

Safeguarding the World's Water

By **Jerome Simpson**

"The Volga River and its basin suffer from poor water quality and ecosystem degradation," notes the European Environment Agency's (EEA) forthcoming pan-European environment assessment. Expert consultations hosted within the framework of the CABRI-Volga project have confirmed these findings. However, with the entry into force on January 1 of Russia's new Water Code No. 174-Φ3, a new era in integrated water management is about to begin.

The code's founding principles are that protection of water bodies (both surface and ground) takes priority over use; that usage shall not harm the environment, and that utilisation be prioritised toward drinking and other domestic purposes. Some of the code's innovations include its river basin approach, the introduction of integrated water basin management schemes, and civil society involvement in decision making.

Rustem Khamitov, director of the Federal Water Resources Agency, is responsible for the code's implementation. Speaking during an Internet conference in July 2006, he said the code has been delivered "to establish water relations on a market basis" and to "simplify or debureaucratise relations in water management."

From 2007, a fee will be charged for water body uses (specifically, abstraction, recreation and power generation) as part of a "water use agreement" so as to promote water conservation. Individuals and legal entities are entitled equal access and opportunity to use and own water bodies. Furthermore, traditional usage by indigenous peoples of Northern Siberia and the Russian Far East is assured. However, the code stresses that all water bodies will remain federal property, owned by the Russian Federation. Ponds or flooded pits are exempted, although these types have not been well defined. This alone has caused controversy regarding their owners' rights.

Under the new law, Russia's 86 regional authorities gain new powers such as the right to issue water-use agreements and/or "grant" water-body use. In addition, these authorities are charged with overseeing water-body protection and prevention of adverse impacts. Decisions to issue agreements and grants will be given within 30 days of the receipt of application. However, says Khamitov,



Photo: Vladimir Filonov, WWF-Russia

Traditional usage by indigenous peoples like the Udegeysy in Russia's Far East is assured under Russia's new Water Code

"It is abundantly clear that it is impossible to manage a river partially, say a lower part of the Volga separately from the upstream parts. A region cannot do whatever it wants on the river flowing through its territory: build a dam, dispose whatever it wants into the river, construct something on it and so forth." The permitting process thus remains under the close control and supervision of authorised federal executive bodies and their inspectors. In issuing grants (e.g. for the discharge of effluents or drainage water or abstraction for agricultural purposes), the Russian Federation government's approval must be obtained.

The new code shares similarities with the European Union's Water Framework Directive. In applying a river basin approach, 20 basin districts have been defined, four of which constitute the Volga basin (although the new boundaries have yet to be harmonised with existing administrative boundaries). Schemes for each basin on integrated water body use and protection will be developed by the relevant federal executive body, while basin councils

Volga Vocation

Challenges and obstacles in the Volga Basin's development are reviewed in a new report entitled "Today's Problems, Tomorrow's Challenges" published in February by the project team. It reveals three major obstacles to achieving sustainable development:

- poor water quality;
- weak basin management; and
- low public awareness and participation in decision-making processes.

The challenge in overcoming these is compounded by external "drivers" and "constraints," such as the pace of economic development and globalisation, climate change, technological innovation, and political and social processes, the report indicates.

Prepared by Wageningen University of the Netherlands in collaboration with the Cadastre Institute of Yaroslavl, Russia, the report builds on a plethora of data gathered during the project's second forum of water management experts in Kazan, April 2006. As a result, a wealth of strategic responses are put forward. Recommendations range from changes in taxation for water use and wastewater discharge, to implementation of environmental regulation at the municipal level. To promote civil society involvement in basin management, the report advocates unification of the monitoring system, enhancing public access to information and pro-active dissemination of that data by the state.

The authors conclude by suggesting the development of enforceable water pollution standards, alongside the more effective enforcement of the "polluter-pays" principle. This would generate funds that could be channelled back into improving water quality. The report contains additional information on the Volga Basin's environment and socio-economical situation such as water usage, flood risk, freight transport and the respective institutional and governance frameworks. It is available for download at: <http://cabri-volga.org/publications.html>.

► composed of diverse stakeholder groups will be established and invited on a consultative basis to make recommendations. Monitoring of basin districts' water bodies will be undertaken by federal executive bodies, in collaboration with regional authorities.

