspian littoral States to agree on a draft protocol on pollution from land-based sources. Agreement was reached on the text of the draft Protocol, with the exception of the article “Scope of application” (Article 3).

August 10-12, 2011, Aktau. During the Third Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Tehran Convention, the importance of finalizing the draft protocol on pollution from land-based sources was emphasized.

July 11-13, 2012, Geneva. At the 1st Preparatory Committee for COP4, the text of the Protocol was finalized for submission to COP4.

August 10-12, 2012, Moscow. Adoption and signature of the Protocol for the Protection of the Caspian Sea Against Pollution from Land-based Sources and Activities to the Tehran Convention by the Contracting Parties.

November 13, 2023. The Protocol for the Protection of the Caspian Sea Against Pollution from Land-based Sources and Activities to the Tehran Convention (Moscow Protocol) ENTERED INTO FORCE.

June 18-19, 2024. Discussion of the priority actions of the Moscow Protocol in the framework of the First meeting of the Preparatory Committee for the Seventh Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP7) of the Tehran Convention.

PROTOCOL FOR THE CONSERVATION OF BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY TO THE FRAMEWORK CONVENTION FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT OF THE CASPIAN SEA (ASHGABAT PROTOCOL)

2004. The development of the draft protocol for the conservation of biological diversity to the Tehran Convention began in 2004 with organizational and financial support from CEP projects until 2012. Overall, 10 rounds of negotiations involving appointed experts from the Caspian states were held to form and agree on the draft protocol on biodiversity. Additionally, a review meeting was organized, along with national training seminars in Azerbaijan, Iran, and Russia. In formulating the protocol articles, provisions from international agreements such as the CBD, CITES, and Ramsar Convention, adapted for the Caspian Sea region, were utilized.

November 18, 2004, Baku. First meeting of experts of the Caspian Littoral States on the development of a draft Protocol for the Conservation of Biological Diversity. During the meeting:

- An analytical information document outlining the possible structure and elements of the draft protocol on biodiversity was presented for discussion.
- Proposals from experts representing the Caspian littoral states regarding the content, scope, and structure of the draft protocol on biodiversity were considered.
- Agreement was reached to include measures addressing invasive species in the biodiversity protocol and to develop an Action Plan aimed at minimizing their impact on the Caspian ecosystem.
- It was agreed that the biodiversity protocol should encompass issues related to the conservation and sustainable use of biological resources.
- Agreement was reached on including selection criteria and principles for the management of protected areas in the Caspian Sea (the List of Protected Areas) as an annex to the Protocol on Biodiversity, as well as categories for defining protected species in accordance with the criteria of the IUCN. It was decided that the Protocol for the Conservation of Biological Diversity should contribute to the development of the Caspian Red Book.

April 27-29, 2005, Almaty. Second meeting of experts of the Caspian Littoral States on the development of a draft Protocol for the Conservation of Biological Diversity. The provisions of the articles of the first draft protocol on biodiversity ("Objectives", "Scope", "Use of terms", Article 7 "Alien species" and Article 8. "Genetically modified species") were discussed. April 2006, Tehran. Meeting of experts of the Caspian states on the development of a draft Protocol for the Conservation of Biological Diversity. The provisions of a number of articles of the protocol project were discussed. Failed to agree on a number of provisions of the protocol articles. In square brackets, the phrase "marine environment" (Article 3 "Scope of Application"), Article 8 "Genetically Modified Species", Article 14 "Access to Genetic Resources" were concluded. The formulation of the provisions of these articles required additional discussions.

October 5-7, 2009, Baku. Meeting in agreement of the articles of the draft Protocol for the Conservation of Biological Diversity. The discussions of the draft protocol on biodiversity were continued. Experts did not agree on a number of points "Country of origin of genetic resources" (Article 1 "Use of Terms"), "wetlands", including in the "Scope of Application" (Article 3).

June 27-28, 2010, Tehran and September 15, 2010, Almaty. Meetings in agreement of the articles of the draft protocol on biodiversity. Discussions on the provisions of the protocol articles continued, with a focus on reaching consensus on previously unresolved issues. It was agreed that each country would conduct national consultations to prepare compromise formulations for the inconsistent provisions of the protocol. The aim is to facilitate the adoption

and signing of the draft protocol on biodiversity at the Fourth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties of the Convention.

September 14-16, 2010, Almaty. Expert meetings on the harmonization of articles of the draft protocol on biodiversity. The expert meeting primarily focused on discussing several key articles of the draft protocol. One major topic of discussion was Article 3, concerning the “Scope of application”, particularly regarding the incorporation of the concept of the “marine environment of the Caspian Sea” to address fluctuations in its level and pollution from land-based sources. Another point of contention was the wording of Article 5, “General obligations”, specifically regarding the inclusion of the phrase “guided by their national legislation” in the preamble of this article. Additionally, discussions revolved around the wording of Article 8, which pertains to “Genetically modified species”.

February 2011, Geneva. Meeting in agreement of the articles of the draft protocol on biodiversity. An agreement was reached by the final wording of Article 3 “Scope of application” Point (E) of Article 1 was not agreed upon since Turkmen Party did not complete the internal consultations on the position reserved by them on item (E) – “Country of origin of genetic resources”.

July 11-13, 2012, Geneva. 1st Preparatory Committee Meeting on COP4. The text of the protocol project as a whole was agreed by representatives of the Caspian states.

December 10-12, 2012, Moscow. Fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Tehran Convention acknowledged the progress made in reaching a principle agreement on the biodiversity protocol and resolved to conclude the necessary arrangements for the adoption and signing of the Protocol as expeditiously as possible.

April 25, 2013, Baku. Discussion on the draft protocol on biodiversity within the framework of the Tehran Convention Meeting on Institutional Issues and Planning. The wording of several articles of the draft protocol on biodiversity was agreed (Article 11 “Procedures for the Establishment and Listing of Protected Areas”).

March 26-28, 2014, Ashgabat. Preparatory Committee Meeting on COP5. Continued discussions of additional proposals and comments to the text of the draft protocol related to Article 9 “Designation of Protected Areas”, Article 10 “Management of Protected Areas”, Article 11 “Procedures for the Establishment and Listing of Protected Areas”. The focal point of the discussions centered around the redaction and addition of point 4 in Article 11 “Procedures for the Establishment and Listing of Protected Areas”. However, consensus on this matter was not reached. It was agreed among the Parties to continue deliberations on this issue during COP-5.

May 30, 2014, Ashgabat. Adoption and signature of the Protocol for the Conservation of Biological Diversity to the Tehran Convention (Ashgabat Protocol) by the Contracting Parties.

PROTOCOL ON ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT IN A TRANSBOUNDARY CONTEXT TO THE FRAMEWORK CONVENTION FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT OF THE CASPIAN SEA (EIA Protocol)

2004. The development of an EIA Protocol commenced in 2004 within the framework of the CEP, supported by UNDP/GEF projects as stipulated in item 3 of Article 17 of the Tehran Convention.

The necessity for such a protocol arose due to the absence of an agreed procedure for conducting EIAs of planned activities in the Caspian Sea region, which was negatively impacting the ecosystems of the area. Given the historical similarities in national approaches to conducting EIA procedures in the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation and Turkmenistan these approaches formed the basis for drafting the Protocol on EIA of the Caspian Sea in a transboundary context to the Tehran Convention.

During the development of the draft EIA protocol, formulations from various articles and annexes of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention) were utilized and tailored to suit the specific circumstances of the Caspian Sea region. However, full adoption of the provisions of the Espoo Convention was not feasible in the Caspian Sea region due to the fact that not all states in the area were signatories to it. Therefore, it was deemed necessary to establish a common international legal framework for conducting EIA in a transboundary context, which would be applicable to all Caspian littoral states. Several rounds of negotiations were conducted on the draft EIA Protocol, along with training seminars.

March 10-11, 2005, Moscow. First meeting of government-appointed experts on the development of a draft protocol on environmental impact assessment in a transboundary context (EIA Protocol). A preliminary version of the draft EIA Protocol based on country proposals was discussed. Proposals were made by countries on the first seven articles of the draft protocol, on amendments to the preamble of the draft protocol, as well as the concepts of “plans and programmes” were excluded from the article “Definitions”, and a number of other definitions were clarified. In addition, clarifications have been made to the articles “Purpose”, “Notification” and some others.

October 24-26, 2006, Moscow. Second meeting of experts appointed by the Governments of the Caspian Littoral States on the development of a draft EIA protocol, where the text of the draft EIA protocol was reviewed article by article, including up to and including Article 12. An additional article titled “Scope of Application of the Protocol” was proposed and adopted. Furthermore, amendments were made to Article 4 “Notification”, including changes to the sequence of items within the article.

7-9 June 2006, Moscow. Third meeting of experts on the development of a draft EIA protocol. The draft EIA protocol was reviewed and agreed upon as a whole, but several proposals from countries remained uncoordinated and in need of further consultations within the Caspian States. These included aspects such as the “Scope of application” of the EIA protocol and the definition of “Coastal areas”. Although the article “Notification procedures” was generally agreed upon, no consensus was reached on the notification languages, and the article remained in square brackets. Additionally, the definitions of “Joint Body”, “Post-project analysis”, as well as the sequence of use of the terms “Transboundary impact” and “Significant transboundary impact” were not agreed upon.

November 30 – December 2, 2009, Moscow; January 27-29, 2010, Moscow; April 26-27, 2010, Baku. Meetings of experts appointed by the Governments of the Caspian Littoral States to develop a draft EIA protocol continued, with discussions ongoing despite some provisions remaining uncoordinated. Throughout these meetings, progress was made, and a preliminary agreement was reached on the structure of the text of the draft EIA protocol.

February 2011, Geneva. Meeting of experts appointed by the Governments of the Caspian littoral States on the development of a draft EIA protocol. During the meeting, efforts to coordinate and align the positions of the countries regarding Article 1 “Use of terms” persisted. However, consensus on the definitions of “Marine Areas” and “Affected Parties” (item b of Article 1 “Use of terms”) could not be reached.

11-13 July 2012, Geneva. Discussion of the EIA protocol during the Preparatory Committee for COP-4. The text of the draft EIA Protocol was generally agreed upon at the expert level.

December 19-20, 2013, Geneva. Discussion of the EIA protocol during the meeting on institutional issues and planning. Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan have not reached consensus on certain formulations, as they diverge from the language used in similar articles of the Espoo Convention, to which both countries are Parties. It has been agreed that representatives of the Contracting Parties will engage in consultations with each other to strive for consensus during the Preparatory Committee for COP-5, aiming to facilitate the adoption and signing of the Protocol at COP-5.

March 26-28, 2014, Ashgabat. Discussion of the EIA protocol during the Preparatory Committee for COP-5. Discussion of Turkmenistan's proposals to Annex I of the draft EIA Protocol led to a decision to seek the advisory opinion of the Espoo Convention on several formulations of the draft EIA protocol. Additionally, the meeting participants agreed to further discuss the draft EIA Protocol at the final Preparatory Committee for the Sixth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Tehran Convention.

November 10-11, 2015, Baku. 3rd Preparatory Committee for COP-6. The response of the Espoo Convention to the request indicated that none of the three proposed amendments to Annex I to the draft EIA Protocol to the Tehran Convention can be considered incompatible with the Espoo Convention. Furthermore, it stated that the adoption of the Protocol with these amendments would not lead to the Parties to the Protocol being in a state of non-compliance with their obligations as Parties to the Espoo Convention.



Signing of the EIA Protocol, 20 June 2018, Moscow, Russia

November 13-17, 2017, Geneva. During the **5th Preparatory Committee for COP-6**, representatives of the Contracting Parties continued to consider the proposal of Turkmenistan on Annex I to the EIA Protocol and additional comments from Azerbaijan.

February 5-7, 2018, Baku. As part of the **Meeting on the Organizational Structures of the Secretariat and the completion of the development of protocols**, the text of the draft protocol was agreed, with the exception of item 9 of Article 5 – “Notification” (“Absence of notification in case of significant transboundary impact as a result of planned activities” and Turkmenistan’s proposals in Annex I to the Protocol. The proposal of the Russian Federation to convene an extraordinary session of the Conference of the Parties to the Tehran Convention to adopt and sign a draft protocol on environmental impact assessment in a transboundary context was supported.

June 20, 2018, Moscow. **Adoption and signature of the Protocol on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context to the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea (EIA Protocol).**

The DRAFT PROTOCOL ON MONITORING, ASSESSMENT AND INFORMATION EXCHANGE is being developed and agreed upon by representatives of the Contracting Parties to the Convention.

December 10-12, 2012, Moscow. During the **Fourth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties** to the Convention, it was decided to start developing a legal framework for the Environmental Monitoring Programme (EMP) – a draft protocol on monitoring, assessment and information exchange (**Monitoring Protocol**).

May 30, 2014, Ashgabat. At the **Fifth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties** to the Convention, the expediency of a legal framework for the sharing of information in support of the implementation of the Tehran Convention and its Protocols was confirmed. The Protocol should establish legal mechanisms for the storage, transmission, and dissemination of data and information within the framework of implementing the provisions of the Tehran Convention and its Protocols. Additionally, the draft monitoring protocol should specify the exchange of quality-controlled data, including baseline data, necessary for accurately assessing the environment of the Caspian Sea.

November 24-27, 2014, May 31 – June 3, 2015, January 21-22, 2016, Baku; April 16-20, 2017, Tehran. During the 2014-2018 events focused on the draft monitoring protocol, the initial version prepared and circulated by the interim Secretariat of the Convention underwent review. General feedback was provided regarding the document’s structure and objectives. A format for discussing the protocol was established, and discussions delved into various articles, including Article 1 “Use of terms”, Article 2 “Objectives”, and Article 4 “General obligations”. **From 2018** discussions on the draft Monitoring Protocol continue through online and in-person events.

February 22, 2023. Online meeting on the draft Protocol on Monitoring, Assessment and Information Exchange to the Tehran Convention.

February 20, 2024. Online meeting on the development of the draft Protocol on Monitoring, Assessment and information Exchange to the Tehran Convention.

June 10-11, 2024, Baku. Meeting on the development of a draft Protocol on Monitoring, Assessment and Information Exchange to the Tehran Convention.

In 2024-2025, the Tehran Convention focused on:

- Activities related to the implementation of the Aktau Protocol, including finalizing a Caspian Sea Plan Concerning Regional Co-operation in Combating Oil Pollution in Cases of Emergency and conducting oil spill response exercises under the Aktau Protocol;
- Priority areas of implementation of the Moscow Protocol, the Ashgabat Protocol and the EIA Protocol;
- Further negotiations on the draft Protocol on Monitoring, Assessment and Information Exchange to the Tehran Convention;
- Activities of the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment, including the development of a new version of the Environmental Monitoring Programme;
- Development of the Strategic Convention Action Programme (SCAP), previously adopted at COP-2 (Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran, November 12, 2008) as a long-term agenda for further consideration by the Contracting Parties and adoption by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention;
- Implementation of the UNDP–UNEP project «Addressing Marine Litter and Marine Plastics – A Systemic Approach in the Caspian Sea».

The presented chronology of events and activities of the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea – the Tehran Convention – confirmed the importance of the Convention, which united the efforts of the States of the region to protect the marine and coastal environment of this largest enclosed body of water on Earth.

