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Research Article

International Politics of Russia's Water Strategy[1]

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Abstract. This article summarizes the outcomes of the implementation of the Water Strategy of the Russian Federation for the period up to 2020 in its part concerning international politics, and assesses the new challenges to international cooperation in the field of the protection and use of transboundary waters that Russia is expected to face in the coming decade. The 2010s were marked by both a changing situation in the field of water availability in Russia, its neighbour countries and the whole world, and changing scholarly approaches to the impact of water scarcity on international politics. Most of the approaches agreed that water scarcity more often leads to international cooperation. While agreeing with this approach, the authors critically assess the assumption that water scarcity is more often a source of conflicts, and that multilateral international institutions are the best tool to mitigate these conflicts. The authors find that this approach is based on Hobbesian notion of the natural condition of war of all against all for scarce resources, the only alternative to which are institutions of coercion, albeit not always perfect. The authors also find that other approaches based on Hobbesian political philosophy separate international political processes caused by fear and by scarcity, the two most important "passions that incline men to peace," according to Hobbes. Fear, including the fear of scarcity, tends to drive conflicts, but scarcity as such is more likely to generate cooperation. While multilateral institutions are sometimes capable of mitigating conflicts, in conditions of water scarcity, bilateral and minilateral – that is, created by a small number of parties – institutions of cooperation turn out to be more effective. The experience of Russia's interaction with its neighbours in the field of protection and use of transboundary water resources considered in the article provides yet more evidence of this. The authors conclude that the international politics component of Russia's water strategy for the coming period is more consistent with the approach that assumes that water scarcity generates cooperation rather than conflicts. They also conclude that bilateral and minilateral institutions of cooperation offer countries destined to share a common river basin instruments of interaction that are more suitable for the conditions of a particular basin than multilateral institutions can offer.

Keywords: Russia; water policy; water scarcity; international cooperation; multilateral institutions; minilateralism; Hobbes.

[1] English translation from the Russian text: Lanko D.A., Nechiporuk D.M. 2021. Mezhdunarodnopoliticheskie Aspekty Vodnoj Strategii Rossii. *Mezhdunarodnye process [International Trends]*. 19(2). P. 105–120. DOI 10.17994/IT.2021.19.2.65.1

The Water Strategy of the Russian Federation adopted in 2009 expired in 2020,[2] and a new version has not yet been developed. The resulting pause gives us an opportunity not only to update the list of tactical tasks for the next 10–15 years in order to set the most ambitious, yet realistic, plans, but also to rethink the key issues related to the fundamental provisions of this strategy. Today, the most important of these underlying principles is based on the assumption that water scarcity supposedly triggers conflicts. This assumption was developed in the 1980s by the then Egyptian Foreign Minister Boutros Boutros-Ghali, who would later go on to become Secretary-General of the United Nayions (Peichert, 2003). However, as we will show here, this assumption has not been sufficiently confirmed over the past decades, although it is still extremely popular among experts and researchers today.

In the 2000s, the thesis on the conflicting nature of water scarcity was widely used in developing the fundamental principles of the international political aspects of Russia's water policy. Russian researchers have repeatedly referred to the "conflict aspect of the global water scarcity problem" (for example, (Orlov et al., 2011: 49)). Russia's National Security Strategy, adopted in 2015, names water scarcity among key challenges, along with climate change.[3] Dmitry Kirillov, Head of the Federal Agency for Water Resources, noted that "the lack of (water) resources is already leading to tensions between states."[4] The purpose of this article is to critically rethink the assumption about the initially presumed conflict potential of water scarcity, including both its theoretical and practical aspects, which will help draw up specific recommendations for Russia's water diplomacy.

We believe that water scarcity is much more likely to lead to international cooperation on a bilateral or minilateral (i.e., between three to five countries) basis than to aggravate existing international conflicts.

In theoretical and philosophical terms, water scarcity is a particular case of a "need," which Thomas Hobbes regarded as an independent category, distinct from the category of "fear." If fear, including fear of scarcity, breeds conflict, then scarcity as such breeds cooperation. Awareness of this at the turn of the 21st century led to a turn in scientific studies of international relations devoted to international politics in the context of water scarcity. The beginning of the 21st century saw an increase in the number of works that looked at the situation with water scarcity as an opportunity to establish transboundary cooperation between states.

