**Can the UN Watercourses Convention Address Transboundary Water Challenges in Central Asia?**

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This talk will explore the relevance of the UN Watercourses Convention to transboundary water challenges in Central Asia’s Aral Sea basin. Concerns about water conflict loom large, especially in the densely populated area of Ferghana Valley, where small rivers and irrigation channels zig-zag back and forth across what are now national borders. Effective cross-border water management has been hampered by the failure of regional transboundary legal agreements. During the Soviet period, a “benefits-sharing” water-energy nexus had existed in which the two upstream republics stored water for the benefit of the three downstream republics, and received energy resources in exchange. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the newly-independent five Central Asian nations agreed to keep the Soviet-era water allocation quotas, but not the energy exchange. The upstream nations of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are increasingly looking to tap into their waters for hydropower and irrigation, which has exacerbated tensions with their downstream neighbors, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. Moreover, effective management of the local irrigation systems has been hampered by increased border security and mistrust among communities in Ferghana Valley. While the UN Watercourses Convention could offer an avenue towards cooperation, it is often perceived to be biased towards downstream countries. Kyrgyzstan has also suggested that it would like to charge its downstream neighbors for the water that originates in its mountains, which builds on the idea of water as an economic good but contravenes international law. While the regional transboundary water agreements highlight the importance of equitable regulation, the rigid water allocation formula and exclusion of “benefits-sharing” arrangements have made it difficult to implement the concept of equitable and reasonable utilization that is so central to the UN Watercourses Convention.