REFERENCES

1. Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea, 2003.
2. Protocol Concerning Regional Preparedness, Response and Co-Operation in Combating Oil Pollution Incidents (Aktau protocol), 2011.
3. Protocol for the Protection of the Caspian Sea Against Pollution from Land-based Sources and Activities to the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea (Moscow protocol), 2012.
4. Protocol for The Conservation of Biological Diversity to the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea (Ashgabat Protocol), 2014.
5. Protocol on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context to the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea (EIA Protocol), 2018.
6. Ministerial statement and decisions of the meetings of the Conference of the Parties to the Tehran Convention.
7. "Acquaintance with the Caspian Sea and the Caspian Ecological Programme (CEP)" Booklet CEP, 2005.
8. Caspian Sea state of the environment – the second report, 2018.
9. Notes by the interim Secretariat (TCIS) to the Tehran Convention meetings.
10. Regional Review document "Environmental Consequences of the Climate Change in the Caspian Sea Region", edited by Prof. P. Kaplin (Moscow State University), UNEP, Geneva, 1997.
11. Regional Report "Inventory of the Coastal Areas of the Caspian Sea and Identification of Sites of Particular Importance and/or Sensitive to Impacts", prepared by Dr. A. Filippov et al, 2005.
12. "Regional Review of the Ecosystem and Biodiversity of the Caspian Sea", prepared by Dr. R. Khodarevskaya and Dr. B. Morozov, 2010.
13. Secretariat arrangements of the Tehran Convention: historic overview, 2022.
14. Strategic Convention Action Programme, 2008.
15. "Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis" (TDA), CEP, New edition, 2007.
16. "Water Balance and Level Fluctuations of the Caspian Sea. Modeling and Prediction", edited by Dr. E. Nesterov, 2016.

Annex I.

THE TEHRAN CONVENTION THROUGH THE PARTICIPANTS' EYES AND EYEWITNESSES.

This section provides information on the participants in the development and implementation of the Tehran Convention at various stages of its elaboration and development. Some memories and testimonies are presented in the form of articles and essays, and a number of memories are presented in the form of interviews.

A. M. AMIRKHANOV. National Coordinator of CEP projects in 2000-2012, Ministry of Natural Resources and Ecology of the Russian Federation

“SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CASPIAN ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMME PROJECTS FOR THE TEHRAN CONVENTION AND ITS PROTOCOLS”.

Translated from Russian language

Since the early 1990s of the XX century, the Caspian Sea region has firmly entered the orbit of regional and international environmental cooperation. Being the national coordinator on the environmental problems of the Caspian Sea from 1998 to 2012, I would like to highlight some aspects of international environmental cooperation in the Caspian Sea region, which continue to be relevant at present. The Caspian Sea has long been actively used both for the exploitation of bioresources and the development of hydrocarbon deposits. Such potentially conflicting resource development is being carried out amid increasing anthropogenic pollution of Caspian waters and aggravation of environmental problems of the coastline associated with fluctuations in the level of the Caspian Sea.

Changes in the marine environment of the Caspian Sea are largely determined by the fact that most coastal countries are consistently implementing a strategy to expand the exploitation of Caspian oil and gas fields and their transport potential. At the same time, the unity of the Caspian ecosystem makes it necessary to consider any significant negative impact on the Caspian marine environment as transboundary. This all requires guarantees of environmental security of the Caspian Sea region and cooperation of all stakeholders of the Caspian littoral states in studying and solving environmental problems of the Caspian Sea.

Since 1998, the coordination of environmental cooperation activities in the region has been carried out by the National Coordinator for Environmental Problems of the Caspian Sea and the national coordinating body under the National Coordinator – the Center for International Projects (CIP), which provided information and analytical support to the work of the National Coordinator. The first meeting of the UNEP Working Group on the Impacts of Climate Change in the Caspian Sea Region, convened in Moscow in May 1994, with the participation of official representatives of the five Caspian littoral states, became the source of the formation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea – the Tehran Convention, which since 2003 has become the legal basis for environmental cooperation of the littoral countries.

In 1994-2000, support for the development of the Tehran Convention was provided during the implementation of the UNEP/Russia project “Integrated Environmental Management of the Volga-Caspian Region”. By this time, various forms of regional environmental and fishery cooperation were operating in the region:

- Cooperation of fishery agencies of the Caspian littoral states, which was carried out within the framework of the “Commission on Aquatic Biological Resources of the Caspian Sea”;
- Cooperation of hydrometeorological services of the regional states, which consolidates the activities of the Coordination Committee on Hydrometeorology and Pollution Monitoring of the Caspian Sea (CASPCOM).

By signing the Tehran Convention, the Parties created the necessary incentives for the acceptance of other important multilateral agreements, such as the agreement on the conservation and management of biological resources of the Caspian Sea and the agreement on cooperation between the Caspian littoral states in the field of hydrometeorology and monitoring of pollution in the Caspian Sea, and also created legal conditions for the tightening of environmental safety standards and the introduction of “zero discharge” technologies in economic activities in the Caspian Sea. Since 2000, the main international environmental cooperation between environmental ministries and agencies of the Caspian littoral states and leading

international organizations (UNEP, UNDP, World Bank, EU-TACIS, etc.) in the Caspian Sea region has been the “Caspian Environmental Programme” (CEP) – a system of international projects formed in the period 1994-1998 as a result of cooperation between all Caspian littoral states and a number of international organizations in the field of sustainable development and environmental management of the Caspian Sea.

In accordance with the scheme of CEP implementation approved by the Government of the Russian Federation, Russian activities within the framework of CEP projects were coordinated by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation through the National Coordinator on Environmental Problems of the Caspian Sea. The organizational basis for CEP implementation in the Russian Federation was the National Intersectoral Coordination Body (ICB), the functions performed by the CIP. National experts represented by relevant ministries and agencies¹ – Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of Russia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, Ministry of Transport of Russia, Ministry of Emergency Situations of Russia, Ministry of Economic Development of Russia, Ministry of Education and Science of Russia, Rosrybolovstvo of Russia, state administration bodies of the Caspian littoral subjects of the Russian Federation, as well as the Russian Academy of Sciences – participated in the CEP project activities.

During the implementation of CEP projects within the framework of the Caspian Regional Thematic Centers and ICE, the experts of the Caspian region countries have gained valuable experience of interaction, collected a significant amount of information on the environmental problems of the Caspian Sea, prepared recommendations and proposals aimed at improving the environmental situation in the region, such as Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis, Regional Strategic Action Plan and others. The Small Joint Grants Programme was implemented quite successfully. The Russian Party attributes great importance to the signing of the Tehran Convention in 2003, the fruit of many years of negotiations, reflecting the understanding and compromises reached and the difficult process of reaching an agreement on such an important issue affecting the national interests of the Caspian littoral states.

UNEP and personally Mr. Frits Schlingemann played a special role in the success of the Tehran Convention preparation process, whose constant support and attention ensured the successful preparation of the draft document and its agreement by the Caspian littoral states. The Tehran Convention's twenty-year stage has shown the importance of this legal instrument for solving environmental problems of the Caspian Sea; its framework nature is its peculiarity, allowing it to address all the problems of the Caspian Sea in its articles and to concretize them through thematic protocols. The outcomes of the complex international environmental projects in the Caspian Sea region contributed to the elaboration and drafting of the documents of the Tehran Convention and its Protocols and helped to identify and solve specific environmental problems of the region under the conditions of intensified exploitation of natural resources of the Caspian Sea.

It seems that further development of the Tehran Convention, with the support of international environmental projects, should be associated with the intensification of activities on specific thematic articles of the Convention and its protocols related to the solution of environmental problems of the Caspian Sea.

¹ Agency names are given as of the present time

— Please, tell us about the time you worked in connection with Tehran Convention and in what capacity.

— I have been involved in this process since the last century and officially held a permanent position since 2000. This position was called differently at different times. Currently, it is called NCLO (National Convention Liaison Officers), but it used to be called differently, for example, SAPIC (Strategy Action Plan Implementation Coordinator). There were other names as well, but I can't remember them all. Thus, within various projects, there were different titles for the personnel coordinating this process, and since 2000, I have officially held these positions.

— Can you please tell us something about the time the Convention was elaborated? Any discussions, debates?

— We have held numerous meetings over the years in the Caspian countries, working together to finalize the text of the document. It was the first time I realized how challenging such a process could be. Our meetings often extended beyond the planned 6 p.m. end time, sometimes running until 7, 8, or even 9 p.m. Despite our fatigue, we persisted without strict time limits, often making progress on only a few phrases or points by the end of the day.

The process was arduous due to the geopolitical significance of the Caspian Sea. Its strategic importance added layers of complexity to the negotiations. However, I don't believe we spent more time on this process than on developing other modern documents. For instance, protocols to the Tehran Convention might seem straightforward but require considerable time and effort.

We meticulously discussed every aspect of the Convention. Each delegation sometimes proposed different versions of a single word, hindering consensus and prolonging discussions into the night. Emotions often ran high, with official representatives showing visible signs of stress and even tears.

Despite heated debates and confrontations over individual proposals, once the meetings ended, the same people who had been fiercely arguing would leave the hall and interact as if there had been no conflicts. We did our work, and once it was done, nothing stopped us from remaining friends. This camaraderie created what we called the "Caspian family," a bond that developed over decades of working together. Nowadays, people often say there was a "family" back then, but now there isn't. Times have changed, with children playing with gadgets instead of outside and communicating online. The pace and intensity of modern life make it difficult to maintain the same relationships as in 2000, 2005, or 2010.

Nevertheless, everyone involved in this process remains very friendly and treats each other well. In the past, our work was more dynamic, with at least ten events in different countries every year. Frequent meetings provided more opportunities for discussion and conversation. It's said that you cannot see a friend for ten years and still pick up right where you left off. However, maintaining such bonds has become more challenging.

— What was the biggest challenge while working/negotiating things? How did you overcome them?

— Here, the answer is clear: these difficulties have been overcome. As a result, we now have a Convention—a legal document between five countries that regulates our relations in a specific area.

— Can you say that this experience influenced your life in a way? If yes, how?

— Within the framework of the Caspian process, some coordinating persons from various countries either worked with their respective Ministries or devoted themselves entirely to this task. My area of responsibility was broader, encompassing more than just this process. Therefore, I cannot say that I devoted all 24 hours a day solely to it. However, everything that transpired over these 25 years was directly my responsibility and work as a coordinator. I tried, as much as possible, to influence the situation not only as an NCLO but also within my role in the Ministry, coordinating all related processes.

Years of experience in coordinating documents have taught me flexibility and the ability to discuss issues even with those who disagreed with me. Through joint efforts, we were able to reach a common understanding. This experience was invaluable to me, and I endeavored to apply it in practice. Additionally, the environmental diplomacy courses at the University of Geneva, which I was fortunate to attend, greatly helped me. They enhanced my ability to understand and resolve issues related to international agreements and cooperation.

Another crucial component that I must mention is our team. I would like to especially acknowledge Bakhtiyar Muradov, the regional coordinator of the first Caspian project, who significantly impacted the process and invested considerable effort. I also have fond memories of working with Elena Kvitsinskaya from the secretariat. We were truly a family. Thanks to the convention, I have made friends in all the Caspian countries, and beyond.

I must also give special recognition to Frits Schlingemann. When discussing the Convention development process, his contribution is paramount. He shouldered immense responsibility and successfully guided the completion of this process. Frits Schlingemann was highly emotional, and I always believed he could find a way out of even the most desperate situations. When it seemed there was no solution, he had the ability to redirect the discussion and find the right words to achieve a result. Without such people, there would be no Convention. Imagine five countries participating in the discussion — a lot depending on the moderator, the person who manages this process. Although he was not a party to the discussion but merely facilitated it, his role was key. Now, Mahir Aliyev is fulfilling these duties with great success.

We encountered all kinds of people in our work. Sometimes, delegation members would insist on their point of view for hours, making the agreement seem impossible. It was a task involving very different people, with diverse characters, worldviews, and approaches to discussion. Yet, despite their differences, they all managed to achieve a common goal, resulting in the document we have today.

— In your view, what is the greatest development through these years? The biggest change between TC then and TC now?

— Indeed, people who have been involved in the process for a long time often reminisce that things were better before, but this isn't entirely true. I agree with you that we have every opportunity to make the future as successful as the past. The capabilities of our countries are expanding, and if some political issues are resolved, we will be able to continue progressing at an equally high speed, if not faster. It is important to remain optimistic and self-confident to overcome any difficulties we may encounter on the way to achieving our goals.

— Maybe you have a wish for Tehran Convention on 20 years of its signing? What would you like to see it in future?

Please tell us what you wish to see in the next ten years in the context of the Tehran Convention and environmental protection in the Caspian Sea.

— I would like to see this document not just as a symbol but as a functional tool for cooperation between countries in the field of ecology. Our goal is to ensure that politics interferes less with environmental issues, although it is not entirely possible to exclude it. I hope to create an

environment where people can simply do their jobs: environmentalists conduct observations, analyzing data, discussing, and finding the best solutions. We should learn from each other and continuously improve in our work.

Currently, our task is to coordinate the texts of the protocols, oversee their adoption, ratification, and implementation. I want to believe that this is just the beginning and only a small part of what we have to do. Now is the time to start working with these documents, building trust in each other, and being more open to cooperation.

— Have you ever been to the Caspian Sea? What did you think when you saw it for the first time?

— Of course, I live on the shores of the Caspian Sea! I don't remember the first time I saw it, probably in early childhood. I am almost certain that for the countries along its shores, the sea is not just a body of water, but a part of everyday life. In Baku, the sea is an integral part of the city's image; it is always in front of our eyes, inspiring us with its beauty.

My daughter now lives far away, but every time she comes home, she hurries to visit the sea. She misses it and loves taking long walks along the seashore. I think she is far from alone in this. This is perhaps the best example of how the sea becomes not just a natural phenomenon but part of the very essence of life. Even a short walk down the boulevard is important to her. The sea remains in our consciousness as something that subconsciously motivates us to live. We might forget this in the daily hustle and bustle, but these feelings always remain with us.

Therefore, I truly hope that our love for the sea drives us to take action to protect and preserve it, so future generations can enjoy its beauty as much as we do.

T.P. BUTYLINA. Head of the National Convention Liaison Office,
Center for International Projects, Moscow

**“PARTICIPATION OF THE CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS
IN THE ACTIVITIES ON THE FORMATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF
THE TEHRAN CONVENTION”.**

Translated from Russian language

The Caspian Sea's ecological integrity determines that any impact on its marine environment, wherever it occurs, becomes, in principle, transboundary, and the Tehran Convention allows “customizing” this legal instrument to address various Caspian Sea problems related to the protection of the Caspian marine environment. Since 1994, international environmental cooperation in the Caspian Sea region has been actively developing and has become a priority for the Ministry of Natural Resources of Russia². The Center for International Projects (CIP), established in 1981 as a mechanism to ensure effective implementation of international environmental projects through UNEP and other international organizations, was entrusted with the organization of preparation and holding in Moscow, in May 1994, on the initiative of UNEP, within the framework of its Regional Seas Programme, the First Meeting of the International Working Group on the Impacts of Climate Change in the Caspian Sea Region, which was the origin of the formation of a legal environmental mechanism in the Caspian Sea region. In 1995, by order of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of Russia, the CIP was assigned the functions of the National Coordinating Body on Environmental Problems of the Caspian Sea under the National Coordinator on Environmental Problems of the Caspian Sea – A. M. Amirkhanov. Since

² Agency names are given as of the present time

1995, within the framework of this activity, the CIP has been implementing a number of international projects on cooperation between Russia and UNEP, including the project on improvement of aquatic ecosystems management in the Caspian Sea region.

In the framework of the UNEP/Russia project “Integrated Environmental Management of the Volga-Caspian Region”, in 1997-2000 two meetings of governmental experts of the Caspian countries were held by the CIP, where the structure, principal features, and content of thematic articles of the future Tehran Convention were formed, as well as recommendations on improvement of integrated environmental management, including environmental monitoring, in the Caspian Sea region were developed. In 1995-1998, the CIP prepared with the participation of Russian experts a series of national reports on environmental problems of the region, such as “Environmental Problems of the Caspian Sea Region of the Russian Federation” and “Impact of Industrial Pollution on the Environment of the Caspian Sea Region”.

The Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation commissioned the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation in 1998 to participate in the implementation of a large-scale programme of the Caspian littoral states – “Caspian Environmental Programme” (CEP) – a system of international environmental projects of UNEP, UNDP, GEF, EU-TACIS, which supported the development and the beginning of the Tehran Convention execution. The organizational basis of CEP activity in accordance with the decisions of the CEP Interim Steering Committee Meeting (Ramsar, 1998, Islamic Republic of Iran) was the activity of National CEP Coordinators, National Intersectoral Coordinating Bodies for CEP implementation and Caspian Regional Thematic Centers (CRTC) in the Caspian littoral states, two in each Caspian country.

The CIP within the CEP from 1998 to 2012 carried out the functions of the Russian National Intersectoral Coordination Body under the CEP National Coordinator A.M. Amirkhanov, as well as the functions under the auspices of UNEP of the regional Legal, Regulatory and Economic Mechanisms CRTC (LREM CRTC). As a national cross-sectoral coordinating body, the CIP worked with all national experts involved in CEP implementation, as well as with the CEP Coordination Office, and liaised with the nine regional CRTCs in the Caspian littoral states. Small contracts such as the “Study and Review to Determine the Flow of Main Pollutants from the Volga Cascade” (2005) to improve water quality in the Caspian Sea and develop relevant recommendations for the CEP Strategic Action Plan, which later formed the basis for the Strategic Action Plan of the Tehran Convention, etc. were implemented through the CIP. As a CRTC of the CPM REM, the CIP coordinated the activities of relevant experts of the Caspian littoral states participating in the activities of this CRTC. National reports of the Caspian littoral states on environmental protection and international legislation related to the Caspian Sea region, as well as the regional report “Legal and organizational measures for the protection and use of natural objects of the Caspian Sea ecosystem in the Caspian littoral states” prepared by UNEP international expert I. Krasnova on the basis of the national reports of the Caspian littoral states on environmental protection were discussed at the meetings of experts of the Caspian littoral states under the auspices of UNEP within the framework of the CRTC REM activity. With the participation of Russian experts within the framework of the CRTC REMP, reviews “Economic Mechanisms for Solving Environmental Problems of the Caspian Sea”, “Legal and Economic Mechanisms for Ensuring Environmental Safety of Offshore Oil Production. World and Regional Experience” and others. All these materials were used in the CEP fulfillment and subsequently in the Tehran Convention activities. The CIP has been acting as the National Tehran Convention Liaison Office (NCLO) since 2008 and provides information, analytical, and organizational support for the activities of the Ministry of Natural Resources of Russia in the implementation of the Tehran Convention and its Protocols. The CIP in the context of providing assistance in the fulfillment of the Tehran Convention communicates with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, the Ministry of Transport of Russia, Roshydromet, Rosprirodnadzor, as well as with the environmental executive authorities of the Caspian littoral regions of the Russian Federation.

The thirty-year activity of the CIP in the field of international environmental cooperation in the Caspian Sea region, including the development and implementation of the Tehran Convention, has been the main focus of the CIP. Many CIP staff and Russian experts from various organizations with whom the CIP has been cooperating for a long time have participated and contributed (an incomplete list of participants in this activity is presented in the annex). For all of us, the Tehran Convention is evidence of the awareness of the commonality of environmental problems of the Caspian Sea and the need for interstate cooperation to resolve them and fulfill the main objective of the Convention – “protection of the marine environment of the Caspian Sea from pollution, including protection, conservation, restoration, sustainable and rational use of its biological resources”.

BAKHTIYAR MURADOV, expert, Azerbaijan

Translated from Russian language

— Can you please tell us something about the time the Convention was elaborated? Any discussions, debates?

— Our work on the Caspian Environmental Programme began in 1995. The first meeting took place that fall in Geneva, where representatives from the Caspian littoral countries, along with international partners like UNEP, gathered. The situation was laid out clearly: the Caspian Sea was in a critical state, with increasing problems related to pollution and declining biological resources. International experts proposed that we join forces and work together. After the meeting, we returned to our respective countries, reported back to our Ministries of Ecology and Natural Resources, and started forming working groups. Each country assembled a team, and I was appointed as Azerbaijan’s national coordinator.

Over the next year or two, the region was visited by missions from the World Bank, the United Nations, and various experts. Gradually, the countries “got used” to working together, though the post-Soviet landscape was still challenging. The collapse of the USSR had created newly independent states, and there was some mistrust. Although many specialists had previously worked together during the Soviet era, we now represent different nations with evolving relationships.

Despite these complexities, the level of expertise was high, and there was a clear understanding that action was needed to address the Caspian Sea’s problems. International partners funded all meetings, seminars, and trips. The second meeting, in 1996 in Geneva, focused on solidifying the programme’s start. Different countries had varied perspectives — some viewed it as a project, others as a full-fledged programme — but all agreed on the necessity of the work.

The countries showed great interest, as the Caspian Sea is a unique body of water, rich in fish and other natural resources. During the Soviet era, the Caspian Sea received significant attention, but after the USSR’s dissolution, new challenges arose regarding its status as either a sea or a lake, affecting territorial divisions. Moreover, there were no joint documents to regulate the situation. To address these problems, we needed not only the will of the countries but also fundamental documents, like a convention or strategic action plan, to outline steps for the sea’s restoration.

During this time, numerous meetings and expert visits were held to develop plans and set goals. The project was extensive, involving 150-200 scientists at various stages, each contributing in their areas of expertise. All decisions were made collectively, based on consensus. If a country disagreed with a certain point, we would reconvene to negotiate and adjust the document until it satisfied all participants.

Another key meeting took place in May 1997 in Istanbul, where it was finally decided to officially launch the programme. There were disagreements — some countries supported the initiative, while others expressed doubts. However, thanks to the efforts of international partners like the World Bank, the United Nations, and the EU-TACIS program, consensus was reached. After coordinating with all governments, a joint decision was made: the program would move forward.

This meeting concluded, and the next took place at the end of 1997 in Almaty. By then, everyone had a prepared list of actions for the near future. We discussed the tasks that needed to be completed before the first steering committee meeting, which was scheduled to take place in Iran. The countries committed to preparing projects on various topics: water resources, biodiversity, sea-level fluctuations, and desertification. Each country had three to four months to develop these projects, with the UN providing modest funding for their implementation. The next meeting was set for Tehran.

In late March and early April, all countries gathered in Tehran for a meeting on transdiagnostic analysis, with experts invited to discuss strategic directions. We worked intensively for two to three days to draft an action plan and align our efforts. By this point, the countries realized the Tehran meeting was a crucial step towards signing agreements and formally launching the project or program. The final decision was made at a subsequent meeting in Ramsar, Iran. On April 1-2, 1998, the project was officially launched under the EU-TACIS program. International experts from the UK, Denmark, and Germany, selected through Lamar International, also participated.

At the Ramsar meeting, the creation of the Caspian Environmental Programme was formalized, with Baku chosen as the coordination center. This decision was not coincidental: Baku, the largest city on the Caspian Sea and Azerbaijan's capital, had been the center of significant activity, including BP's involvement in developing new offshore fields. BP offered financial support to the program, providing \$100,000 for equipment, office renovations, and modernizing a research vessel for expeditions. Kazakhstan supported Baku as the center, Russia favored Iran, and Turkmenistan abstained from voting. After discussions and debates, Baku was chosen as the site for the coordination office.

In addition, thematic centers were established in each Caspian littoral country. Azerbaijan set up a database for the entire Caspian Sea zone and a pollution control center. Iran developed centers for coastal zone management and emergency response. Kazakhstan established centers for biodiversity conservation and sea-level fluctuation studies. Russia created a legal affairs center in Moscow and a fisheries management center in Astrakhan. Turkmenistan focused on centers for combating desertification and public health.

With all necessary documents signed and decisions made, after the Ramsar meeting, experts from the EU-TACIS programme arrived in Baku. The Azerbaijani government provided us with a wonderful office in the Government House — spacious, bright, and well-equipped. From this point in April 1998, we embarked on the active development of the Caspian Environmental Programme.

— What was the biggest challenge while working/negotiating things? How did you overcome them?

— I can honestly say it was very challenging. There were constant discussions, with each country having its own view of the situation. As I mentioned earlier, after the collapse of the USSR, relations between countries weren't at their best. But over the course of two or three years, we became a cohesive team. When we met, it felt like reuniting with family — there was no hostility. We would just sit down together and work, work, and work.

The development of the Convention took five years, beginning in 1998. The Legal Affairs Center was set up in Moscow, where specialists from each country, including legal experts, gathered to work on the document. A key figure in this process was Mr. Frits Schlingemann,

who deserves special mention. From the very first meeting in Geneva, he was fully immersed in our work. Drafting the Convention was a long and painstaking process — every word and every phrase was carefully discussed and agreed upon. It was extremely difficult because all five countries had different laws and approaches, but we had to create a unified document.

The biggest challenge in the Convention negotiations was finding a common ground between the different legal frameworks of the participating countries. What might not be forbidden in one country could be unacceptable in another. But despite these challenges, we managed to overcome everything. The most significant achievement was the wealth of experience we gained from working together, which began in 1995 and officially continued from 1998 to 2007. The work was continuous — year after year, month after month, day after day.

— Can you say that this experience influenced your life in a way? If yes, how?

— What did this project give me? It became my life's work. I formed many friendships and partnerships across these countries. Our team, both experts and country representatives, became a tight-knit group. I remember when David Aubrey, a highly competent and hardworking man from the USA, led the project. In 2000, Tim Turner, an Englishman, joined us in Baku and made significant contributions as well. Stuart Gunn from the EU-TACIS programme also worked in Baku for four years. We had other experts from Canada, Germany, Denmark, and the Netherlands. But Frits Schlingemann stood out, having been with us since day one and still overseeing the project today.

After the Caspian Programme, I managed the project on navigation safety and pollution prevention in the Black and Caspian Seas from 2009 to 2014. This was another major project supported by the European Union, involving all the Caspian countries except Iran. We did extensive work, creating numerous documents, and achieved significant results.

For me, this project has been a true passion. My team of specialists from various countries and I worked together for 10-15 years, and this effort left a deep mark on my career. I even left the civil service and set aside my academic work because I saw the immense potential and necessity of what we were doing for the Caspian region. During the Soviet era, the Caspian Sea began to degrade, and we aimed to halt, restore, and protect it. The process was complex — every word and even every comma in the documents were debated at the highest level, and decisions were only made after lengthy consultations with the ministries of each country.

— In your view, what is the greatest development through these years? The biggest change between TC then and TC now?

— The Convention is just one of the many documents developed within the programme. For instance, we created documents addressing desertification and sea level fluctuations. In 2000-2001, we conducted an expedition across the Caspian Sea to study pollution. Ten years had passed since the fall of the USSR, and no detailed pollution studies had been carried out during that time. Our vessel, carrying experts, traveled the entire Caspian Sea, and the results showed that, while the sea had partially self-cleaned, with several “hot spots” remained.

In addition to the Convention, we developed a transdiagnostic analysis that identified key issues needing attention, along with a Strategic Action Plan (SAP). Each country proposed measures that could be implemented individually or collaboratively with other states. If you look at that document today, you'll see that many of its goals have already been achieved: fish factories have been built, research in coastal areas has been conducted, and regular monitoring and pollution control are in place.

It's especially noteworthy that oil production in the Caspian region has significantly increased in recent years, which could have negatively impacted the sea. However, thanks to the countries' approaches and the oversight by oil companies, the situation has improved, and the Caspian Sea is no longer as polluted as it was during Soviet times.

— What is your brightest memory from your work in connection with the Tehran Convention?

There were many moments when we thought the work was nearing completion, only to have new issues arise, requiring revisions and coordination. To be honest, when the signing of the Convention was scheduled for 2003 in Tehran, many of us doubted it would actually happen. But all five countries gave their consent. The signing was attended by high-ranking officials — Ministers of Ecology and Natural Resources and national coordinators. But there was an unexpected twist: Turkmenistan wasn't able to get its government's approval in time and didn't sign the document on the designated day. It wasn't until the following day, after we had already left, that we received a message from Tehran saying the Turkmen representative had obtained the approval and signed the Convention. That's how we completed this tremendous task.

— Maybe you have a wish for Tehran Convention on 20 years of its signing? What would you like to see it in future?

— The Caspian Sea is unique in its ecosystem and geopolitical significance. I've been participating in expeditions since 1975, back when scientific expeditions were organized in Soviet Azerbaijan. There are long-standing sections in the Caspian Sea — specific points where the water is regularly studied for pollution, oxygen content, and other parameters. This data allows us to track changes in the sea's ecosystem and build a dynamic picture of its condition. But after the USSR collapsed, these studies nearly ceased for a decade, leading to a loss of continuity in monitoring. Restoring this research became one of the region's top priorities.

Unfortunately, there has been a cooling in relations around the Caspian programme, which has significantly slowed progress. When we were actively meeting and collaborating, we worked as a unified team. Representatives from all five countries, including Foreign Ministries officials, were closely involved. Diplomats helped navigate the legal aspects, ensuring the programme's documents were coherent and consistent.

In 2007, discussions began in Baku about establishing a Secretariat for the Convention. However, disagreements quickly emerged. Azerbaijan and Iran both wanted to host it, followed by Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan expressing interest as well. No consensus has been reached, and for the past 17 years, the countries have been unable to come to a decision. This, of course, has slowed progress and hindered the active work of the team. I firmly believe the Secretariat should be based in the Caspian region, not in Geneva. Local experts, who are genuinely invested in the success of this project, should be at the forefront.

When we first started, many doubted we would achieve anything. But after a year or two, through the dedication of our specialists and the teamwork we built, it became clear we were on the right path. The signing of the Tehran Convention was the first major milestone of our joint efforts. It marked a huge step forward, following a series of smaller reports on issues like desertification and fisheries. But it was the Convention, signed by all five countries, that became the most important achievement and a testament to the power of cooperation.

B. N. MOROZOV. Participant in the development and implementation of the Tehran Convention in 1995-2010, Center for International Projects, Moscow

“THE TEHRAN CONVENTION AND THE PROBLEMS OF CASPIAN SEA LEVEL FLUCTUATIONS AND REGIONAL BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION”.

Translated from Russian language

The development of the Tehran Convention began in 1998 within the UNEP/Russia project on integrated environmental management of the Caspian region and continued since 2000, also under UNEP support of the international project “Caspian Environmental Programme” (CEP), in accordance with the recommendation of the First Meeting of national experts of the five Caspian littoral states on the consequences of climate change for the Caspian Sea region, organized by UNEP in Moscow in May 1994 and supported by the “UN Caspian Mission”.

That is, during the period of the “catastrophic” rise in the level of the Caspian Sea, which replaced the period of the actual anomalous (about 3.5 m) drop in its level in 1880-1977 [with the amplitude of “usual” inter-seasonal (intra-annual) fluctuations of about 0.3-0.4 m], amidst the increased interest in ensuring environmental safety of the implementation of projects for the offshore development of hydrocarbon resources. The problem of significant multi-year fluctuations of the water surface level, which are so urgent and typical for the Caspian Sea, recorded paleogeographically and archaeologically, as well as in historical and cartographic sources, in the aspect of their impact on the state of the marine and, especially, coastal environment, was among the priorities of the Convention developers and the system of its thematic protocols. The problem of biodiversity conservation is one of the most important competencies of the Tehran Convention. Two regional thematic centers directly related to this issue were established in the course of the “Caspian Environment Programme” (CEP), which supported the development of the Tehran Convention through the fulfillment of international projects: on Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) and on (adaptation to) Sea Level Fluctuations.

The CEP experts prepared a series of thematic national reports and regional reviews on the most important aspects of environmental protection activities as a modern scientific and informational reference base for the Convention under development. In Russia, national experts from leading scientific organizations of the Caspian littoral regions of the Federation, Moscow, and St. Petersburg were involved in the preparation of such documents at the request of the relevant structures. To a certain extent, the source of basic comprehensive knowledge about the state of the Caspian marine and coastal environment was studies on the justification of sustainable exploitation of bioresources, as well as those related to “rescue” projects from “catastrophic” shoaling and then encroachment of Caspian waters. These materials were substantially developed by environmental monitoring data, as well as EIAs of projects to develop the region’s resource potential by international and national, such as Russia’s LUKOIL, companies.