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[2] Water Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020. Approved by Decree No. 1235-r of the Government of the Russian Federation. 2009. 27 August. Available at: http://govemment.ru/docs/10049/ (accessed: 26.03.2021).

[3] The National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation. Approved by Decree No. 683 of the President of the Russian Federation "On the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation." 2015. 31 December. Available at: https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICkB6BZ29/content/id/294430 (accessed: 26.03.2021).

[4] Kirillov D.M. 2020. More Expensive Than Oil: Interview with the Head of the Federal Agency for Water Resources Dmitry Kirillov. *Komsomolskaya Pravda.* 25 June. Available at: https://www.kp.ru/daily/27147.3/4241488/ (accessed: 26.03.2021).

The thesis about the threat of conflict in the event of water scarcity is mainly used by those who call for water control by the multilateral institutions of global governance. It seems to us, however, that control of the world's water reserves by multilateral institutions is disadvantageous for states with significant water reserves, including Russia. Moreover, under conditions of increasing water scarcity, including in some regions of Russia and in neighbouring countries, multilateral institutions demonstrate their inability to offer effective water management models. As the case of Central Asia, which will be discussed in this article, shows, declining water resources coupled with the inability of multilateral institutions to offer effective models for their management do not escalate regional conflicts. On the contrary, there are some steps, albeit symbolic, to establish cooperation between the countries of the region that have different water availability.

Russia has considerable positive experience of bilateral cooperation in the use of transboundary waters. Promoting this experience in the international arena could become an element of Russia's water diplomacy, strengthening its "soft power" in general. The analysis of the legal framework for cooperation between Russia and its neighbours in this area, detailed below, allows us to clarify the specifics of the Russian experience. At the same time, the results of this analysis allow us to identify the most important task of the Russian water diplomacy for the coming period, which is to establish cooperation with its neighbours in this area on a minilateral basis. On the one hand, this stems from the peculiarities of Russia's border water systems; on the other hand, minilateral cooperation offers an alternative in cases where multilateral institutions fail to effectively manage water resources.

1

The discussion of the conflict potential of resource scarcity is rooted in the political philosophy of Thomas Hobbes, which has led some scholars to conclude that material scarcity is the effect and cause of conflict in the state of nature (Newey, 2010: 66). In Hobbes' *Leviathan*, the concept of scarcity and "need" (Hobbes, 2004)) often appear alongside the concept of fear. According to Hobbes, fear and need make the state of nature what it is. In Chapter VIII of *Leviathan*, fear and want explain "the use of unjust, or dishonest means." (Hobbes, 2019: 76), and "slavery" in Chapter X. (Hobbes, 2019: 97). Chapter XIII, which characterizes the state of nature as "war of all against all," defines fear and want as "(t)he passions that incline men to peace" (Hobbes, 2019: 136). And yet need is not fear. In this regard, Chapter IV of *Leviathan* declares need, but not fear, to be "the mother of all inventions" (Hobbes, 2019: 30).

International politics is driven by both fear and scarcity, although the two have different effects on it, as can be seen in the works of neorealists and neoliberals in international relations theory, influenced by Hobbes' *Leviathan*. Speaking of the influence Thomas Hobbes had on neorealism, Michael Joseph Smith observes that "his notion of the international state of nature as a state of war is shared by virtually everyone calling himself a realist" (Smith, 1987: 13). Under conditions of fear, the neoreal-

ists argue, "hegemony makes cooperation more feasible" (Gilpin, 2001: 94), but under conditions of scarcity, cooperation can also occur without hegemony. According to Stephen Krasner, the interaction of states may, for instance, "structure the pattern of world trade, the distribution of radio frequencies, the use of outer space, or the rules governing the exploitation of deep seabed nodules" (Krasner, 1982: 498).