Citizens and civil society organisations now enjoy the right to participate in decision-making processes concerning the use and protection of water bodies. However, there are no detailed provisions regarding the means for involvement, e.g. in decisions pertaining to water use. Regarding information access, relevant monitoring, status and usage information will be stored in a national water body register (excluding point-source effluent and pollutant discharge data), to be maintained by the federal executive body. Requests for information will be responded to within five working days; the desired information will be provided for a fee or the request will be refused with a written reply.

The code is progress in Russia's attainment of international targets such as the UN Millennium Development Goal for sustainable water resources management. It is also supportive of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe's Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) environment strategy in the development and implementation of integrated water resource management programmes, establishment and strengthening of basin management bodies, and the development of monitoring programmes for river basins.

However, with its entry into force, attention must turn towards its implementation and ensuring water users' compliance. "The development of secondary norms — and their enforcement — will be critical in this regard," says Natalia Davydova, director of the Moscow-based Ecological Projects Consulting Institute. Being a framework law, a brace of implementing regulations are expected to follow, encompassing numerous procedures, impact limits, fee rates and indicators, alongside amendments to existing laws. According to Davydova, some 24 statutory acts should be adopted to fully implement the provisions of the code. "However, only half of the necessary acts have been passed to date," she added. Critically, tangible deadlines and targets for their completion have not been set.

Tackling Russia's most critical water management issues, especially outdated or non-existent wastewater treatment systems and poor institutional coordination, is a formidable challenge. With 20 cubic kilometres of wastewater currently flowing into the Volga's ecosystem every year and only 15 percent of this meeting national treatment standards, the code is a golden opportunity to clean up Russia's water. It could also serve as a shining example of integrated water resources management in an economy in transition.



Photo: Alexander Budnikov

The Volga: still one of the dirtiest rivers in Russia

Groundwater Law Enters into Force

The EU's new groundwater directive 2006/118/EC entered into force in December 2006. It is one of the most important under the EU's 2000 Water Framework Directive. The European Commission's Environment Committee rapporteur Christa Klass, who piloted the legislation through Parliament, said, "Groundwater is our most important natural resource but over half the bodies of freshwater in the EU are polluted and can never be cleaned up again. This is why we must protect them better."

The directive protects groundwater "against pollution and deterioration." Among other things, it introduces a mandatory requirement to prevent the entry of hazardous substances (cyanide, arsenic, biocides and phytopharmaceutical substances) into groundwater. It also imposes a single limit value (50 milligrams per litre) on nitrates in groundwater. The law fleshes out targets set in the framework directive and gives member states clarity on how to draw up river basin management plans, due 2009.

New Russia-EU Environmental Partnership

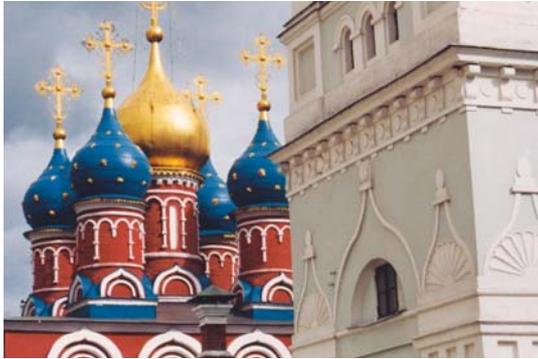


Photo: Jerome Simpson

A new EU-Russian permanent partnership council (PPC) on the environment has been established with a view to opening up dialogue on objectives and priorities indicated in the "Road map of the EU-Russia Common Economic Space."

The initiative sets out to foster sustainable

development in Russia and the EU and will focus on seven priority areas of cooperation: environmental policy convergence, water protection and marine issues, biodiversity and nature conservation, environmental impact assessments, forests and pollution prevention, and climate change. Both parties met for the first time in Helsinki in October 2006 when EU Environment Commissioner Stavros Dimas and Russian Minister of Natural Resources Yuri Petrovich Trutnev signed the terms of reference for the Environment Dialogue.

The partnership council consists of ministers from Russia, the current and incoming EU presidencies, and a European commissioner. The format allows for the full discussion of issues on which the EU and EU member states share competency and serves as a small forum that facilitates decision making. Meetings can be called by the EU or Russia. Other PPCs focus on energy, foreign affairs, transport, justice and home affairs.

Rescuing the Ural's Sturgeon

The absence of any major barriers in the Ural River means it is the only watercourse in the Caspian region with a natural hydrological regime and uninterrupted sturgeon migration routes. In cooperation with a number of Russian environmental organisations and institutions, the Hungary-based Central European University has initiated the Ural Basin Project. According to Viktor Lagutov, the project's co-director, the project's ultimate goal "is to establish sturgeon parks along migration routes within the Ural River to preserve the last viable Caspian sturgeon population."

