



Conflict Factsheet

Turkey-Armenia: Water-Quality Challenges

Type of conflict
Sub

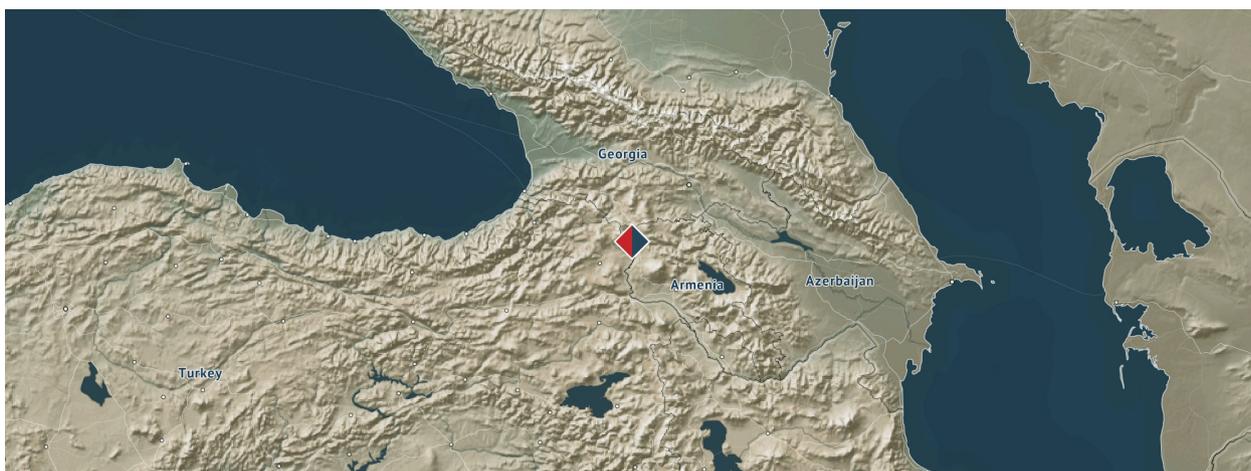
Intensity
1

Conflict Locality
Western Asia

Time
1990 –ongoing

Countries
Armenia, Turkey

Resources
Water



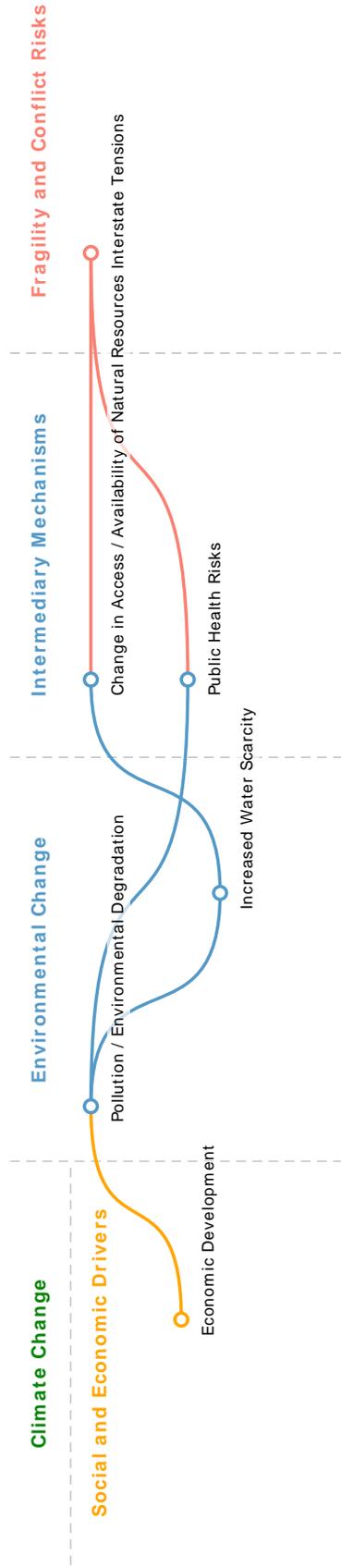
Transboundary
water
management

Conflict Summary

Turkey and Armenia succeeded in putting aside their tensions to continue cooperation over the Arpacay River on water-sharing issues. However, this cooperation needs to be extended to water quality and protection.



Conceptual Model



Context Factors



Water



Conflict History

Before the collapse of the USSR, the Soviet Union concluded a number of treaties with Turkey regarding cooperation over the Arpacay River, which now constitutes the border between Turkey and Armenia. Both sides continue to implement these treaties, despite their lack of bilateral diplomatic relations. However, the treaties only dealt with the quantity to be shared between the co-riparians. The political hostility between the co-riparians has prevented them from extending this cooperation to also include issues of water quality protection.