Thomas Hobbes had as much influence on neoliberalism as he did on neorealism. Leo Strauss wrote that "if we may call liberalism that political doctrine which regards as the fundamental fact the rights (…) of man and which identifies the function of the state with the protection or the safeguarding of those rights, we must say that the founder of liberalism was Hobbes" (Strauss 2007: 174). Based on the liberal ideas of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms as the most important principle of international law, Peter H. Gleick, the pioneer of research on the conflict potential of resource scarcity, introduced the concept of the "human right to water" to international relations scholars (Gleick, 1998). He also became one of the most consistent proponents of the thesis about the conflict potential of water scarcity. To support this claim, in one of his works he even admitted the possibility of using hydraulic structures as weapons in a conflict between states (Gleick, 1993).

Unlike neorealists, neoliberals do not distinguish between the fear-driven and scarcity-driven aspects of international politics, treating scarcity-driven politics as a kind of fear-driven politics – the fear of scarcity. In their works, the right to water appears not as an end in itself, but as a means of avoiding international conflicts over water. The right to water, in their view, is the concern of multilateral international institutions. For example, Francis Cheneval (Cheneval, 2007) refers to Thomas Hobbes, arguing that multilateral institutions are becoming increasingly important in the face of transnational threats, including water scarcity. What matters to neoliberals in *Leviathan* is the contrast between Europe of the 17th century, where people lived under a government that held everyone in fear (Hobbes, 2019: 133), and contemporary America, where "savage people (…) have no government at all" (Hobbes, 2019: 135). By analogy, today they find in every region of the world "zones of stable peace," supported, in their view, by multilateral institutions of global governance, and "zones of war" (Solingen, 1998), where the recommendations of such institutions are rejected.

So, scarcity is as significant a motive for international political behaviour as fear, but the influence of these two driving forces is different. Neoliberals see multilateral institutions of global governance as a remedy against fear, while neorealists are sceptical about the potential of such institutions. Yet neorealists also affirm the possibility of bilateral and minilateral cooperation under conditions of scarcity. There is some debate about the ability of multilateral cooperation to overcome the fear of scarcity, but scarcity without fear – "the mother of all inventions," according to Hobbes – facilitates the emergence of diverse forms of cooperation, depending on the conditions specific to each case.

2

At the beginning of the 21st century, the scientific schools studying the impact of water resources on international politics underwent a transformation. Previously, most of them followed the tradition established during the Cold War (for example (Cooley, 1984)), which viewed water scarcity as a factor in international conflicts. Meanwhile, in the 21st century, there has been an emerging tendency to view water scarcity as a factor of international cooperation (Grover, 2007). After all, anyone who has read Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book* knows that "water is water, and when there is but one source of supply, all hunting stops while the Jungle People go there for their needs." Russia does not face the problem of acute droughts in its transboundary basins. However, those calling for multilateral control over water resources, including in Russia, often appeal to extreme forms of water scarcity in their arguments.

They gloss over the fact that "the excessive affective motive (in international conflicts) is more dangerous than the one motivated by conditional scarcity" (Sushentsov, 2010: 78). At the beginning of the 21st century, the thesis about the greater conflict potential of redundancy compared to scarcity was recognized by many international relations researchers specializing in water use. For example, in the 2000s, a group of researchers at the Peace Research Institute Oslo led by Nils Petter Gleditsch found that, all other things being equal, the probability of a military conflict between states is higher if the border between them is crossed by a common river (Gleditsch et al., 2006). It cannot be overlooked that the reason military operations are often carried out in river valleys is not because the river's resources cannot be divided by peaceful means, but because it is extremely difficult to conduct military operations in the mountains. Indeed, it is not for nothing that the crossings of the Alps by the armies of Hannibal and Suvorov gained such great fame.

Not surprisingly, this group of researchers later had to focus mainly on intra-state conflicts, since the number of inter-state conflicts over water proved to be small. At the same time, an attempt was made to identify factors of interstate cooperation in conditions of water scarcity (Bohmelt et al., 2014). The very idea that human-induced scarcity of resources, including a deficit of water, not so much leads to conflicts but rather "can produce international cooperation by confronting states and transnational groups with tasks that require collaboration" (Homer-Dixon, 1999: 5), was articulated as early as the 1990s. Based on this hypothesis, Jan Selby confirmed that the likelihood of armed conflicts over water at the interstate level is low, unlike the conflicts over oil (Selby, 2005). And the frequency of such conflicts at the intra-state level is higher.