The plan is ambitious: it aims to tackle all aspects of river basin management including participation of local communities and the introduction of new education programmes in local universities. The project is about to get underway and, although proponents still seek funding, they have won the support of regional environmental authorities, federal agencies and local academia. An inaugural workshop, scheduled in Orenburg, Russia June 13-16, aims to bring together regional Russian and Kazakh environmental authorities, as well as national and international experts in related disciplines. The event is being co-sponsored by NATO's Programme for Security through the Science and Caspian Environment Programme. More information is at <<http://uralbas.ru>>.

CABRI VOLGA BRIEF

CABRI-Volga supports information and know-how exchange between Russian and European stakeholders in the water management domain. Its overall aim is to engender effective river basin management, foster cooperation and networking, and European integration. It is EC/UN financed and runs until February 2007. More information on goals, partners and forthcoming events is online, in both English and Russian, at: www.cabri-volga.org.

The **CABRI VOLGA BRIEF** seeks to raise awareness in the Volga region based on the views of a variety of stakeholders, disseminate the results and achievements of the Cabri-Volga project, and share policy news and best practices from related initiatives.

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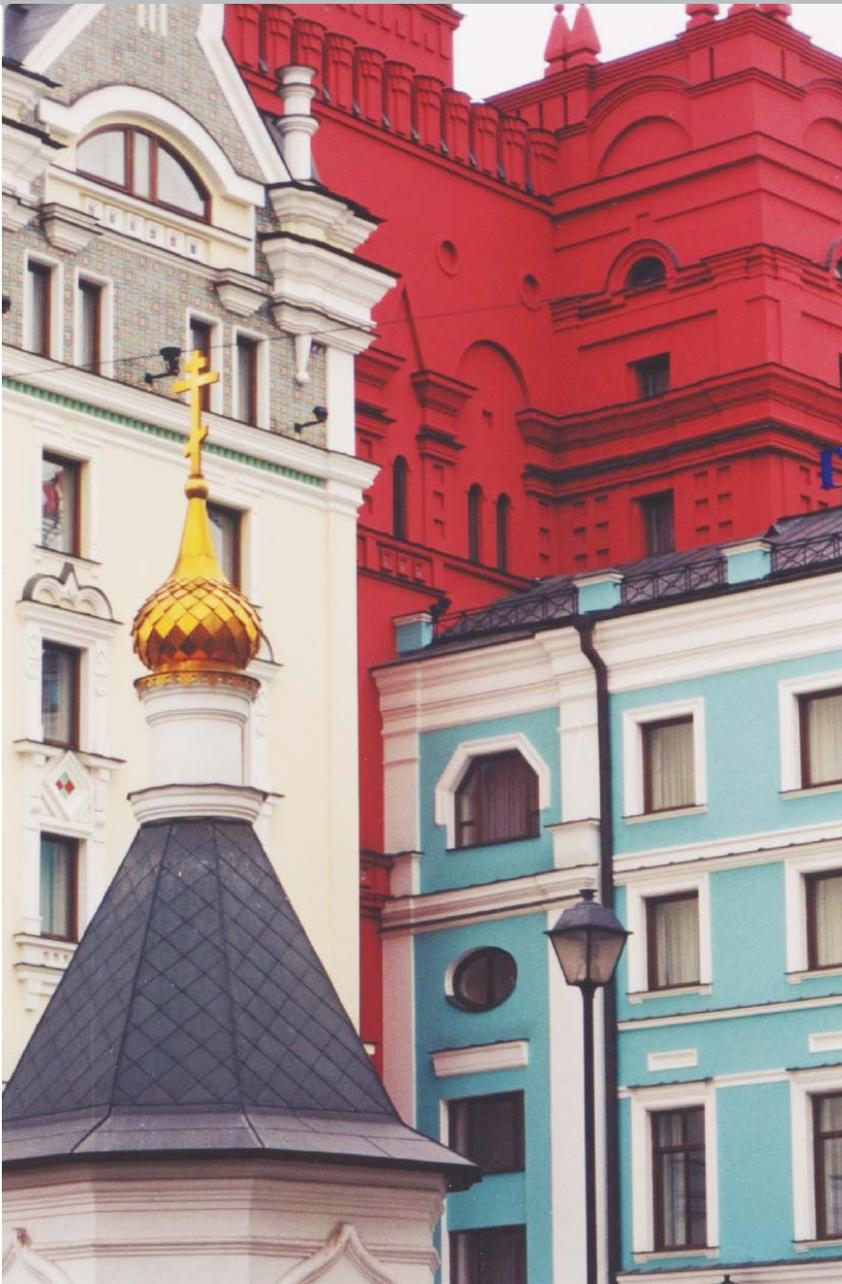