The 2000 National Report “State and Conservation of Biological and Landscape Diversity of the Caspian Sea Region”, prepared by Y. G. Puzachenko and published in 2002 (based on the materials of Russian CEP experts with the addition of data from applied hydrobiological studies of the Nizhnekamsk and Kuibyshev reservoirs, provided by M. I. Karpyuk)³ an analysis of paleogeographic and historical/instrumental data on the Caspian Sea level fluctuations for different time intervals was presented. A strict regularity was revealed, typical for such processes: the amplitude of fluctuations is an unambiguous function of the observation time interval. The clear stability of these relations allows us to consider this phenomenon as a normal natural phenomenon. It turned out that when considering any 100 years, the amplitude of the Caspian Sea oscillation does not exceed, taking into account the error, three meters.

³ Current state and factors determining the biological and landscape diversity of the Volga-Caspian region of Russia / Abdurakhmanov G.M., Karpyuk M.I., Morozov B.N., Puzachenko Y.G.. – Moscow: Nauka, 2002. – 416 p + 33 il.

It turned out that when considering any 100 years, the amplitude of the Caspian Sea oscillation does not exceed, with account of error, three meters. It should be noted that just for a century of instrumental observations by 1979, the level of the Caspian Sea changed by 3.4 meters. Usually, such an “anomalous” value of the magnitude and rate of level drop is explained by anthropogenic withdrawal of a significant part of the Volga runoff during the filling of the Volga-Kama cascade of reservoirs. Nevertheless, this issue requires additional clarification with the involvement of recent data on Caspian Sea level fluctuations.

The report notes that since the geological history of the Caspian lowland demonstrates exceptionally high multi-frequency landscape dynamics, and the area of the Caspian Sea water area has changed several times, resulting in huge transformations of its landscapes and ecosystems, they can be considered adapted to periodically deep changes without fatal loss of biological and landscape diversity.

The level fluctuations significantly determine the nature and the most important features of biological and landscape diversity of at least the coastal zone of the Caspian Sea. And if the level of the World Ocean has been changing for the last 2000 years in the amplitude of about 1.4 m, the level of the Caspian Sea has been fluctuating within 6 m, accompanied by a significant instability of salinity. So, the stability of the “lake environment” is significantly lower than the oceanic one. If we consider the incommensurably small size of the Caspian Sea relative to the Ocean, it becomes obvious how unstable the Caspian environment is and what a high level of ecological plasticity the species surviving within its water area or associated with it as a habitat should possess.

Level changes lead to major transformations of the coastal zone, changes in the conditions for numerous species of nesting birds, feeding of many fish species, salinity, groundwater levels in adjacent areas, etc. The complex structure of terraces shows the historical “normality” of these reversible transformations. And the recurrence and periodicity of these transformations allow us to consider the Caspian biota to be quite adapted to them. Apparently, the (biological and landscape) diversity itself does not suffer from all these natural fluctuations and only its structure changes.

At the same time, landscapes of coastal areas can both shift following the coastline and be replaced through a series of successional restructurings, including reverse ones during transgressions to regressions and vice versa. This should be recognized when planning any, but especially conservation activities in the dynamic spaces of coastal ecotones of a unique lake-sea. It should be noted that just for 95 years of instrumental observations in 1882-1977 the level of the Caspian Sea has changed by 3.4 meters. Usually, such an “anomalous” value of the level drop is explained by anthropogenic withdrawal of a significant part of the Volga runoff during the filling of the Volga-Kama cascade of reservoirs. Nevertheless, this issue requires additional clarification with the attraction of recent data on Caspian Sea level fluctuations.

Analyzing the duration of the periods of change in the sign of annual average (according to more than half a century of instrumental observations) level change allows us to consider them as a simple flow of events. That is, with respect to predicting the start time of the next short-term oscillation of the level, we can only report that the probability of this event increases as the interval of the existing sign of such a change increases. A similar analysis of trends of already long-term changes in the Caspian Sea level based on paleogeographic data does not lead to such conclusions. In this respect, it is notable that the 18-year period of level rise from 1978 to 1995 falls within a pair of 10-year solar activity cycles (1977-1986 and 1987-1996), and the “composite” 45-year (8 + 37) period of non-monotonic fall of 1933-1940-1977 falls within the 11-year (1934-1944), two 10-year (1945-1954 and 1955-1964), and 12-year (1965-1976) Schwabe-Wolf cycles.

The current downward phase of level change coincided with a pair of past 11-year cycles (1997-2007 and 2008-2018) and, if such a coincidence is not entirely accidental [A number of instrumental observations of the level made before 1933 does not allow to clearly identify similar

periods of its unidirectional changes. And very conditionally allocated 51-year period of weak non-monotonic lowering of the level 1882-1932 only approximately coincides with the sequence of 11-year (1879-89) two 12-year (1890-1901), (1902-13), and two 10-year (1914-1923) and (1924-1933) cycles], then the current, in the middle of the cycle, drop of the Caspian Sea level to about -29 m BSW will not become the limit, approaching, however, to the mark (about -30 m) of the natural threshold of runoff into the evaporator of the Kara-Bogaz-Gol Bay.

The above considerations and obtained indicative estimates of the values of the limiting century-long range of level fluctuations after appropriate clarifications will be able to guide the work of the Protocol on the Conservation of Biological Diversity of the Tehran Convention (Ashgabat Protocol) regarding the establishment of the limits of coastal protected areas and special protected areas and zones for advance planning of appropriate measures of natural environment management of different degrees of advance. For Russia, the provisions of the Ashgabat Protocol of the Tehran Convention, in turn, make it possible to enhance the requirements of national legislation in the sphere of coastal landscape-ecological systems (zones) protection by recognizing the specific features of the Russian Caspian Sea, since, according to Article 5 (d), the Parties “shall protect, preserve and restore areas that are unique, most vulnerable or of importance for the region by applying environmentally friendly and sustainable methods, primarily through the establishment of protected areas”.

The establishment of such “protected areas”, considering the specific landscape dynamics of coastal spaces, can significantly close legal gaps in the establishment of water protection zones and delineation of protected areas in sites with uncertain and variable (due to level oscillations) shorelines (including the problems of the state inventory of such specific sites) for the Caspian littoral subjects of the Federation. My participation in the development of the Tehran Convention and within the framework of the CEP projects as a Russian expert in the field of biodiversity conservation was closely connected with a number of national and international experts, such as Professor Y.G. Puzachenko of Moscow State University. It is important to emphasize Y.G. Puzachenko's deep interest in solving environmental problems of the Caspian Sea, his commitment to summarizing the vast materials on biodiversity and application of new methods of remote sensing data processing in relation to the assigned tasks.

Among the international experts of CEP, it is necessary to note a significant contribution to the study of the current (by the beginning of the XXI century) state of bioresource potential of the Caspian marine ecosystem, a great enthusiast of fisheries science, an experienced FAO staff member, Canadian Arkadiusz Labon as the head of the Astrakhan Caspian Regional Thematic Center of CEP on aquatic bioresources. He was exceptionally motivated, active, educated, contactable, positive and somewhat naive optimist in his work. Despite numerous organizational, political and other difficulties and risks, it was A. Labon who managed to conduct the first full-fledged bioresource survey in most of the Caspian Sea area after a significant break (after the collapse of the USSR) under the CEP flag.

JUMAMURAD SAPARMURADOV, Deputy Minister of Nature
Protection of Turkmenistan in 2007-2014

Translated from Russian language

— Please, tell us about the time you worked in connection with Tehran Convention and in what capacity.

— My work involved preparing special materials regarding the biodiversity of the Turkmen part of the Caspian Sea for participants involved in discussions on the text of the Convention from Turkmenistan's Party. My active involvement in working with the Tehran Convention

began in 2007 when I was appointed as the Deputy Minister of Nature Protection of Turkmenistan and became responsible for the implementation of this Convention.

— Can you please tell us something about the time the Convention was elaborated? Any discussions, debates?

What was the biggest challenge while working/negotiating things? How did you overcome them?

— The time of developing the Convention was indeed challenging, as recounted by participants involved in the process. The text of the Convention itself undoubtedly presented difficulties. Representatives from various countries participated, and reaching a consensus was a daunting task. The initial period was particularly challenging when the legal status of the Caspian Sea was not clearly defined, and approaches to the use of its biological resources varied. Nevertheless, even at that time, all five countries were involved in activities aimed at conserving the biological resources of the Caspian Sea. The initial stage was the most complex and required special attention and efforts to achieve consensus.

— Can you say that this experience influenced your life in a way? If yes, how?

— The experience gained during the development and implementation of the Tehran Convention has been invaluable for participating in multilateral processes, especially in discussions on the protocols to this Convention. I actively participated in the development of these protocols, and currently, four of them have been adopted. It is important to note that Turkmenistan has ratified all four protocols, and the second one, the Moscow Protocol, recently entered into force. This is a collective victory for all participants, and I am pleased to congratulate us all on this achievement. We hope that these efforts will contribute to the preservation of the unique ecological system of the Caspian Sea.

— In your view, what is the greatest development through these years? The biggest change between TC then and TC now?

— I believe that the main achievement over the years is that the Tehran Convention has inspired countries to preserve the marine ecosystem at national, regional, and international levels. During the preparation of the Convention itself and the development of the protocols, the Parties began to find common ground on issues related to the protection of the Caspian Sea's nature.

— What is your brightest memory from your work in connection with the Tehran Convention?

— The participants involved in the development of the Tehran Convention demonstrated incredible patience. They often had to go beyond the agenda when discussing various issues, and I imagine how challenging that must have been. These qualities were particularly evident during official meetings of different levels and discussions on the protocols being developed.

— Describe Tehran Convention in one word. What is it for you?

— The Tehran Convention has led to significant mutual understanding, agreement, and the pooling of efforts among all five countries. Without this, it would have been very difficult to develop and adopt the convention.

— Maybe you have a wish for Tehran Convention on 20 years of its signing? What would you like to see it in future?

— I would really like to see the issue of the Convention Secretariat's placement resolved as soon as possible. I never anticipated that this issue would become the main obstacle to

implementing the Convention itself. I hope that in the near future, the Caspian region countries will agree on the location, and the Secretariat will be able to function fully. I support the idea of rotating the Secretariat's leadership among the countries, as decided at the Fifth Session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention in 2014. There is still much work ahead, but I believe that we will be able to achieve full consensus regarding the operation and location of the Secretariat.

— Please tell us what you wish to see in the next ten years in the context of the Tehran Convention and environmental protection in the Caspian Sea.

— I would like countries to start acting together as soon as possible. Turkmenistan's initiative to launch the Phase II of the Caspian Environmental Programme is an important step in this direction. Considering serious issues such as climate change, the lowering of the Caspian Sea level, and threats to biological resources, including the Caspian seal and fish, such a programme will contribute to the development of the Tehran Convention and better preservation of the marine environment. This initiative, proposed by the President of Turkmenistan at the First Caspian Economic Forum in 2019, complements the efforts to implement the Convention and protocols rather than duplicating them. The development of the fifth protocol is underway, and despite the challenges, I look to the future with optimism because there is no alternative.

— Have you ever been to the Caspian Sea? What did you think when you saw it for the first time?

— It was an incredible experience for someone born in the desert to find themselves at a real sea. After graduating from university, we went to a classmate's wedding, and we had to take a boat from Turkmenbashi, then known as Krasnovodsk, to the island of Gyzyl-Suv, which translates to «red water.» Along the way, I became a little scared because it was a vast expanse of water for me. However, over time, I grew to love this sea, visiting the coast and islands, especially Ogurchinsky Island, which is now part of the Hazar Nature Reserve. The Caspian Sea, with its unique biodiversity and environment, deserves special attention and approach. I would like to emphasize once again how important it is for scientists and environmental specialists to come to an agreement as soon as possible and turn our Caspian Sea into a sea of harmony and peace. Recently, the decrease in the level of the Caspian Sea has been concerning, but we hope that this is only a temporary phenomenon.

N.B. TRETYAKOVA. National Coordinator of the Tehran Convention,
Ministry of Natural Resources and Ecology of the Russian
Federation, Moscow

**“THE FIFTEENTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE «CASPIAN SEA DAY»
WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE TEHRAN CONVENTION IN
RUSSIA: 2008-2023”.**

Translated from Russian language

The Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea is a vital document safeguarding our unique natural heritage. This region demands special attention and coordinated efforts among nations.

The Caspian Sea is more than just a body of water dividing our countries; it is the cradle of remarkable biodiversity and a symbol of shared responsibility. The Framework Convention, also known as the Tehran Convention, serves as a guiding beacon for the preservation of this invaluable ecosystem.

Since the Convention's adoption, many of us have worked side by side to protect the sea from human-caused threats. I take pride in having actively participated in this effort since 2002 and continuing to this day, providing professional input on various aspects of the Convention. My extensive experience and deep understanding of the field have enabled me to bring new momentum to its implementation, and I truly believe that our team is making the Caspian Sea cleaner, safer, and richer.

Through close collaboration with my colleagues — many of whom have contributed to this publication — we have achieved significant progress. For me, this work is not just a job; it's a calling. It's more than fulfilling formal obligations — it's about preserving the unique natural environment for future generations. The Caspian Sea isn't just a resource; it's part of our history, culture, and identity. We are not only saving it for ourselves but for our children and grandchildren.

I would like to take a moment to share my thoughts on an important event — the “Caspian Sea Day”. As the national coordinator for the Tehran Convention, I believe this forum is one of the most engaging and informative events under the Convention.

Celebrated annually on August 12, the **“Caspian Sea Day”** marks the anniversary of the Tehran Convention's entry into force, an initiative first proposed by the Iranian delegation. In Russia, this day has been observed since 2008, playing a crucial role in fostering cooperation among all parties involved in addressing the environmental challenges of the Caspian region.

At the roundtable discussions of the Caspian Sea Day forum, experts from scientific and environmental organizations — including the Volga-Caspian Branch of VNIRO, Rosrybolovstvo, the Caspian Marine Research Center, and others — joined forces with representatives from regional governments and natural resource ministries to address pressing issues.

The primary topics included:

- Biodiversity conservation in light of oil and gas development in the North Caspian Sea, in alignment with the Tehran Convention and its Protocols;
- The role of the public and stakeholders in addressing environmental challenges facing the Caspian Sea;
- National capacity-building mechanisms for implementing the Convention, in cooperation with the Rio Conventions, and within the context of the socio-economic development of the Caspian region;
- Achieving environmentally sustainable development in the region through the Tehran Convention's mechanisms, in line with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals for 2030;
- Preventing pollution of the Caspian Sea's marine and coastal environment to ensure the region's sustainable development, in line with national and federal projects like «Clean Country».



Caspian Sea Day – 2019, Dagestan, Makhachkala



Several key areas were discussed in dedicated sessions:

- Developing unified approaches to harmonize environmental impact assessments and the protection of Caspian biota, including the creation of specialized tools to ensure environmental standards across all Caspian littoral states;
- Preventing pollution from wastewater, marine debris, and microplastics, along with studying how microplastics move through marine ecosystems;
- Addressing the environmental risks associated with hydrocarbon development and transportation, and fostering partnerships among the public, businesses, and government;
- Establishing integrated, economically sound approaches to managing the Caspian Sea's marine and coastal environment, to support sustainable development goals.

The final documents from these roundtables offered recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of the Tehran Convention to address the environmental challenges in the Caspian Sea region. Given the urgent need for a new societal approach toward the Caspian's marine environment, special emphasis was placed on environmental education and public awareness.

Expanding education on the Tehran Convention and its potential to solve the region's environmental issues is crucial, particularly through higher education and school programmes. The media also plays an important role in raising public participation, but the most effective way to foster environmental stewardship is by involving people in hands-on ecological activities.