A team of Oregon State University researchers led by Aaron T. Wolf examined the treaty framework for international water cooperation. The corpus of regulations they assembled includes more than 600 agreements, beginning with the 1871 Russian–Austrian treaty regarding navigation and hydraulic works along the Vistula and San rivers.[5]

[5] Transboundary Freshwater Dispute Database. Programme in Water Conflict Management and Transformation, College of Earth, Ocean and Atmospheric Sciences, Oregon State University. Available at: https://transboundarywaters.science.oregonstate.edu/content/transboundary-freshwater-dispute-database (accessed: 26.03.2021).

The signing of this agreement was the first step toward the Russian–Austrian treaty of 1873 and the creation of the League of the Three Emperors. However, the database does not include any agreements signed after 2007, with the last document involving Russia being the 2002 agreement with Belarus on the protection and rational use of transboundary water bodies. Moreover, the group's report does not contain an analysis of such agreements involving post-Soviet Russia since they limited their analysis to the agreements concluded in English, French, Spanish, German, Polish, and Portuguese (Giordano et al., 2014: 249).

The conclusions of the researchers, even without reference to the Russian experience, seem to be optimistic. The main conclusion is that "… most of the world's transboundary area and the population living within transboundary basins are now formally governed by at least one treaty" (Giordano et al., 2014: 261). The need to share a common basin more often leads to cooperation between states, forcing them to enter into international agreements, rather than provoking conflicts between them. Another group of researchers, also relying in their work on the hypothesis of Thomas Homer-Dixon, showed that cooperation most often occurs in situations of moderate water scarcity, while in cases of acute or insignificant scarcity the probability of cooperation is lower (Dinar, Dinar, Kurukulasiriya, 2011). Finally, once established, bilateral cooperation institutions are more likely to be preserved than to disappear when conflicts between these states escalate for reasons other than water distribution.

3

The Water Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020 does not mention the conflict potential of water scarcity, and the word "conflict" is not mentioned even once. Nevertheless, it contains a great deal about international cooperation, described as "a key aspect of state policy in the sphere of water relations" and "the most important mechanism for the implementation of the Strategy." Similarly, the text of the 2015 National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation mentions freshwater scarcity as a challenge to state security, along with the effects of climate change. Here, too, however, water scarcity was not named as a cause of international conflict. Instead, the document pointed to international cooperation as a tool to "counter threats in the sphere of ecological security and environmental management."

Both documents recognized the potential of water scarcity for international cooperation, but did not clearly distinguish between multilateral cooperation on the one hand, and regional, bilateral, and minilateral cooperation on the other. The need for such a division is due to the fact that there are two types of environmental threats: local and global (Bhagwati, 2004: 158). The former often affect the security of two or more neighbouring states, while the latter affect the security of all countries, regardless of their distance from the source of pollution. One of the few examples of global environmental threats is climate change, mentioned in the National Security Strategy, along with water scarcity.

In the 21st century, the global industrial giants in North America, Western Europe, and East Asia have begun to adopt, albeit slowly, models of sound environmental management to mitigate the effects of climate change. This should have a positive impact on the fate of countries as distant from these regions as the island states of Oceania, whose very existence has been threatened by rising sea levels as a result of climate change. This will also help improve the accuracy of hydrometeorological forecasts (Scher, Messori, 2019), including forecasts of winter snowpack formation in areas north of the 40th parallel north (Adam, Hamlet, Lattinmaier, 2009). In other words, these efforts directly affect Russia, where snow plays a significant role in the water cycle, exacerbating or reducing (depending on the amount of precipitation during the cold season) water shortages in some Russian regions.