Photo: Jerome Simpson

Moscow: last port of call for CABRI-Volga

On Course for Sustainability

Project gives Duma recommendations for strategic water-resource management

By **Jerome Simpson**

“Systematise hazard risk management; effectively implement Russia’s new Water Code; and develop alternative financing solutions for tackling Volga-related problems.” These were the three key recommendations heard by

representatives of Russia’s state Duma and envoys of leading international organisations at a policy roundtable convened in Moscow on February 27. The recommendations were drawn from a series of consultations organised by the CABRI-Volga project with experts in river basin management

during its 27-month lifetime, undertaken with a view to defining sustainable development options.

“Systematising risk management is necessary to tackle the risk of accidents posed by unsafe industrial facilities, floods from the poor condition of dams, and health risks posed by sub-standard drinking water,” reported Siegfried Rupprecht, CABRI-Volga project manager to roundtable participants. To implement the new Water Code, administrative reform is necessary in order to effectively realise water basin district management. In overcoming cash-strapped budgets for dealing with water quality problems, implementing the polluter-pays principle means “every rouble paid for polluting the water should be used for cleaning the water,” concluded Rupprecht.

The aim of the largely political event was to identify opportunities for further cooperation between the European Union (EU) and Russia in light of these recommendations. Among the political measures and practical activities brought forward were further legislative development, know-how exchange, and collaboration in research concerning the impacts of global warming.

During the discussions that ensued, Tatyana Moiseenko, professor of ecology at the Russian Academy of Sciences, called for the definition of standards or “reference conditions” for the Volga, adding that the water-rich Netherlands can serve as a role model for Russia. Participants noted the value in sharing not only European but American and Asian experiences in river basin management, especially local practices. Tatiana Shipitsina of the EU’s Water Initiative encouraged the development of twinning projects that encompass capacity building. One example might be linking with the EU and Balkan networks of environmental inspectors. These include the Environmental Compliance and Enforcement Network for Accession (ECENA) and another group under the rubric

Volga Basin 2020

Regional strategy recommended to address infrastructure needs and decline of international shipping

By **Jerome Simpson**

The steel-making town of Cherepovets, 375 km north of Moscow at the northern tip of the Rybinsk Reservoir, was the last port of call for more than 60 Russian and European Union (EU) river basin managers, brought together under the auspices of the CABRI-Volga project. As part of the third forum hosted November 15-17, 2006, experts cooperated to define activity proposals and draft recommendations for the sustainable management and development of the Volga basin.

Among the practical suggestions put forward at the event, which included pause for thought at the Feropontovo Monastery in the Western Taiga, were an integrated Volga basin transport strategy, the launch of a Volga investment forum, and strengthening the role of new river basin councils in developing integrated water management schemes. Also recommended was the twinning of Russian river basins with EU counterparts.

The gathering was the final stepping stone in a process that began with the exchange of good practices in water management in October 2005 in Nizhny Novgorod, and which was followed by consideration of the evolution of the Volga basin's priority problems in Kazan in April 2006.

The recommendations were collected from five expert groups whose thematic priorities encompassed:

- river and environmental rehabilitation;
- human security and vulnerability;
- natural resources and their sustainable use;
- connecting goods and people; and
- institutional coordination and cooperation.

Among the detailed proposals put forward were the development of an integrated transport strategy, dubbed "Volga Basin 2020." Developed on the basis of multi-stakeholder consultations at both regional and local levels, the strategy would nurture the Volga as an international waterway, with the inclusion of a suite of measures designed to connect key transport nodes and modernise the much-degraded waterway infrastructure. Financing options would be included.



Photo: Fabrice Renaud

Where social concern meets environmental protection: Ferapontovo Monastery, Western Taiga

In the context of the implementation of Russia's new Water Code and its accent on sub-basin management, strong calls were made for unifying the permitting processes for water use, for ensuring "real" mechanisms for representation and participation in decision-making processes (within the new basin councils), and for the reform and development of realistic water-quality standards. Also high on participants' agendas was the appointment of a scientific organisation to support and advise on water management issues. Developing — and maintaining — innovative, sustainable financing mechanisms such as green taxation and green funds based on the polluter-pays principle were also put forward with a view to ensuring the safe operations of dams and other hydro-facilities and the provision of clean drinking water.