Obstacles to good management of the waters

The Kars River – originating in Turkey – and the Ahuryan River – originating in Armenia – merge into the Arpacay (or Akhourian) River, which constitutes the border between Armenia and Turkey. Even though Turkey and Armenia have been able to put aside their tensions to sustain bilateral cooperation over the Arpacay River and enforce the agreements brokered before the collapse of the USSR, the current status of cooperation is not sufficient to achieve good management of the waters (see [Turkey-Armenia: water cooperation despite tensions](#)). In fact, there are significant loopholes in the treaties, such as the absence of agreement on water quality standards and water protection (Cestti et al., 2015; Carius et al., 2005).

Scientists discover serious pollution in the river

This is all the more important as Armenian environmentalists have discovered that the water from the reservoir is polluted with heavy metals and toxic materials, which can have dangerous consequences for the population (IPWR, 2009). The scientists have also highlighted the additional pollution caused by the disposal of domestic garbage flowing into the reservoir from the Armenian side of the River (Ibid.). A further concern is the downstream impacts of intensive agriculture in Turkey upstream from the river. In fact, the use of chemicals and pesticides is likely to cause salinisation of the water downstream (Carius et al., 2005).

Therefore, water-quality issues now require the co-riparians to engage in cooperation beyond the existing agreements. Since cooperation between Armenia and Turkey has been limited to the old water-sharing agreements established between Turkey and the USSR, the emergence of quality issues in the Arpacay River represents new challenges to the current status quo.

Resolution Efforts

Need of cooperation on water protection

Given scientific findings, scholars have emphasised the need for both co-riparians to cooperate on the setting-up of clean-up mechanisms – which would either absorb or remove the excess traces of heavy metals present in the water (IPWR, 2009). However, even though Armenian and Turkish officials have been meeting every year, they have only discussed water quantity issues, leaving out the water-quality issue (Ibid.).



Lack of scientific bilateral cooperation

Moreover, the lack of cooperation between Armenian and Turkish ecologists has been another obstacle to cooperation to address these water-quality issues (IPWR, 2009). Some scientists had hoped that the normalisation of the bilateral relations between Turkey and Armenia could enable deeper environmental cooperation on the Arpacay River (Ibid.). However, the recent failure of the Armenian and Turkish government to ratify an agreement at the beginning of 2015, which would have been a significant step towards the normalization of the countries' bilateral relations, has dashed this hope (NYtimes, 2015).

Need to raise awareness about water-quality issues

In the light of this deadlock at government level, solutions to the water-quality issues could be initiated at the local level to raise awareness on water-quality issues amongst the population living in the reservoir area (IWPR, 2009). Given the fact that Armenian environmentalists have reported the absence of environmental organisations on the Turkish side of the reservoir (Ibid.), such awareness-raising programmes might be a trigger for some Turkish organisations to mobilise in favour of water protection in the area.

To conclude, the findings of Armenian scientists, who pointed out the presence of hazardous materials in the Arpacay River, indicate that further cooperation in terms of water quality beyond the status quo is needed. Given the current deadlock at the governmental level between Armenia and Turkey, a first solution to the issue might be to foster cooperation through track-2 initiatives.



Intensities & Influences

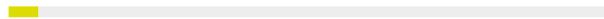


INTENSITIES

International / Geopolitical Intensity



Human Suffering



INFLUENCES

Environmental Influences



Societal Influences



Diplomatic Crisis

Diplomatic crisis involving non-violent tools such as economic sanctions



Violent Conflict

No



Salience with nation

National



Mass displacement

None



Cross Border Mass Displacement

No



Resolution Success

Reduction in geographical scope

There has been no reduction in geographical scope.

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Increased capacity to address grievance in the future

There is no increased capacity to address grievances in the future.

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Grievance Resolution

Grievances have been completely ignored.

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Causal Attribution of Decrease in Conflict Intensity

There has been no reduction in intensity

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Entry Points for Resilience and Peace Building

Cooperation

Water quality issues now require the co-riparians to engage in cooperation beyond the old water-sharing agreements established between Turkey and the USSR.

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Promoting social change

Solutions could be initiated at the local level to raise awareness on water quality issues amongst the population living in the reservoir area.

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Resources and Materials

Conflict References

[Turkey-Armenia: Water Cooperation Despite Tensions](#)

References with URL

[Carius et al. \(2005\). Cooperation on Turkey's transboundary waters](#)

[Cestti et al. \(2015\). Toward Integrated Water Resources Management in Armenia](#)

[IPWR. 8/05/2009. Pollution in Border Reservoir Worries Armenia](#)

[The New York Times. \(2015\). Armenia Halts Ratification of Agreement With Turkey](#)

Further information

<https://factbook.ecc-platform.org/conflicts/turkey-armenia-water-quality-challenges>