Attempts to address water scarcity are also being made globally, primarily as part of the sixth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2030.[6] Countries around the world are striving to ensure the accessibility and sustainable management of water and sanitation for the entire world population, especially, where necessary, through transboundary cooperation. In practical terms, this means attempts to ensure that by 2030, all countries that have to share transboundary river basins, without exception, will have signed agreements regulating the use of their waters. Given the infinite diversity of transboundary river basins and the specific relations of the states that share them, the SDGs contain extremely vague requirements for the content of such agreements.

The clarification of such requirements, as suggested by some researchers (for example (Hussein, Menga, Greco, 2018)), seems superfluous. This would have a negative impact on the attainability of the SDGs, considering that, as of 2020, even economically developed countries had not provided statistical data on 40–50% of the indicators (Gennari, Navarro, 2020). Moreover, it contradicts the objective of ensuring Russia's sovereignty over the watercourses of Siberia and the Far East (Likhacheva, 2020: 173–176) and, more broadly, over all of the country's water resources. Water scarcity is a local threat because implementing water management models in one river basin will not help alleviate water scarcity in another river basin. While mitigating the effects of global threats requires multilateral cooperation at the global level, growing water scarcity encourages regional, bilateral and minilateral cooperation.

4

Attempts at global water management are in Russia's interest only insofar as they encourage its neighbours to sign bilateral and minilateral agreements with Moscow on the use of transboundary waters. And when they boil down to imposing specific provisions of such agreements under the pretext that the alternative might be a conflict

[6] United Nations General Assembly. Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. New York, 2015. 25–27 September. Available at: https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda (accessed: 26.03.2021).

that, allegedly, would inevitably arise in conditions of water scarcity, such attempts become counterproductive. An important example in the context of Russian interests are the efforts of the UN Economic Commission for Europe to impose a unified model of cooperation on Central Asian countries with regard to the use of the region's scarce water resources under the pretext of mitigating regional conflicts,[7] which were never supported by the Central Asian states.

A number of authors (Hummel, 2017; Menga, 2017), including Russian experts (Borishpolets, 2010; Kim, 2018) and researchers from Central Asian countries themselves (Askeyeva et al., 2017; Zhansautova et al., 2017), point to water scarcity as a crucial element in the context of international conflicts in Central Asia. The readiness to conduct "consistent joint work (…) with international organizations in order to avoid conflict situations" in conditions when "access to clean water is, in fact, one of the challenges to security in the Central Asian region,"[8] is regularly demonstrated by the leaders of the countries located in the lower reaches of major transboundary rivers, namely Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, whose water supply depends on the withdrawal volumes in the upstream countries – Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.

However, even Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are not ready to accept the UNECE recommendations, which suggest not only establishing multilateral control over water withdrawals from transboundary rivers in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, but also over water use in these countries themselves. Dushanbe and Bishkek are even more opposed to the establishment of such control. The latter could cede some rights to uncontrolled water withdrawals from transboundary rivers, but only in exchange for the assistance of multilateral institutions in "addressing poverty, combating natural disasters" and "debt relief" up to "debt cancellation on official bilateral loans,"[9] and in amounts far exceeding the capacity of the multilateral institutions themselves.

The text of Russia's Water Strategy calls for "strengthening (its) role (…) in solving global problems in the field of protection and use of water resources, and in solving the water problems of Central Asia." Mentioning global problems and a particular region in the same sentence gives the impression that the problem cannot be solved at the local level without the involvement of institutions of global governance. However, the latter have already proven to be ineffective in the context of the region's water

[7] UNECE. Water Quality in Transboundary Rivers of Central Asia – The Launch of a Platform for Cooperation. Press release. 2011. 20 September. Available at: https://unece.org/press/water-quality-transboundary-rivers-central-asia-launch-platform-cooperation (accessed: 09.10.2022); Bo Libert, "Draft Concept of the SPECA Strategy on Water, Energy and Environment," Presented at the Fourteenth Session of the SPECA Governing Council, Ashgabat, Turkmenistan. 2019. 21 November. Available at: https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/SPECA/documents/gc/session14/Draft_Concept_of_the_SPECA_Strategy_on_WEE_English.pdf (accessed: 09.10.2022).

[8] Tokayev K.J. Speech at the Meeting of the Valdai Discussion Club. Sochi, Russia. 2019. 3 October. Available at: http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/61719 (accessed: 09.10.2022).

