**Talking points for the webinar**

**Strategic aspects of water resources management in Central Asia**

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* Participants of the four webinars mentioned a number of compelling reasons why regional cooperation on water should be strengthened
* Cooperation would bring a broad range of economic and social benefits to all riparian states, both upstream and downstream
* Joint investment is shared regional infrastructure would enable countries to increase profitability of the water sector, strengthen resilience to climate change, create jobs, ensure food security, better protect the environment - and all these without risking debt distress
* For three decades analysts kept repeating the mantra that disputes over water were a stumbling block to regional economic and trade cooperation. Today economic cooperation and trade between Central Asian countries is developing with unprecedented dynamism, still most of the problems hindering the integrated, efficient and rational management of water resources at the regional level remain.
* Needless to say, this entails a significant risk: until cooperative, long-term solutions to the problems of the water sector are not in place, the flourishing regional economic and trade cooperation is a castle built on sand.
* As it was pointed out during the last webinar, high level political will to strengthen cooperation on water exists: a number of important initiatives have been launched in recent years, like the agreement of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to build two HPS on the Zeravshan river.
* This political will now needs to be translated into action. As it is often realized, the devil is in the details. Since interest of upstream and downstream countries are not necessarily identical or symmetrical in each and every specific case, only a broad, long-term approach can convince all players - irrigated agriculture, hydropower, communal and industrial water supply, environmental agencies and their numerous partners in other areas of the economy, including ministries of finance - that cooperation is in the interest of everybody.
* The idea of a water and energy consortium has been touted for many years. Since the overwhelming part of water infrastructure is owned by the state, it is not possible to create such a consortium without inter-state agreements. There are historic examples for such regional frameworks, like the European Coal and Steel community created in 1951. It ended resource competition, which caused many wars, once and forever. It paved the way for the creation of the Common Market and then the European Union.
* In Central Asia, strengthening cooperation on water is not just a tool to support economic growth. It is a strategic necessity in the face of the huge challenges posed by climate change that may profoundly destabilize the region if not addressed properly, as well as the risks and opportunities brought about by geopolitical and geoeconomic processes.
* The development of a solid economic basis for regional cooperation on water, with a smart regional investment concept at its core could proceed in parallel with a structured strategic dialogue on water in the 21st century. The two processes would mutually reinforce and inform each other. They would help phase out narrow minded policies of self-sufficiency and self-reliance. The interaction between participants of the two parallel discussion tracks would make all stakeholders aware that bridging the ever-growing gap between the investment needs of the water sectors of individual countries and the actual capacity of their economies should be a shared strategic objective of all Central Asian countries.
* The organizations supporting the Programme “Water as a driver of sustainable recovery: economic, institutional and strategic aspects of water resources management in Central Asia” would be ready to support the preparation, launching and conduct of a structured strategic dialogue on water, with the participation of institutes of strategic studies and other interested stakeholders.