In celebration of the 10th anniversary of the Tehran Convention in 2013 and the "Caspian Sea Day", various events were held in Astrakhan, Dagestan, and Kalmykia, including beach clean-ups and student competitions, conferences, and seminars.

As a result of the Caspian Sea Day forum – 2015, a collection of materials titled "Strengthening Stakeholder Interaction in Protecting the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea" was published and widely circulated. The Tehran Convention and its protocols are instrumental in guiding decision-making for the conservation of the Caspian's marine environment and biological resources, especially in the context of oil and gas operations.

During the 2017 Caspian Sea Day events, LUKOIL–Nizhnevolzhskneft LLC demonstrated a systematic approach to environmental protection in the Caspian, showcasing their high readiness for oil spill response. These exercises included helicopter evacuations and fire drills.

To effectively manage the Caspian's marine and coastal environment, improving pollution monitoring systems is critical. Research into microplastics in marine ecosystems must be prioritized. The development of sustainable, eco-friendly tourism is also vital, though the potential impact of a surge in visitors must be carefully managed to prevent harm to protected areas.



Caspian Sea Day – 2015, Astrakhan

The increased engagement of stakeholders in the Caspian Sea Day forums highlighted the need for more robust monitoring of pollution and biodiversity, and a standardized approach to sharing data among the Caspian littoral states. Additionally, it is essential to further develop methodologies for environmental impact assessments and harmonize conservation efforts across the region. It would be beneficial to summarize the outcomes of the Caspian Sea Day forums across the Caspian littoral states, so they can be utilized in advancing the work of the Tehran Convention and its Protocols.

In closing, I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to everyone who supports and shares in our mission to preserve the Caspian Sea. I am truly grateful to each of you. Let our work serve as an example to future generations of how nature can — and must — be protected. Together, let's continue our efforts to ensure the Caspian Sea remains the jewel of our planet.

OLEG GUCHGELDIYEV, Environmental and Rural development specialist, 2001-2013, World Bank/UNDP/UNEP, Turkmenistan

Translated from Russian language

— Please, tell us about the time you worked in connection with Tehran Convention and in what capacity.

— I started my work in the Caspian region in 2001 as a consultant for small grants and investment projects for the World Bank under the Caspian Environmental Programme. This programme was an umbrella project, one of its goals being the creation and signing of the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea. Throughout my career, I held various positions, and besides the World Bank, I also collaborated with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the European Union, implementing small grant programs. Together with UNDP, we worked on a national project for Turkmenistan, where I served as a project advisor for the protection of Caspian Sea biodiversity.

Until 2013, I participated in various projects related to the Caspian Environmental Programme. In 2013, I led a project aimed at coordinating efforts and preparing five action plans for the implementation of the Convention. In this role, I coordinated the work of all five countries in the region, which can be considered one of my last key positions within the Caspian

programme. Additionally, during this period, I continued collaboration with the World Bank and private companies on Caspian Sea environmental issues.

— Can you please tell us something about the time the Convention was elaborated? Any discussions, debates?

— Certainly, it was a very interesting time. I participated in many events and often accompanied the Turkmenistan delegation as a technical advisor. I remember the heated discussions that took place. Every word of the Convention was discussed in detail, people disagreed, took breaks, drank coffee, returned, and argued again. It took a lot of time. Word by word, discussion by discussion — each country sought to contribute, so discussions often lasted late into the night.

Night sessions, in particular, are memorable when we sat late into the night, discussing each chapter, each word of the Convention in detail. However, what was especially heartening was the mutual desire of all five countries to sign this Convention, despite many unresolved issues, such as the delimitation of the Caspian Sea borders and its status — whether it is a lake or a sea. All countries understood the need for a framework document and joint efforts to protect and improve the ecology of the Caspian Sea. This result was achieved not only thanks to the complex transboundary analysis of all Caspian environmental problems conducted in 2003-2006 but also the realization of the importance of the Caspian Sea for the resources of each country — biological, cultural, ethnographic, and others.

— What was the biggest challenge while working/negotiating things? How did you overcome them?

— Consensus was the only way to overcome emerging disagreements. Observing this process was extremely interesting. Although I was not directly involved in all negotiations, as they were mainly conducted by government delegations, representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministries of the Environment, my role was in technical support and participation in meetings related to ecology.

We often witnessed how the almost achieved consensus was disrupted. When all countries seemed to agree, one of the delegations would stand up and object, and everything would start over. But, as I mentioned earlier, the determination to reach consensus and sign the Convention outweighed all doubts and arguments. This process required tremendous effort. The contribution of the participants of government delegations was particularly significant. We, as experts, provided direct support, but it was the delegation members who invested colossal effort in reaching a final decision and signing the Convention.

— Can you say that this experience influenced your life in a way? If yes, how?

— Undoubtedly, this experience was invaluable. I had the opportunity to work with numerous donors and organizations, which provided me with valuable knowledge and skills. The period after 2006, when I traveled extensively throughout the Caspian countries, studying their situations and approaches to problem-solving, was particularly memorable. The Caspian Programme, as a flagship project of the Convention, played a key role in this, providing me with the opportunity to gain experience in various areas: strategic planning, development of investment projects and small grants, and implementation of new solutions for countries, especially Turkmenistan. I also participated in the Project Selection Committee for all Caspian countries.

The work on implementing changes and conducting situational analysis was multifaceted. Although the Convention has an environmental focus, it addresses not only issues of biodiversity and environmental cleanliness but also social-economic aspects, trade, and the daily lives of people, especially in rural areas of Turkmenistan. It was also important to consider the sustainable development of the oil and gas industry to ensure it does not harm the ecology of the Caspian.

This diverse work significantly enriched my professional experience and helped me manage many projects in the future. I also had the honor of implementing the first project of the Global Environmental Fund in Turkmenistan, related to the protection of biological resources of the Caspian Sea. This project became an unforgettable milestone in my career and had a significant impact on my life.

— In your view, what is the greatest development through these years? The biggest change between TC then and TC now?

— Unfortunately, I am not very well informed about recent changes, but during the time when I worked, the consensus reached after the signing of the Convention was of paramount importance. After the signing of the Convention, there was a lot of work on the signing of protocols. This work was even more challenging because the Convention defined the basic framework, while the protocols outlined specific actions, restrictions, and coefficients. A huge amount of work was done, and I believe that the main task was to determine the content of these additional documents, which contributed to the implementation of the Convention, and then to implement them.

Undoubtedly, changes in the regulatory framework, legislation, approaches, and the introduction of new visions were required. Changes were happening, the process was dynamic, and in my opinion, these changes will never cease. For example, we are currently facing major difficulties due to changes in the level of the Caspian Sea. There are many problems here: when we started the programme, the problem was the rise in the level of the Caspian, then, closer to 2010, its level began to decrease. Currently, this decrease is quite serious and affects not only the economies of the countries but also the lives of people. Therefore, the programme must be dynamic and respond to the challenges of the time, which it did during the 10 years I worked there.

— What is your brightest memory from your work in connection with the Tehran Convention?

— The most memorable aspect is the family that formed in the Caspian region. Over the 10 years of work, we not only aligned our documents and desires to help the Caspian, but also became close as people. We became friends, comrades, one big family, whose main concern was the ecological health of the Caspian. We still maintain relationships and connections with some people. I visited the Convention's website and saw many familiar faces of people who worked on the Caspian. It was very nice to see that they are alive, healthy, and continue to work. I would like to wish them all good health, many years of life, and fruitful work for the benefit of the Caspian.

I also returned to the Caspian after my work ended. Turkmenistan organized Caspian training sessions with the International Ocean Institute, and I helped organize the first event and also came to give lectures. The connection with the Caspian never breaks, especially the warm relationships with colleagues. I have vivid memories of how this family lived together for 10 years, how we communicated, and were not just a group of people with common interests.

— Maybe you have a wish for Tehran Convention on 20 years of its signing? What would you like to see it in future?

Please tell us what you wish to see in the next ten years in the context of the Tehran Convention and environmental protection in the Caspian Sea.

— I would like to wish the Convention many years of existence, as well as continued interest from countries, governments, states, people, and the private sector in preserving the biodiversity, ecology, cleanliness, and unique natural wealth of the Caspian region. May the interest in the history and culture of the Caspian peoples also be preserved. I hope this interest remains unchanged.

Whenever I visit Turkmenistan, I always try to spend at least a couple of days on the shores of the Caspian Sea. This is not only because of the healing properties of its waters, which can strengthen the immune system for the whole year, but also to meet the people I have worked with and to learn about how the situation is changing. Therefore, over the next 10 years, I hope that the work will be dynamic, continue and expand, and that the Tehran Convention and all efforts associated with it will have stable funding and be able to successfully address the challenges existing both on the Caspian Sea and worldwide. Special words of thanks and wishes for health and many years of work are directed to all those who work diligently in the Caspian programme. We will always support, care, and, if necessary, help and contribute to the successful advancement of this important cause of preserving our wonderful Caspian Sea.

— Have you ever been to the Caspian Sea? What did you think when you saw it for the first time?

— My first significant visit to the shores of the Caspian Sea was part of a project with the World Bank and was filled with amazing experiences. I traveled from the northern border of the Caspian Sea in Turkmenistan to its southern shores, conversing with locals and interviewing fishermen.

One of the most memorable moments was visiting Gyzy-Suv Island. This island, artificially created in the 1950s, impressed me with its beautiful beaches. During the filming of a documentary about it, we inserted a disk box with aerial photographs taken from a helicopter. However, the Ministry demanded their removal, insisting that it looked like the «Maldives», and they needed «Caspian beaches». Such beautiful places! When I found myself on this beach first time in early December 2001, the weather was surprisingly warm. Despite it being 10 degrees Celsius, the sea and sand created an atmosphere of tranquility. I lay down and simply fell asleep under the warm rays of the December sun. This was my first impression of the Caspian Sea – pure, tranquil, and with huge potential for tourism development. I always strive to return here with my family to enjoy this place and recharge with its beneficial air, which helps maintain health throughout the year.

E. V. OSTROVSKAYA. Participant in the events of the Tehran Convention, Caspian Marine Research Center (KASPMNITZ) of Roshdyromet, Astrakhan

“DEVELOPMENT OF COOPERATION BETWEEN CASPCOM AND THE TEHRAN CONVENTION”.

Translated from Russian language

I became involved in the work with the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea in 2013 on the part of the Coordination Committee for the Hydrometeorology of the Caspian Sea (CASPCOM). The Coordination Committee brings together the efforts of the hydrometeorological services of the Caspian littoral states to create a regional system for obtaining and sharing information on the state of the Caspian Sea in order to ensure public safety and facilitate sustainable economic development in the region.

CASPCOM had focused much attention on enhancing cooperation with the UNEP Caspian Environment Programme (CEP), then the Tehran Convention. The Director of the Caspian Sea Research Center, Mr. S. K. Monakhov, who has done much to establish links between CASPCOM and the Convention, has been an active participant. K. Monakhov, who actively participated in the work of CEP, first as an expert, then, after his appointment in 2007, as Coordinator of the

CASPCOM Integrated Hydrometeorology Programme (CASPAS). Under his assistance in different years of the first decade of the XXI century in cooperation with CASPCOM CEP/TACIS expeditionary studies of the Northern and Middle Caspian Sea and the Volga Delta were made, which was very important because at that time the state pollution monitoring programme was practically minimized.

In 2006, a hydrometeorological atlas of the Caspian Sea was prepared for the CASPCOM website, and in 2009, a guide to Caspian Sea hydrometeorology on the Internet. In 2010, the first issues of the General Catalog of the Caspian Sea Level and the CASPCOM newsletter on the state of the Caspian Sea level were developed on an agreed layout. The bulletin is then issued on a permanent basis twice a year, made freely available on the CASPCOM website, it provides valuable information on inter— and intra-annual sea level changes and is widely disseminated among users in the Caspian Sea littoral countries.

I have been carrying out the work on the preparation of CASPCOM information resources since 2017 after my appointment as CASPAS Coordinator. All information is now placed in free access on the official CASPCOM website – www.caspcom.com. In fact, CASPCOM is the owner of a unique weather and climate database in the region, which can serve as a basis for assessing the state of the environment in accordance with Article 19 of the Tehran Convention.

The countries agreed on the first Caspian Sea Environmental Monitoring Programme (EMP) in 2012. In 2013, a memorandum of understanding between CASPCOM and the Tehran Convention was signed, opening new opportunities for cooperation between hydrometeorologists and environmentalists. Since 2015, I started to participate in the meetings of the Convention Secretariat's Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment as an expert on the assessment of the quality of the marine environment, especially marine sediments, and the development of criteria and targets for such assessment. The work on selection of criteria for assessment and its inclusion in regular reports on the state of the regional environment is ongoing.

As a lifelong researcher, I cannot fail to note the significant contribution of the Tehran Convention to the development of communication among scientists working on Caspian Sea issues. In cooperation between CASPCOM and the Tehran Convention, 2 international scientific conferences on regional climate change and adaptation have been organized and hosted: "Climate and Water Balance Changes in the Caspian Sea Region" conference was held on October 19-20, 2010, and "Climate Change in the Caspian Sea Region" conference was held on October 27-28, 2021. The discussion of important for the region problems of climate change, related changes in the Caspian Sea level, and restructuring of ecosystem processes aroused great interest in the scientific community.

The conferences have provided platforms for discussion and exchange of opinions for a wide range of specialists and scientists from the Caspian littoral states and other countries of the world, attracting the attention of the international community to the region and its problems. The last conference was held at a difficult time of the coronavirus pandemic via videoconference, but nevertheless, it gathered more than a hundred researchers and the published materials were distributed in a few days!

I believe that within the Tehran Convention, extremely important work is being done to preserve a unique water body – the Caspian Sea – and I hope this work will continue.

AIGERIM KUAT, Director of the Department of international cooperation, Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Kazakhstan

Translated from Russian language

— Can you please tell us something about the time the Convention was elaborated? Any discussions, debates?

— The Convention project began to be developed in the 1990s. It was a time of emerging new independent states on the territory of the former USSR. The period was indeed very challenging, but despite all the difficulties of the transitional period, the Caspian states showed the will and desire to pay close attention to the issues of protecting the marine environment of the Caspian Sea. I would especially like to emphasize the role of the UNEP European Office in preparing the Convention.

— In your view, what is the greatest development through these years? The biggest change between TC then and TC now?

— In my opinion, the most significant achievement of the Convention is the preparation and signing of Protocols to the Tehran Convention by the countries and the beginning of the implementation of those Protocols that have already entered into force, particularly the Aktau Protocol. Another important achievement for the countries is the agreement on key approaches to improving the institutional mechanisms for implementing the Convention. In this regard, I hope that the ad hoc Expert Group of countries will be able to reach an agreement on all unresolved issues in the shortest possible time and that the Caspian countries will achieve agreements on the establishment of a Secretariat for the Convention in the region, which will closely interact with international organizations, including UNEP.

— Describe Tehran Convention in one word. What is it for you?

— I would use the word “future”. In my view, the Tehran Convention is a legal instrument that will help preserve the Caspian Sea and thereby contribute to creating decent living conditions for people in the Caspian region and preserving its unique nature not only in the present but also in the future.

— Maybe you have a wish for Tehran Convention on 20 years of its signing? What would you like to see it in future?

— I would like the Tehran Convention to become not only the legal basis for interaction among Caspian states but also an effective mechanism for stabilizing and improving the ecological situation in the region. I would hope that more attention is given to the practical aspects of implementing the provisions of the Convention.

— Please tell us what you wish to see in next ten years in the context of the Tehran Convention and environmental protection in the Caspian Sea

— I hope that starting from the next ten years, the Tehran Convention will become the legal instrument that allows Caspian countries to find the most optimal solutions based on consensus to improve the state of the Caspian Sea marine environment and implement them. I also hope that by that time, Caspian countries will be able to independently address all tasks related to the preservation and improvement of the unique Caspian marine environment without seeking assistance from international organizations and the international community. The Convention itself will serve as an example to all countries of the world of how nations can independently and effectively cooperate with each other for the well-being and prosperity of their populations and the improvement of natural conditions.