[9] Rakhmon E. Speech at the High-Level International Conference on the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Implementation of the International Decade for Action "Water for Life" 2005–2015, Dushanbe, Tajikistan. 2010. June 8. Available at: mfa.tj/uploads/main/2013/03/kitobi_ob_eng.pdf (accessed: 09.10.2022).

problems. This does not mean, however, that there will be an aggravation of conflicts caused by water scarcity. On the contrary, tensions between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan on the use of shared waters have eased recently.

In particular, Shavkat Mirziyoyev was a vocal crtici of the construction of the Rogun Hydropower Plant in Tajikistan on the Vakhsh River during his tenure as Prime Minister of Uzbekistan under President Karimov. Later, after becoming president of Uzbekistan, he supported, for some time, the draft UN Conventions on the use of the Amu Darya and Syr Darya water resources proposed by UN Secretary-General António Guterres.[10] However, after his visit to Tajikistan in March 2018,[11] Mirziyoyev dropped his criticism of the Rogun Hydropower Plant, seeing the supply of electricity generated by it as a potential for the economic development of his country. Though symbolic, the improvement in Tajik–Uzbek relations is an example of the positive impact of bilateral and minilateral cooperation on the protection and use of transboundary waters when the solutions offered by multilateral institutions prove untenable.

5

Russia has concluded agreements on cooperation in the use of transboundary waters with ten neighbouring states, more than any other country in the world. One of these agreements is trilateral – with Finland and Norway.[12] Bilateral agreements have been concluded with Finland,[13] Ukraine,[14] Mongolia,[15] Estonia,[16] Belarus,[17] China,[18]

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[10] "Beginning of Russian–Uzbekistani alks in Expanded Format," President of Russia. 2017. 5 April. Available at: http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/54222 (accessed: 26.03.2021).

[11] Panfilova V. 2018. Rakhmon and Mirziyoyev Fraternize: There are Almost no Unresolved Issues between Dushanbe and Tashkent," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta.* 12 March. Available at: https://www.ng.ru/cis/2018-03-12/5_7187_rahmon.html (accessed: 26.03.2021).

[12] Agreement between the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the Government of Norway and the Government of Finland Concerning the Regulation of Lake Inari by means of the Kaitakoski Hydroelectric Power Station and Dam. 1959. 29 April. Available at: https://iea.uoregon.edu/treaty-text/2681 (accessed: 09.10.2022).

[13] Agreement between Finland and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics Concerning Frontier Watercourses. Signed at Helsinki. 1964. 24 April. Available at: https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20537/volume-537-I-7804-Other.pdf (accessed: 09.10.2022).

[14] Agreement between the Government of Ukraine and the Government of the Russian Federation on the Joint Use and Protection of Transboundary Water Bodies. 1992. 19 October. Available at: http://voda.mnr.gov.ru/regulatory/detail.php?ID=3281 (accessed: 26.03.2021).

[15] Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of Mongolia on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Waters. 1995. 11 February. Available at: http://voda.mnr.gov.ru/regulatory/detail.php?ID=3282 (accessed: 26.03.2021).

[16] Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the Republic of Estonia on Cooperation in the Field of Protection and Rational Use of Transboundary Waters. 1997. 20 August. Available at: http://voda.mnr.gov.m/regulatory/detaN.php?ID=3279 (accessed: 26.03.2021).

[17] Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the Republic of Belarus in the Field of Protection and Rational Use of Transboundary Water Bodies. 2002. 24 May. Available at: http://voda.mnr.gov.ru/regulatory/detail.php?ID=3280 (accessed: 26.03.2021).

[18] Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the People's Republic of China on the Rational Use and Protection of Transboundary Waters. 2008. 29 January. Available at: http://voda.mnr.gov.ru/regulatory/detail.php?ID=3278 (accessed: 26.03.2021).

Azerbaijan,[19] Kazakhstan,[20] and Abkhazia.[21] The agreement with Ukraine was terminated in 2014, and there are no agreements with Latvia, Lithuania, Georgia, and North Korea. The results of a comparative analysis of these agreements are presented in Table 1, showing Russia's experience of cooperation with its neighbours in the use of transboundary waters.