The meeting's outcomes enabled the drafting of the project's final policy recommendations as well as an action plan and research agenda. These are presented within two final project reports that are now available online at: <http://www.cabri-volga.org/publications.html>.

ONLINE UNTIL 2012

The CABRI-Volga website at www.cabri-volga.org will remain online until 2012. This will ensure the continued availability of project results and other related information. During April and May many new publications and reports will be uploaded, including this newsletter, policy recommendations, a Volga-oriented action plan and research agenda, as well as the project's plans for follow-up.

Implementation and Enforcement of Environmental Law (IMPEL).

Political mechanisms that could play host to such cooperation were also proposed. Jean-Louis Lavroff of the European Commission's delegation to Russia put forward the new EU-Russia permanent partnership council for the environment, while Shipitsina highlighted the EU-national policy dialogues, hosted with non-member countries. The latter encompasses assistance for integrated water-resources management, including financing for water supply and wastewater treatment. Representatives of the country's political administration were invited to articulate concrete suggestions on how to address the Volga's problems.

Delegates also observed the importance of cooperation with Russian society and its involvement in sustainable water resources management. Irmgard Schwaetzer of the German Committee for Disaster Reduction suggested a platform of researchers, policymakers and NGOs be established to identify the vulnerability and hazards faced by society and determine next steps in reducing these. Professor Alexander Likhotal of Green Cross International agreed, saying, "Civil society needs to be involved as much as possible." He underlined the importance of a balance between federal and regional authorities, business and civil society in assuring the success of the Volga's management.

In reflecting on the thorny issue of financing water management, Jean-Louis Oliver, the secretary general of the French Water Academy, related France's experiences. "Water must finance water." In France, six river basin agencies collect fees and reinvest these revenues back into projects. This finances an average of 50 percent of domestic water works investments through subsidies for local governments and soft loans for enterprise.

Participants praised the recommendations, calling them "a roadmap" for action in the future. One remarked that it would be a shame to lose traction gained through the project. Janos Bogardi, professor at the United Nations University's Institute for Environment and Human Security and founding father of the Volga Vision strategy, said, "If we break now, we lose the momentum started with the Volga Vision. CABRI-Volga's conclusions are an opportunity to continue the Volga's development."

The roundtable concluded by endorsing the recommendations and opportunities for cooperation raised by its participants. Organisations and others not able to attend but with an interest in supporting the recommendations' valorisation are invited to register their interest via the project website at: www.cabri-volga.org.

Local Outreach

Volga's stakeholders voice their views

The Pushchino Research Centre, located some 100 km south of Moscow on the banks of the Oka River, played host on February 26 to a discussion forum focused on mapping future research objectives for the Volga. More than 30 scientists convened at the invitation of Peter Mashkin, head of the centre. After hearing about the project's results, participants proposed strengthening the scientific basis of Volga management by implementing pilot research projects that would design and test basin management models on segments of the river, e.g. the Oka. In contributing to the project's recommendations, they wished to add the enhancement of basin monitoring, and improvement in the user-friendliness and distribution of this information to all relevant stakeholders.

Similar conclusions were drawn in Astrakhan, where an outreach workshop hosted by a project partner, the Caspian Marine Scientific and Research Centre, took place on February 21. Participants voiced their interest in a pilot basin activity in the Lower Volga's delta that would concentrate on developing self-financing mechanisms, i.e. the reinvestment of fees and fines into environmental improvement. Such a project could transcend national boundaries, for instance, by involving Kazakhstan, participants noted.

Finally, improving collaboration between authorities and industry in the reduction of anthropogenic sources of water pollution was the subject of a workshop hosted in Yaroslavl by another CABRI-Volga partner, the Cadastre Institute. Around 25 industrial enterprises participated in the event, which took place on February 16. They contributed to an animated discussion focused on how to meet the requirements of domestic legislation in reducing the health risks of those living in cities. Among the meeting's conclusions, now available for download at the project's website, were the establishment of protected sanitary zones for Yaroslavl's northern and southern industrial centres.

Russia: custodian to 25 percent of the world's drinkable reserves

Photo: Alexander Budnikov