— **Have you ever been to the Caspian Sea? What did you think when you saw it for the first time?**

— When I first saw the sea, it seemed beautiful and boundless to me. And I believe that this gift of nature must be seen by our descendants in all its magnificence.

A. A. POSTNOV. Head of the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment, participant in events within the Tehran Convention, State Oceanographic Institute, Roshydromet, Moscow

“ISSUES OF REGIONAL COORDINATION OF MARINE ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING IN THE ACTIVITIES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE TEHRAN CONVENTION”.

Translated from Russian language

Environmental monitoring and assessment are the informational basis for any nature preservation action. Without knowledge of the state and level of pollution, it is impossible either to plan adequate environmental protection measures or to correctly assess their effectiveness. It should be noted that monitoring of the marine environment in the Caspian Sea began in the late 1970s under the USSR. In the 1990s, this activity was continued by the newly established independent states – Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Turkmenistan. In these countries, both routine monitoring and special “extended” monitoring programmes were organized, providing for a more detailed grid of stations and a longer list of observed parameters of the marine environment. An example of such an “extended monitoring” programme was, in particular, the “Programme for Monitoring of Transboundary Water Bodies of the Caspian Sea for 2012-2014” carried out by the Russian Federation within the framework of the Federal Target Programme “Development of the Water Management Complex of the Russian Federation in 2012-2020”. However, the monitoring carried out in individual Caspian littoral states was of an individual nature, the observation programmes were not coordinated, and as a result, it was difficult to get an idea of the state and pollution of the marine environment of the Caspian Sea as a whole.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the issues of monitoring coordination between the Caspian littoral states in the field of marine environment monitoring became one of the central issues at the very beginning of international efforts to protect and restore the marine environment of the Caspian Sea. Back in the 1990s-2000s, ship surveys of water areas adjacent to the coasts of the Caspian littoral states were conducted, the most polluted areas (“hot spots”) were identified, a database of historical data on sea pollution collected during national monitoring programmes in individual Caspian littoral states was formed, and steps were taken to create a unified regional monitoring programme that would characterize the state and pollution of the sea as a whole.

International donors have also contributed to the Caspian Sea monitoring. In particular, during 2006-2009, the European Union financed and organized the implementation of the TACIS project “Water Quality Monitoring of the Caspian Sea and Development of an Action Plan for High Pollution Zones”. The project aimed to assist the countries of the Caspian region (without Iran’s participation, as the TACIS assistance programme was intended exclusively for the countries of the former USSR) in organizing a coordinated regional Marine Environmental Monitoring Programme to inform the National and Regional Action Plans in managing the quality of the marine environment in the areas of major pollution sources, as well as developing an

Action Plan to reduce pollution in the Caspian Sea. The project included intercalibration of hydrochemical laboratories in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Turkmenistan and supply of additional analytical equipment, several ship expeditions, and development of proposals for a regional Caspian Sea monitoring programme.

After the signing and enforcement of the Tehran Convention, cooperation between the Caspian littoral states in the field of monitoring and assessment of the state of the marine environment received a new momentum. Thus, an entire Article 19 of the Convention was devoted to monitoring issues. It stipulated that the Contracting Parties:

- make efforts to establish and implement appropriate independent and/or joint programmes for monitoring the state of the marine environment of the Caspian Sea;
- coordinate the list and parameters of pollutants whose discharge and concentration in the Caspian Sea shall be monitored;
- regularly independently and/or jointly assess the state of the marine environment of the Caspian Sea and the effectiveness of measures taken to prevent, reduce and control pollution of the marine environment of the Caspian Sea;
- make efforts to harmonize rules for the preparation and application of monitoring programmes, measurement systems, analysis methods, data processing methods, and data quality assessment;
- develop a centralized database as a basis for decision-making and a common source of information and education for specialists, administrators, and the public.

We should note that monitoring of the marine environment in the Caspian Sea began in the late 1970s under the USSR. In the 1990s, this activity was continued by the newly established independent states – Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Turkmenistan. In these countries, both routine monitoring and special “extended” monitoring programmes were conducted, providing for a more detailed grid of stations and a longer list of observed parameters of the marine environment. An example of such an “extended monitoring” programme was, in particular, the “Programme for Monitoring of Transboundary Water Bodies of the Caspian Sea for 2012-2014” carried out by the Russian Federation within the federal programme “Development of the Water Management Complex of the Russian Federation in 2012-2020”. However, the monitoring carried out in individual Caspian littoral states was of an individual nature, the observation programmes were not coordinated, and as a result, it was difficult to get an idea of the state and pollution of the marine environment of the Caspian Sea as a whole.

In order to address one of the most important objectives set out in Article 19 of the Convention, namely the establishment of a joint programme for monitoring the state of the marine environment of the Caspian Sea, in 2009-2011, the GEF/UNDP CaspEco project developed the Caspian Sea Environmental Monitoring Programme (EMP), which aimed to establish an organizational, methodological, and technical basis for obtaining data and information on the Caspian Sea environment necessary for assessing the state of the Caspian Sea environment (including the preparation of the State of the Caspian Sea Environmental Report). The results of the previous projects of the Caspian Environmental Programme, as well as the above-mentioned project of the TACIS programme of the European Union were used. A working group of representatives of the Caspian littoral states under the chairmanship of Mr. Reza Sheikholeslami (Islamic Republic of Iran) was established for the development of the ESMP within the framework of CaspEco.

The Environmental Monitoring Programme fully complied with modern requirements for the organization and conduct of marine environmental monitoring; it was considered and adopted as a basis at the Forth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the TC (Moscow, December 2012). The environmental monitoring programme of the 2012 model perfectly met

modern requirements for the organization and conduct of marine environment monitoring. However, during the next 10 years, the TC Parties have not started their implementation. The main reason for this was significant differences in the degree of technical capability of the states to determine a number of marine pollution parameters.

In the course of activities on the realization of the Tehran Convention, it became obvious the necessity of revision of EMP, and development of other activities related to monitoring and assessment of the environment, for which a regional international mechanism embedded in the structure of the Tehran Convention was necessary. The Working Group on Monitoring (Environment), Assessment (and Information Exchange), abbreviated as WGME, was intended to become such a mechanism. The decision on the establishment of the WGMA and its structure (composition) was adopted at the Fifth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the TC (Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, May 2014). The work of the WGMA started already at the end of June 2014 according to the preliminary terms of reference. The final version of the group's terms of reference was adopted at the Sixth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (Baku, Azerbaijan, October 2022).

According to it, the WGMA is an advisory body to and under the auspices of the Secretariat of the Tehran Convention and has the following tasks:

1. To develop institutional and operational procedures and modalities for a stable marine environmental monitoring system, including the existing network of national monitoring organizations;
2. to ensure harmonization of the monitoring systems of Contracting Parties through the analysis and assessment of the necessary monitoring capacity, including the identification of resource requirements;
3. Develop common regional guidelines for the implementation of the Environmental Monitoring Programme (EMP), taking into account national standards and including a common and comparable quality assurance system;
4. Development/agreement of marine environmental quality indicators and standards, including physico-chemical, biological, ecological and socio-economic, and preparation of guidelines for their implementation;
5. Provide guidance on the development of a hierarchy of goals and objectives and implementation of water quality targets based on marine environmental quality standards;
6. Overseeing and advising on issues arising during the implementation of the EMP, including how to develop capacity, testing implementation mechanisms through pilot monitoring, etc...;
7. Providing inputs and methodological support in the preparation of the Caspian Sea State of the Environment Reports;
8. Develop a procedure for regular exchange of technical and scientific information related to monitoring and evaluation between Contracting Parties through the Secretariat, including metadata requirements for regional data repositories;
9. Development of methods for forecasting the dynamics of seawater pollution levels.

The WGMA was established with 2 representatives from each Caspian littoral state, a chairperson, and an observer from the Caspian Sea Hydrometeorology Coordination Committee (CASPCOM)⁴. At the first informal meeting of the WGMA in June 2014, Alexander Postnov (Russian Federation) was elected as acting chair of the group; he was later confirmed as chair of the group by the Sixth meeting of the Conference of the Parties in October 2022.

⁴ The Caspian Sea Hydrometeorology Coordination Committee (CASPCOM) is a working body of national meteorological and hydrological services of the Caspian littoral states designed to coordinate the activities of the states to implement the provisions of the Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Hydrometeorology (Astrakhan, 2015).

The WGMA held six meetings between 2014 and 2019. CASPCOM representatives attended most of these meetings as observers and provided substantive input. During these meetings of the WGMA:

- Agreed on a list of regional water quality standards common to the Caspian littoral states based on the list of maximum permissible concentrations of pollutants in seawater legislated in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, and Turkmenistan, supplemented by a number of additional parameters proposed by I.R. Iran.
- Reached preliminary agreement on the use of Probable Exposure Levels (PELs) from the Canadian system as Interim Regional Sediment Quality Guidelines for the Caspian Sea. Initially, only a limited number of parameters will be used to match the countries' monitoring capabilities.
- Analyzed the level of commitment of the Caspian Sea littoral states to implement the Caspian Sea Environmental Monitoring Programme (EMP) and proposed that the TCIS conduct a survey to identify the countries' efforts to start implementing the EMP in the near future.
- Reviewed the content and final text of the second State of the Caspian Sea Environment Report and provided recommendations on its structure and procedures for drafting subsequent reports.
- Considered a draft procedure for the exchange and quality control of baseline monitoring data and reviewed the requirements for a regional monitoring data center, including its possible establishment within the Caspian Environmental Information Center (CEIC).

However, in the fall of 2019, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan, referring to the fact that at that time the TC parties had not fully agreed on the Terms of Reference of the WGMA, declared their unwillingness to continue the work of the WGMA in the format adopted earlier and proposed to change its name to "Meeting of experts of the Caspian Sea littoral countries to develop proposals for the Caspian Sea Environmental Monitoring Work Programme". In this regard, further work, which resumed in March 2021, was narrowed down to the creation of a new version of the Caspian Sea Marine Environment Monitoring Programme on the basis of EMP-2012.

A questionnaire was prepared to seek the views of Parties on the basics of EMP-2012. The Parties' responses to the questionnaire were discussed at three technical meetings held between 2021 and 2022. As expected, the Caspian littoral states had the greatest difficulty in agreeing on a list of mandatory and optional marine environmental parameters to be monitored, especially those related to marine biology and biodiversity. As a result, it became evident that at present the Parties are not ready for the joint implementation of the 2012 EMP in its entirety, mainly due to the lack of capacity of some Parties to conduct observations of some parameters. This situation is not likely to be resolved soon, as the necessary capacity-building requires the allocation of funds and other efforts that may not be acceptable to Parties at present. Consequently, full implementation of EMP-2012 is postponed to a distant, uncertain future.

Alternatively, a simplified interim EMP covering only those parameters that are currently available to all Parties could be finalized and implemented. Currently, the list of these commonly available parameters includes temperature, salinity, pH, phosphate, nitrite, ammonium nitrogen, dissolved oxygen, 5-day biological oxygen demand, total petroleum hydrocarbons, and iron. It is expected that discussions on these alternative ways forward will be held shortly at the meetings of the WGMA, whose Terms of Reference and composition were finally formalized at the Sixth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the TC (Baku, October 2022).

MOHAMMAD REZA SHEIKHOLESLAMI, Expert, the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI)

— Please, tell us about the time you worked in connection with Tehran Convention and in what capacity.

— Work on environmental cooperation in the Caspian Sea began after the collapse of the Soviet Union. I first looked into this issue in 1996, when I was presented with a review of a text prepared by the United Nations Environment Programme. I was a delegate from Iran and already had experience working as a marine environment consultant to the Department of the Environment DOE-IRAN.

By that time, I was also involved in work on another convention, known as the Kuwait Convention, related to the southern coast of Iran, the Persian Gulf and Sea of Oman. However, when I was invited to Geneva, the above-mentioned presented text turned out to be completely different from what was planned. Did the text change significantly? In fact, the entire text remained in square brackets, indicating that the delegates from Caspian Sea Littoral States had not been able to reach consensus on any of its subjects/articles, which was truly surprising.

— Can you please tell us something about the time the Convention was elaborated? Any discussions, debates?

— The development/adoption and signing of The Framework Convention for the Protection of the Caspian Sea Environment were a long and laborious process. I joined the work already during the first and second phase of the Caspian Environment Programme (CEP 1 and 2, 1998-2002 and 2003-2007) as regional consultant to the CEP in connection with pollution monitoring and assessment. The primary aim of CEP1 was establishing dialogue among Caspian Countries at first, facilitating the cooperation for adoption and signing of the convention. We had to expedite the implementation of the CEP2, but even the preliminary concept had not yet been developed. The drafting intensified at the end of CEP1 and the beginning of CEP2. It all happened as if in one fine moment, when in the second phase, the work significantly accelerated. The process of regional cooperation was indeed not simple, and now, in my opinion, it has become even more complex than before in implementing phase of the convention.

— What was the biggest challenge while working/negotiating things? How did you overcome them?

— One of the main challenges was the issue of the legal regime in the Caspian Sea which has not yet led to a collective agreement. Many points and terms used in the draft text of the Convention were extremely important in this sense. No one expected us to overcome this problem. However, the process was significantly aided by experienced international consultants, including those from the United Nations Environment Programme. All we could do was to continue discussions. We revisited the same issues repeatedly, showing patience and proposing new solutions. Especially important at this stage was the reference to the legal status of the Caspian Sea in the text of the Convention to prevent undesirable interpretations in the future.

Another problem was that some formulations or parts of the text did not correspond to the national legal norms and legal regime of each of the participating countries. This was expected, and our internal discussions continued, but gradually we reached a common agreement. Another issue was that the wording of the English version of the text was, in many cases, too vague for the Russian-speaking members of the drafting team, considering that the text should be both in English and Russian. The understanding of the text varied: English-speaking members of the team could not correctly interpret the text in English for it to be understood by the Russian-speaking members. Therefore, we reviewed and rewrote the text many times to make it clearer and more consistent in both languages. But we showed persistence and patience to

reach a consensus in understanding every word, every phrase, and every concept set out in the Convention.

— Can you say that this experience influenced your life in a way? If yes, how?

— First of all, it seems to me, working as a consultant or in an academic setting, you not only teach others and propose solutions, but you also constantly learn yourself. For me, it was a unique environment where I could acquire many skills that are rarely encountered elsewhere. In this case, we had to interact with people with different expertise and divers' culture, attitude and ideas to find specific solutions and understand exactly how to achieve the set goals. For me, it was a valuable experience both in terms of personal development and professional growth.

— In your view, what is the greatest development through these years? The biggest change between TC then and TC now?

— I would say that, in reality, we did not expect to reach the point where the Convention would be signed and ratified – we anticipated it would take much longer. However, this turned out to be a very important and significant achievement. Then, during Phase 2 of the CEP we were able to develop many other aspects after 2007 under continued CEP and then TC interim Secretariat activities up to now, such as the protocols including: Protocol Concerning Regional Preparedness, Response and Co-operation in Combating Oil Pollution Incidents ("Akteu Protocol"), the Protocol for the Protection of the Caspian Sea against Pollution from Land-based Sources and Activities ("Moscow Protocol"), the Protocol for the Conservation of Biological Diversity, the Protocol on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context and the Protocol on Monitoring, Assessment and Information Exchange which the last is under more negotiation/agreement. This was a great accomplishment, but we have a lot of work ahead of us.