Table 1. Russia's agreements with neighbouring countries on the use of transboundary waters

Analysis criterion	Year of agreement									
	1959	1964	1992	1995	1997	2002	2008	2010 (a)	2010 (b)	2011
The main instrument of cooperation is a meeting of commissioners	X		X	X						
The main instrument of cooperation is a joint commission		X			X	X	X	X	X	X
The parties exchange information on water management measures	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
The parties exchange water monitoring data				X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Reference is made to electricity and/or fisheries	X	X								
Reference is made to multilateral conventions					X	X		X	X	X
Reference is made to bilateral treaties						X	X			
Reference is made to the need for coordination with other joint commissions								X		X

Note: The full names of the concluded agreements are given in the footnotes on pages 204-205. Since two agreements were signed in 2010, they are marked: with Azerbaijan – 2010(a), with Kazakhstan – 2010(b).
Source: compiled by the authors

The comparative analysis of the texts of Russia's intergovernmental agreements on the use of shared waters shows that the most important elements of transboundary water cooperation include the exchange of information on water management and water protection measures undertaken by the parties to these agreements, as well as the exchange of water monitoring data. The meetings of commissioners and joint commissions are effective tools of cooperation, with the choice of tool depending on the context of the agreement in question, the characteristics of the transboundary river basin, the economic activities in it and the nature of relations with a particular country. The mention in the agreements of other international documents, as well as industries that depend on the implementation of a given agreement, is also dependent on the context.

[19] Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the Rational Use and Protection of Water Resources of the Transboundary Samur River. 2010. 3 September. Available at: http://voda.mnr.gov.ru/regulatory/detail.php?ID=3276 (accessed: 26.03.2021).

[20] Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan on the Joint Use and Protection of Transboundary Water Bodies. 2010. 7 September. Available at: http://voda.mnr.gov.ru/regulatory/detail.php?ID=3277 (accessed: 26.03.2021).

[21] Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the Republic of Abkhazia on Cooperation in the Protection and Rational Use of Transboundary Water Bodies. 2011. 6 October. Available at: http://voda.mnr.gov.ru/regulatory/detail.php?ID=6789 (accessed: 26.03.2021).

Russia's experience in implementing these agreements in their diversity is in high demand both in the post-Soviet space, primarily in Central Asia, and more broadly, for example, in the BRICS countries. In particular, on the margins of the 2018 Johannesburg BRICS summit, Russia and South Africa signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Water Cooperation, which also covers hydropower issues.[22] In addition to the requirements for the "development of international cooperation in the use and protection of water bodies," the new version of Russia's Water Strategy could also include other measures to promote the experience of such cooperation that has already been gained, not limited solely to the support of foreign projects based on Russian experience, as is stated in the current version of the Water Strategy.

In this context, the possibility of holding the tenth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the UNECE Water Convention in 2024 in Russia is an important priority. Although, as shown above, the UNECE Secretariat failed to attract experts who would propose a single model of cooperation on the use of scarce water resources in Central Asia that would suit all, or at least most countries in the region. Its triennial meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention has proved to be one of the most representative international forums in the field of water diplomacy.

The implementation of the international political tasks set forth in the previous version of Russia's Water Strategy has not always been successful. For example, the document envisioned the emergence by 2020 of a "bilateral and multilateral treaty framework for the joint use and protection of transboundary watercourses, in particular with regard to the Samur, Neman and Western Dvina rivers. In the case of the Samur River, this task has been solved, but not in the case of the Neman and Western Dvina." It seems that the tasks of concluding agreements on the Neman and Western Dvina should not simply be automatically transferred to the new version of the Strategy, but its text should also reflect the analysis of the reasons why such agreements were not concluded in the 2010s.

It is difficult to create a treaty framework for the joint use of the Neman and Western Dvina rivers because their basins are shared not by two countries, as most transboundary basins in Russia are, but by three countries: Russia, Belarus and Lithuania for the Neman River; and Russia, Belarus and Latvia for the Western Dvina. The term "minilateralism" was introduced to describe the difference between the cooperation of three to five countries, as opposed to both bilateral and multilateral cooperation with a large number of participants (Kahler, 1992). So far, Russia has had only managed to successfully implement one trilateral agreement on the joint use of a transboundary water basin – the 1959 agreement with Finland and Norway. However, since the mid-2010s, a growing number of scholars have hailed minilateralism as an effective format

[22] "Talks with President of South Africa Cyril Ramaphosa," President of Russia. 2018. 26 July. Available at: http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/58107 (accessed: 26.03.2021).

for solving international problems, for a variety of reasons. For example, more than half of all research papers examining the problem of minilateralism in the context of international environmental cooperation appeared after the publication of Robert Falkner's article in 2015 (Falkner, 2015).

Liberals view the spread of minilateralism as a consequence of the post-Cold War crisis faced by the unipolar system, leading to a new system of international relations based on truly multilateral global governance (Hampson, Heinbecker, 2011). Conversely, realists see minilateralism as a consequence of the crisis suffered by the multilateral institutions of global governance that previously regulatedinternational trade and finance, for example (Bremmer, 2014; Zharikov, 2017). Regardless of whether the growing importance of minilateralism is a consequence of the crisis faced by unipolarity or of multilateralism, it offers a successful format for dealing with regional and local specifics. It fully meets the goals of developing a treaty framework for the joint use of transboundary waters between Russia and its neighbours.

* * *

Since the approval of the Water Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020, the national system of the state management of the use and protection of water has improved, including in terms of international cooperation. However, some of the international political objectives set forth in the Strategy remain unfulfilled to this day. The past decade, marked by important changes in Russia, neighbouring countries and around the world, has prompted the development of new strategic tasks of an international political nature. A new version of the Water Strategy could include a provision on water scarcity, which is faced by some regions of Russia and neighbouring border regions. This would add value to the document, helping Russia to build relations with neighbouring countries in this area.

While continuing to support projects to create water management facilities based on the Russian model in water-stressed states, Moscow could focus on priority cross-border cooperation initiatives where Russia's neighbouring regions would participate in joint projects with the constituent entities of the Russian Federation. The new version of the Water Strategy could mention that water scarcity not only requires, but also promotes deeper international cooperation. With water scarcity facilitating cooperation, a course to speed up the establishment of common institutions on a bilateral or minilateral basis would help boost Russia's influence. Failure to do so could result in Russia losing its leadership in this area.

The new version of the Water Strategy could delineate international water cooperation at the global and regional levels in bilateral and minilateral formats. Cooperation at the global level is in Russia's interests to the extent that it stimulates deeper cooperation at other levels, too. If, however, participation in certain cooperation programmes at the global level requires Russia to give up its obligations to its neighbours or requires Russia's neighbours to give up their obligations to Russia, then participation in such

programmes is not in Russia's interests. What doe cause concern is the practice of global institutions claiming a leading role under the pretext that the alternative to their recognition would be a conflict that is allegedly inevitable in the face of water scarcity.

In addition, the updated Water Strategy could distinguish different types of projects to create water management facilities based on the Russian model in water-stressed states and build a hierarchy of priorities for such projects. This applies both to cross-border cooperation projects and to priority projects in the regions bordering Russia. First of all, we are referring to Central Asia, where the problem of water scarcity is most acute, but this also applies to projects implemented far from Russian borders. All this will help to disseminate Russian experience in the rational use and protection of water bodies. At the same time, Moscow should not forget about other tools to promote its experience, including the forums of global and regional management institutions in the water sector.

Russia's pervious Water Strategy named supporting and conducting scientific research among the measures aimed at implementing the Strategy. At a time when the crisis of unipolarity and global multilateral governance institutions is adding importance to minilateral cooperation in international relations, Russian researchers in this sphere could develop models for three- to five-party negotiations and cooperation in this format. This would contribute not only to the implementation of the new version of the Water Strategy of Russia, which will certainly include goals related to the development of a legal framework for trilateral cooperation in specific transboundary basins, but would also help improve the public administration system of Russia in terms of international cooperation as a whole.

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