There are projects that support and assist the Convention. One of them, which I consider particularly important, is related to the preparation of documents for monitoring and assessing pollution within the framework of the Convention for the region and its environment. This process took a lot of time, we faced many problems, held numerous meetings, but in the end, we succeeded. It is important to note that now we have a regional plan for monitoring and assessing pollution. The other few number of supporting projects can also be mentioned such as "Caspian Environmental Information Centre", the Adaptation Fund project "Urbanization and Climate Change Adaptation in the Caspian Sea Region", the project "Addressing Marine Litter and Marine Plastics – a Systemic Approach in the Caspian Sea" and the Caspian Sea State of Environment reports (SOE).

However, the structure and responsibilities of national institutions and their capabilities in each countries to implement these plans vary. For example, in Iran, they differ from the capabilities of Russia or Azerbaijan or other members. This needs to be taken into account, and it is very important that we can demonstrate how to cooperate in the region and exchange data. This is achievable. I could give several more examples based on regional activities, where people or organizations, universities could cooperate to create effective activities, but so far none of these measures are satisfactory. For example, partnerships with scientists, international organizations and research centers.

I would like to emphasize that all these achievements were made possible thanks to the activities of the interim Secretariat. The region really has great potential, but there is a lack of willingness between TC members to work effectively as well as with third Parties, and this should be taken into account. This is a problem that has so far prevented the establishment of a permanent Secretariat of Tehran Convention within the Caspian Sea region.

— What is your brightest memory from your work in connection with the Tehran Convention?

— As I already mentioned, at times we did not expect that the Convention would be signed. But, as it seems to me, it happened suddenly, almost instantaneously, at the end of the

negotiations. It was interesting that at the official signing ceremony of the Tehran Convention, the representative of Turkmenistan did not attend, which was somewhat disappointing, but it was done after a few days' delay, which was very gratifying. The next task was obtaining ratification. Observing this process was truly interesting.

— Can you tell us something funny, touching or interesting from that time?

— There were many amusing moments that I encountered. For example, during various meetings, delegates from different countries would occasionally change. Sometimes one of them would agree with certain articles or aspects, not only directly related to the text of the Convention but also to its activities, plans, and so on. Then suddenly, the expert or delegate from that country would change, and the issue would be raised again at the meeting. The new delegate might propose something that completely disrupted the previously reached agreements, and we could not convince them that this point or part of the text had already been agreed upon and approved. This happened quite often at the meetings.

— Describe Tehran Convention in one word. What is it for you?

— If I had to choose just one word, I would say “vision”. If I were to describe it in two words – “big picture”.

— Maybe you have a wish for Tehran Convention on 20 years of its signing? What would you like to see it in future?

— First, we need to understand what we mean when we say “future.” Are we talking about the near future or a more distant perspective? We are aware of the region's problems that hinder cooperation between countries, and we should not be too ambitious. We need to focus on the aspects that can be improved right now. I could name a whole list of wishes that would be beneficial in the future and would be truly ambitious.

But the most obvious and important thing is the creation of a permanent Secretariat which has not come to agreement after several years. What will the approach to the Secretariat be? It could be created on a fixed or rotational basis, but this issue requires further discussion. Why do I say that we should not be too ambitious? Because first, we need to solve this particular problem. If we succeed, if we have an efficient financial mechanism (budget), then I think in the future we will have other wishes and plans. Otherwise, we will just be talking to each other without having concrete results. Of course, there are many other important aspects, but in my opinion, the creation of a well-functioning permanent Secretariat supported by an efficient financial mechanism is the top priority.

— Please tell us what you wish to see in the next ten years in the context of the Tehran Convention and environmental protection in the Caspian Sea.

— I wish to see more and more strong political willingness/desire between TC members for effective cooperation in practice, especially when the objectives, action plan and projects of the Tehran Convention are properly integrated and implemented in the development plans of each country. Also to see good interaction with other potential partners such as other international conventions, UN agencies, scientific collaborative institutions and etc. It seems that it is stalling and not making the expected progress. It should be noted that we have the TC and the major related protocols in hand, supported by many other documents and projects so far, now it is the time for action, we should not forget that we are in implementing and monitoring phase of the Tehran Convention.

— Have you ever been to the Caspian Sea? What did you think when you saw it for the first time?

— I was born on the coast of the Caspian Sea, in a house located near the city of Ramsar in northern Iran. That's where I spent my childhood. When foreigners, especially those who have never been to Iran or don't live in this region, hear about the Caspian Sea, they often imagine it as a dry and inhospitable area. This is a misconception. It is indeed cold here in winter and hot in summer, but the Iranian coast of the Caspian Sea, which we call "Shomal" (meaning "North"), is completely different. "Shomal" is associated with greenery and natural abundance, somehow subtropical climatic condition. This region is rich in water, developed, and ideal for tourism. There are about 800 kilometers of coastline covered with forests. Previously, the sea here was truly beautiful, but the fluctuation in sea level caused significant damage. But even now, this place remains truly amazing. Most of the time particularly in the spring and summer, waking up in the mornings, I watched the sun rise from the sea. This sight always amazed me.

I'm very sorry that I couldn't visit the other shore of the Caspian Sea when I was in high school. At that time, it was the territory of the Soviet Union, and it was impossible to go there. This became one of the disappointments of my childhood. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, I was invited to work on the Caspian Sea, and thus my long-standing desire came true.

M.V. BOLGOV. Participant of events within the framework of the Tehran Convention, Head of the Laboratory of Surface Water Modeling, Institute of Water Problems of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow

"CASPIAN SEA LEVEL FLUCTUATIONS".

Translated from Russian language

The scientific events held under the aegis of the Tehran Convention have repeatedly considered the task of long-term sea level forecasting. This task is very urgent, as poorly predictable fluctuations of the sea level cause significant damage to the economy of coastal territories, create risks for infrastructure facilities of oil production, the existence of aquatic bioresources, etc. A scientifically based methodology of sea level forecasting for decades ahead is required.

The solution to the forecasting problem of the level of a closed water body is based on models of various degrees of complexity, but one of the main problems is the exchange of reliable information on the state and use of input resources in the Caspian basin, on the hydrometeorology of the sea. The most complicated issue is to factor in the impact of ongoing climatic changes on the sea level. River water inflow and evaporation from the sea surface play a determining role in the formation of multi-year fluctuations of the Caspian Sea level. Information on these processes, which form the basis of the forecast, should be obtained within the framework of joint monitoring programmes based on the cooperation of all Caspian littoral states.

L. V. DZHABRUYEVA. Participant of events within the framework of the Tehran Convention, Kalmyk State University, Republic of Kalmykia, Elista

“PARTICIPATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF KALMYKIA IN THE ACTIVITIES OF THE TEHRAN CONVENTION AND THE CASPIAN ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMME”.

Translated from Russian language

The coastal territory of Kalmykia is characterized by anthropogenic desertification processes. Kalmykia's experts in combating desertification and land degradation have identified regional priorities, capacity-building needs, and thematic assessments on the Russian coast of the Caspian Sea region. The Republic of Kalmykia's environmental problems related to the Caspian Sea arose in the process of the integrated development of the sea itself and its natural resources, in connection with which the subject took a very active part in the activities of the Tehran Convention at various stages of its development. In order to solve environmental problems, Kalmykia has for a number of years participated in the preparation of fundamental documents that are effective mechanisms of the Tehran Convention and the Caspian Environmental Programme (CEP). The main areas of the Republic's participation in the environmental protection activities of the convention were the protection of the marine environment of the Caspian Sea from pollution, conservation, restoration, sustainable and rational use of its natural resources.

Kalmykia has been actively cooperating with the Caspian Regional Thematic Centers (CRTCs) within the framework of CEP since 1998. Together with the CRTC on Legal and Regulatory and Economic Mechanisms (CRTC REM) on the basis of the Centre for International Projects of the Republic, proposals on approaches and experience of cooperation with UNEP and other international organizations in solving problems of Caspian water ecosystem management, on the current system and problems of Caspian management within the Republic were developed.

Together with the CRTC on combating desertification, research work was carried out to assess the socio-economic consequences of desertification processes on the Russian coast of the Caspian Sea. As part of cooperation with the CRTC on biodiversity conservation, risk factors affecting biological and landscape diversity on the territory of Kalmykia, including the Caspian Sea coast were identified. Kalmykia made a certain contribution to the development of the National Report of the Russian Federation “State and Conservation of Biological and Landscape Diversity of the Caspian Region” (2000). Scientists and experts from Kalmykia studied biological diversity, identified risk factors affecting biological and landscape diversity, and gave recommendations on the protection and restoration of biological diversity in the coastal and marine areas of the Caspian Sea.

Special attention was dedicated to the activities of the Republic to improve the management of coastal ecosystems of the Caspian Sea, as the Kalmyk coast of the Caspian Sea is a convenient testing ground for studying coastal profiles for a comprehensive study of the Caspian Sea. In the 2000s, justifications for the implementation of a pilot project on integrated transboundary management and planning of the coastal zone on the territory of the Lagan district of the Republic of Kalmykia were developed. Assessment of the resource potential of the coastal zone of Kalmykia was carried out, a data bank of natural resources of the Lagan district was formed, analysis of natural conditions of the coastal zone was conducted, and a mechanism for ensuring environmental objectives in the formulation of programmes for the rational use of the coastal zone of the Lagan district of Kalmykia was developed.

Within the period of Tehran Convention development, Kalmykia's experts took an active part in various events and forums: seminar “Improvement of Caspian Sea ecosystem manage-

ment” (Moscow, March 2000); expert meeting within the framework of the Caspian Ecological Programme (Moscow, October 2000); working meeting on the formation of the Concept of the Action Plan on the improvement of management of marine and coastal ecosystems of the Caspian region and issues of investment policy of the Caspian Ecological Programme (Moscow, October 2000). These events became the basis for further activities of the Republic’s experts on the protection of natural resources of the Caspian Sea.

In September 2001, the CEP collected data for the creation of the Caspian Sea Information System (CaspSis). The experts carried out organizational work on the collection of necessary data on the Republic of Kalmykia. Exploratory research work was performed within the framework of the CEP Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis. The materials received formed the basis of the CEP report from the Republic of Kalmykia to identify the region’s priority objectives for addressing Caspian Sea problems to improve the living conditions of the population, which were presented at the Third Expert Meeting of the CRTC PREM “Assessment of Legal and Economic Mechanisms Applied to the Protection of the Caspian Sea Environment” (Moscow, August 2001).

In order to discuss and strengthen regional ties between non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and coordinate their activities, Kalmykia’s experts took part in a stakeholders’ seminar on the Caspian Sea (Azerbaijan, June 2007), which highlighted the need for joint activities within the framework of CEP and the Convention Secretariat (e.g. Caspian Day, preparation of training materials, etc.). Every year, Kalmykia participates in the “Caspian Sea Day”, established to commemorate the entry into force of the Tehran Convention on August 12, which is one of the effective mechanisms for involving the local population in the protection of the Caspian Sea.

Today, on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the signing of the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea – the Tehran Convention, the role of the experience gained, and opportunities realized by the Republic of Kalmykia in the common cause of uniting the efforts of stakeholders in protecting the natural environment of the Caspian Sea is evident. One of the examples of such united efforts to protect the Caspian Sea is the active participation of the scientific community of the B.B. Gorodovikov Kalmyk State University in the Association of Universities and Research Centers of the Caspian countries.

Y.G. BEZRODNY. Participant of events within the framework of the Tehran Convention, branch of LUKOIL Engineering LLC, VolgogradNIPImorneft, Volgograd

“CONTRIBUTION OF LUKOIL OIL COMPANY SPECIALISTS TO THE DEVELOPMENT AND ESTABLISHMENT OF THE TEHRAN CONVENTION”.

Translated from Russian language

LUKOIL won the tender for the study, exploration, and production of hydrocarbons in 1997 and pioneered the development of oil fields in the Russian sector of the Caspian Sea, setting its strategic goal to become one of the world’s leading oil companies at the turn of the XXI century. In view of the special conditions of the location of OOO LUKOIL-Nizhnevolskneft’s license areas, namely the northern shallow, well-warmed, and therefore the most highly productive water area of the Caspian Sea, which is closed and isolated from the World Ocean, the subsoil user had to offer technologies that would ensure the necessary protection of the marine environment from pollution and compliance with international conventions, strict national environmental legislation, and regulations. To achieve this, in 1998, leading Russian environmental scientists together with LUKOIL specialists developed and the Russian Ministry of Natural Re-

sources approved Special Environmental and Fishery Requirements for Geological Research, Exploration, and Production of Hydrocarbons in the Protected Zone in the Northern Part of the Caspian Sea (SRERT, 1998), which were based on the principle of “zero” discharge.

Years of practical experience of OOO LUKOIL-Nizhnevolzhskneft’s development of license areas in the Russian sector of the Caspian Sea have shown the high efficiency of this small in volume but very capacious in content regulatory document, which is based on the principle of “zero” waste discharge into the sea. Data from literature sources and observations of hydrometeorological characteristics were analyzed in preparation for LUKOIL’s prospecting and exploration work in the Northern Caspian, and a detailed regime generalization was carried out for the areas of planned drilling. A storm situation bank for the historical period (44 years) was prepared. Computer digitization of atmospheric pressure maps and wind calculations for storm situations were performed. Two— and three-dimensional hydrodynamic models of different levels of spatial resolution were developed, and calculations were performed for the indicated storms, wind waves, sea level, and currents at different horizons. Probabilistic modeling was carried out, and characteristics of the rare recurrence of the most important hydrochemical parameters were obtained. Later, the results of historical data and actual studies combined with the materials of industrial environmental monitoring provided invaluable assistance to the subsoil user during the very acute public hearings on the planned economic activity and the state environmental expertise of the project documentation.

I was invited in 2000, having already had experience in designing environmentally safe development of offshore oil and gas projects for OOO LUKOIL-Astrakhanmorneft, OOO LUKOIL-Nizhnevolzhskneft, OOO Caspian Oil Company, OOO Megatron NVK, Overseas Operating Company Ltd., and others, as a national expert from the Russian Federation on the documents elaboration of the Caspian Environmental Programme in the Center for International Projects, where the drafting of the International Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea and its Protocols was actively underway. Professional specialists (G.M. Abdurakhmanov, T.P. Butylina, S.G. Golubeva, I.S. Zonn, D.N. Katunin, N.I. Litvinova, V.A. Markov, S.K. Monakhov, B.N. Morozov, A.A. Mungiev, etc.) in various spheres of activity formulated proposals from the Russian Federation to the future Convention, which is vitally important in the conditions of rapid development of offshore hydrocarbons by new Caspian states. The practical experience of OOO LUKOIL, acquired in the process of actual development of offshore hydrocarbon fields in the Northern Caspian Sea, which was proposed for discussion by the working national groups of the Caspian states on the Convention to be developed, was extremely important.

Constructive proposals from LUKOIL’s oilmen and their practical experience were incorporated into the final version of the international Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea, which was signed on November 4, 2003, and became effective on August 12, 2006. It took 8 years to finalize the document, which reflected the efforts of five coastal states to reach an agreement on regional actions to protect the fragile ecosystem of the Caspian Sea. It should be noted that LUKOIL is the only Russian oil company developing the subsoil of the Northern Caspian on a real and large scale (figure), strictly complies with the provisions of the Tehran Convention and its Protocols, and its own corporate standards, which sometimes exceed international and Russian legislative and regulatory environmental requirements. Such an example is very positive and is supported by supervisory authorities and subsoil users from the Russian Federation and neighboring countries.



A. A. MUNGIEV. Participant in the development and implementation of the Tehran Convention in 1995-2020, SINTEKO-N LLC, Republic of Dagestan, Makhachkala

“OIL POLLUTION CLEANUP AND INDUSTRIAL AND DRILLING WASTE TREATMENT AND DISPOSAL UNDER THE «CASPIAN ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMME SMALL GRANTS PROGRAMME»”.

Translated from Russian language

The “Small Grants Programmes”, funded by the GEF and the World Bank, were of great importance within the scope of the Caspian Environmental Programme (CEP). In 2003, SINTECO with more than 20 years of experience in neutralization of oil-contaminated and drilling wastes, soil and water treatment from oil and oil products contamination, and rehabilitation of damaged landscapes, won a grant under the “Small Grants Programme” funded by GEF and the World Bank. The project aimed to implement the technology of biodegradation of oil contamination of water, soil, and oil sludge in one of the oldest oil fields in Dagestan, specifically the Berikeyskoye oil field, covering an area of about 15 hectares.

The project was financed on a parity basis by the World Bank and NVC Megatron from the Russian Party. As a rule, the process of cleaning from pollution is complex, combining physical and chemical methods with microbiological reclamation and, at the final stage, with the organi-





Territory treatment results after 2 months



Drilling Waste Disposal Site

zation of regulated succession of restored landscapes or water areas. The cleanup process consisted of three phases:

- Construction of oil traps and a drainage system to prevent oil-rich fluids flowing from the wells onto the landscape and into water bodies.
- Plowing and treatment of the territory with a biopreparation and application of specialized fertilizers and loosening agents.
- Seeding clean areas with pioneer crops.

Barley was shown in spring 2004 in the areas of the territory where pollution reduction to satisfactory values was achieved. The sowing became an indicator showing that soil fertility was restored. Pollution monitoring was carried out during the cleanup process.



Prior to treatment



Nine months later

SINTECO LLC, in cooperation with Tsentrkaspneftegaz LLC, created a landfill for processing and neutralization of drilling waste generated during drilling in the Caspian Sea water area and implementation of rehabilitation measures in case of emergency situations during oil and gas production, transportation, and processing on the territory of the Republic of Dagestan. This project was implemented within the concept of “zero discharge” into the Caspian Sea during exploration and production of hydrocarbon resources in its water area. LLC SINTECO also received a grant in 2009 under CEP Phase 3 to improve waste treatment technology and develop the LLC SINTECO landfill.

More than 3000 tons of drilling wastes were neutralized at the landfill, including with the support of CEP’s Small Grants Programme. These wastes were generated during drilling of the Tsentralnaya-1 well in the Caspian Sea, and further neutralization of contaminated soils of drilling and other industrial wastes formed during the operation of oil and gas fields of Transneft, Gazprom, Rosneft-Dagneft, Kaspoil, and other oil and gas producing companies in Dagestan and beyond.

FRITS SCHLINGEMANN, United Nations Environmental Programme, Switzerland

— Please, tell us about the time you worked in connection with Tehran Convention and in what capacity.

Can you please tell us something about the time the Convention was elaborated? Any discussions, debates?

What was the biggest challenge while working/negotiating things? How did you overcome them?

In your view, what is the greatest development through these years? The biggest change between TC then and TC now?

— Reflecting on the history of the Caspian Environmental Programme (CEP), it is worth noting the joint efforts that began as early as 1995, a year before my appointment as the director of the regional office of UNEP. This initiative was a response to the collective request of the five Caspian littoral states during a meeting convened in Almaty. The project gained momentum in 1998 with the start of the first GEF project, marking the beginning of a series of successful endeavors supported by three consecutive GEF projects until 2012. This path was characterized by trilateral cooperation between the World Bank, UNDP, and UNEP, each bringing its unique strengths. Our collective goal was to lay the groundwork for substantial investment support for the participating countries. In 2004, we organized a joint forum in Baku, and despite some challenges, this experience provided valuable information and learning opportunities for all stakeholders.

Recognizing the strengths and resources of our partners, a strategic decision was made to entrust UNDP with the leading role, considering its influential position and strong ties with the GEF. This was a logical step, considering the regional dynamics and the experience that UNDP brought to the project. Since 1995, the process of preparing the convention has been underway, lasting eight years and accompanied by annual meetings. These meetings were an integral part of the successful advancement of the project, running parallel to the preparation of the Caspian Environmental Programme and GEF projects. It is noteworthy that the CEP played a key role in shaping the Convention, symbolizing the spirit of cooperation among the five participating countries.

Despite the complexity of the negotiation process, no serious obstacles arose, which testifies to the commitment and cooperation of all involved countries. This period was marked by a

constructive atmosphere of learning, fostering mutual understanding and progress. It is also important to acknowledge the complex geopolitical landscape of that time and to consider the perspectives and challenges of various participating states, including the United States. The issues arising from this dynamic underscored the need for regional initiatives and leadership to achieve our common goals.

The path to the successful conclusion of the agreement in the Caspian region was a testament to the resilience and dedication of many participants. When I assumed the position of director of the UNEP regional office, I had doubts about the feasibility of such an ambitious project. Our executive director from Germany expressed skepticism about the feasibility of implementing this agreement. However, when we successfully concluded the agreement in 2003, his enthusiasm was evident. He generously praised the collective efforts of all participants in a letter to the UN Secretary-General, emphasizing our contribution to peace and cooperation in the region. This recognition, including the gratitude of Kofi Annan, significantly enhanced the credibility of the UN project.

However, the process was not without its challenges. The Caspian littoral states emerging from the Soviet Union grappled with issues of national sovereignty and harbored certain distrust towards regional cooperation, especially regarding Iran. These factors created obstacles to the development of regional interaction, which we had to overcome with sensitivity and perseverance. Our approach involved engaging with those who were open to cooperation, and we continued our work despite limited support from the UNEP headquarters and varying levels of enthusiasm from the Caspian littoral states themselves.

A key aspect of our strategy was frequent travel throughout the region and personal diplomacy. I spent a lot of time meeting with representatives and ambassadors from Russia, Iran, and other countries, including Turkmenistan, to build trust and understand their perspectives. Taking a broader view, the period from 1995 to 2012 was marked by continuous progress despite challenging issues. Our efforts to integrate the GEF and Convention processes were mostly successful, but we encountered obstacles in securing further support, especially considering the geopolitical sensitivity associated with Iran and Russia. The process of international cooperation, especially in a region with diverse political dynamics, requires a deep understanding of each participant's perspective and a commitment to mutual respect and trust. The signing of the Convention in Tehran and Turkmenistan's subsequent participation highlighted the nuanced nature of diplomacy and the influence of strategic collaboration.

One of the key aspects of our work in the Caspian region was considering the need for protocols under the Convention. Since the Convention itself is framework-based and does not prescribe specific actions, these actions needed to be detailed in separate protocols. Initially, we focused on four protocols: oil spills, biodiversity, transboundary environmental impact assessment (EIA), and land-based sources of pollution. While the oil spill protocol was relatively straightforward and based on negotiations between countries, the other three protocols were new territories, posing certain difficulties in the negotiation process. A memorable milestone on this path was the meeting in Bossi, where representatives of environmental ministries and experts from the participating countries gathered in a closed setting. This strategic decision facilitated targeted discussions and led to significant breakthroughs at the outset of negotiations on the four protocols. This moment is a testament to the power of purposeful dialogue and collaboration.

Negotiations on these protocols were not without difficulties, but they were not insurmountable. The progress achieved in these negotiations, culminating in the agreement on four protocols within a decade, was remarkable, especially considering the initial skepticism of the participating countries, which had little experience in such cooperation and carefully guarded their sovereignty.

Negotiations on the Biodiversity Protocol, especially in the context of establishing protected areas, were indeed a complex task requiring careful interaction among all participants.

Ensuring the agreement of all Parties before creating such territories was an important step that helped address the interests of each country and ensure a sustainable solution. Mandates and limitations faced by representatives of different countries complicated the negotiation process. However, the adaptability and perseverance of the negotiators, as well as their willingness to work within these constraints, were key factors in their success. The ability to find compromises and solutions even when faced with rigid constraints is one of the most important aspects of international diplomacy.

Regarding the role of UNEP, it is important to acknowledge both its strengths and weaknesses. Different approaches to environmental protection and diplomacy can be effective in different scenarios. For example, focusing on creating networks and ensuring broad support, as Achim Steiner did, has both its advantages and limitations. In the Caspian process, UNEP's structured approach provided an important tool for coordinating actions and ensuring the participation of all countries, despite its complexities and shortcomings. The process of international cooperation always requires a deep understanding of various interests and a readiness to seek compromises. Our experience and determination in overcoming challenges in the Caspian region reflect the importance of flexibility and tolerance in diplomatic work.

— What is your brightest memory from your work in connection with the Tehran Convention?

— Reflecting on the key moments of my experience, I am particularly proud of the significant progress achieved in Tehran and Ashgabat. The meeting in Ashgabat in 2014 marked a breakthrough in our efforts. We reached consensus on institutional mechanisms and the Protocol on Biodiversity, which was a remarkable achievement given the complexity of the issues at hand. The atmosphere in Ashgabat was one of genuine enthusiasm and cooperation, culminating in the signing of the agreement with the Secretariat. While the signing was not a formal requirement, it symbolized collective joy and commitment to the agreement. The consensus decision of the Conference of the Parties was evidence of the prevailing spirit of cooperation, making formalities secondary during the signing.

The situation with Kazakhstan demonstrated an interesting dynamic. Despite their initial position that their delegation lacked the authority to make certain decisions, it became evident that their participation in the consensus aligned with a broader agreement at the Conference. The question of delegation authority highlighted a procedural aspect that, while important, did not impede our achievements in a broader context. Among other instances, this case showcased the nuanced and sometimes complex interaction during diplomatic negotiations.

In conclusion, this experience underscores the importance of persistence, diplomacy, and comprehensive participation in international environmental agreements. The progress made, especially in reconciling complex issues such as the Protocol on Biodiversity and institutional mechanisms, is testament to the collective efforts and dedication of all involved Parties. It emphasizes the potential for successful collaboration even in challenging conditions and the vital role of various stakeholders in achieving sustainable environmental goals.

— Maybe you have a wish for Tehran Convention on 20 years of its signing? What would you like to see it in future?

Please tell us what you wish to see in next ten years in the context of the Tehran Convention and environmental protection in the Caspian Sea.

— One of the most interesting and forward-thinking aspects of our work was the development of the Protocol on Monitoring, Assessment, and Information Exchange. My enthusiasm for this initiative was inspired by the principles of the Aarhus Convention, where I was fortunate to attend. The Aarhus Convention was a breakthrough in environmental governance, especially in Western Europe, as it granted individuals broad rights to challenge government decisions. This approach influenced our efforts in the Caspian region, particularly considering that

Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan are Parties to the Aarhus Convention. Such alignment provided a solid foundation for the Protocol project, focusing attention on three key areas.

However, the challenge lies in the actual exchange of information between the Convention Parties. Despite principled agreements, difficulties persist in the free exchange of information, as it is often seen as a powerful tool of influence. The goal of the Protocol on Monitoring, Assessment, and Information Exchange is to encourage and facilitate the exchange of crucial environmental information. I believe this Protocol is crucial for the Convention's future, as it fosters the development of a culture of open communication and cooperation among participating states. Looking ahead, it can be said that the Convention's frameworks are approaching the need for operationalization. With the establishment of the Secretariat and the imminent ratification of the Moscow Protocol, the focus should shift to organizing operational work and ensuring its financing. Success in this area is achievable, as evidenced by past efforts.

In this regard, instead of exhaustive implementation programs, it would be more strategically sound to identify several key areas within additional Protocols to the Convention for the implementation of individual projects. Such an approach aligns with my belief in the necessity of taking gradual steps rather than striving for radical and all-encompassing changes. Excellent models for this are joint exercises, similar to those currently conducted for oil spill response. They not only contribute to cooperation but also demonstrate tangible benefits of collaborative work, which can then evolve into the adoption of common policies and further collective efforts.

Speaking more creatively, I once imagined the Secretariat not as a stationary institution but as a mobile, "floating" Secretariat housed on a ship. While this idea is unlikely to ever be realized, it embodies the spirit of innovation and adaptability that, in my opinion, are necessary for successful environmental management. This dream underscores the need for flexibility and the search for new approaches to solving the complex problems of the Caspian Sea.

— Can you say that this experience influenced your life in a way? If yes, how?

— Reflecting on my participation in the Caspian Environmental Programme, I realize how deeply it has impacted me and become an integral part of my life. Among the initiatives I proposed, one of the most effective strategies was building trust among the participating countries. We achieved this through a unique approach that, while unconventional, proved to be highly successful. We organized training courses on environmental diplomacy in Geneva, inviting delegates from various conventions and representatives from the Caspian region. These courses played a crucial role in strengthening mutual understanding and trust among the participants. They learned not only about the nuances of environmental diplomacy but also about collaboration and relationship-building in general.

Another important aspect of our work was focusing on scientific networks, which I believe are critically important for advancing environmental initiatives. During my tenure as regional director, I established strong ties with the Russian Academy of Sciences. The significance of such connections cannot be overstated, as they brought influential experts and academic expertise to our discussions and decision-making processes. We also recognized the importance of involving scientific committees and sought to engage academies of sciences in the discussion process. This approach aimed to amplify the influence that these scientific organizations and individual experts have within their governments. While not all attempts in this direction were successful, the principle underlying such an approach remains highly promising.

I noticed that scientists, especially from the former Soviet republics and Iran, often had more open and effective communication channels than their political counterparts. They frequently collaborated and exchanged ideas, overcoming typical barriers faced by politicians. This realization underscored the potential of utilizing existing scientific networks to achieve the environmental goals set forth. Finally, our journey in the Caspian Environmental Programme underscores the importance of perseverance, diplomacy, and comprehensive participation.

The progress achieved, especially in reaching agreements on such complex issues as the Protocol on Biodiversity and institutional mechanisms, is evidence of collective efforts and commitment from all involved Parties. It highlights the potential for successful cooperation even in challenging conditions and the vital role of various stakeholders in achieving sustainable environmental goals.

— Have you ever been to the Caspian Sea? What did you think when you saw it for the first time?

— My experience working with the Caspian Sea has been diverse and profoundly impactful, shaping my understanding of the region and its environmental challenges. Traveling along the shores of the Caspian, I witnessed stark contrasts in landscapes and ways of life. In Azerbaijan, particularly beyond Baku towards the Iranian border, the remnants of abandoned oil wells sharply contrast with the bustling and lively areas often frequented by Iranian tourists in the summer. Such juxtapositions highlighted the environmental and socio-economic issues of the region.

Crossing into Turkmenistan, strict border controls and the stark contrast in the urban landscape of Turkmenbashi from the Iranian side served as reminders of the unique political and cultural landscapes characterizing each of the Caspian littoral states. Kazakhstan, on the other hand, presented a different picture with its pristine beaches and untapped potential, reminiscent of some of the world's most sought-after tourist destinations yet still largely undeveloped.

These journeys across the Caspian Sea were not merely geographical expeditions but deep immersions into the complex socio-political and environmental tapestry of the region. Interacting with national representatives across various spheres was simultaneously challenging and rewarding. Such interactions, sometimes occurring under less-than-ideal circumstances, such as flight delays from Aktau to Baku, provided a unique insight into the dynamics of the region.

Regarding our work with the Caspian Environmental Programme, the commitment of individuals like Tatiana and Gozel was instrumental. Managing the political landscape, especially in bilateral discussions with high-ranking officials, required a delicate balance of honesty, respect, and strategic communication. Learning to express one's opinions candidly yet diplomatically, while staying within cultural and political boundaries, was a decisive aspect of our success.

This experience underscores the importance of understanding and respecting diverse perspectives and approaches to a single issue. It also speaks to the necessity of open and honest dialogue to facilitate effective international cooperation. The time I spent in and around the Caspian Sea has been a significant part of my life, offering valuable lessons in diplomacy, environmental conservation, and the complexities of regional cooperation.

Photographs by users of the Pixabay platform
Wikilimages, Roya Mehralizade, Faik Nagiyev; the Pexels
platform Ruslan Atayev, Amina, Teymur Mammadov,
Ren Lavsad, akb.ph; and the Unsplash platform Yasmin
Peyman, Roozbeh Eslami, Anton Rybakov were used as
illustrations.

Tehran Convention, 2025

www.tehranconvention.org

2025