



New Framework of Cooperation over Water in the Euphrates Tigris Region Through Epistemic Community Activities: the Euphrates Tigris Initiative for Cooperation

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Solutions to water dispute have been the prime issue on the agenda in the hot spots of the Middle East. In multilateral negotiations, mostly politicians and diplomats have addressed the search for solutions. An initiative founded three years ago has used an unprecedented approach to overcome problems related to water in the Euphrates Tigris Region. The Euphrates and Tigris (ET) Rivers are located in a region, which extends geographically over parts of six countries namely Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Turkey of which Iraq, Syria, and Turkey are the prime riparian of the two rivers. The surface area of the Euphrates Tigris Region is 784,000 square kilometer. The ET region is important in world affairs due to the diversity of its overall features. While the political issues in the ET region are perceived as relevant and complex in the American and European eyes, those related to water and development is more complicated but less evident. Academics, fitting the description of epistemic community, from Iraq, Syria, Turkey and the United States worked out a new approach for sustainable cooperation on regional development by founding an initiative in May 2005 known as the Euphrates Tigris Initiative for Cooperation (ETIC). As a riparian initiative, ETIC has been unique in that it looks beyond water rights per se to themes related to environmental protection, development and gender equity, water management and governance and grass-roots participation in a holistic, multi-stakeholder framework. Unlike international litigation, furthermore, such options do not require the direct par-

ticipation of governments, thereby encouraging greater stakeholder participation and diffusing other political issues. Most legal scholarships concerning the Region, however, have focused primarily on water allocation issues with the premise that treaties on water sharing would be the best solution. Iraq, Syria and Turkey have entered since 1920 into lengthy negotiations over water allocations and achieved little. ETIC has focused on Track 2 collaborative activities in Iraq, Syria and Turkey where needs for development, infrastructure networks rehabilitation, capacity-building and leadership formation, integrated water resources management and health care services are similar. Cooperation and goodwill among ETIC founding members have helped implementing joint activities for the ET region. ETIC action modality comprises focused meetings, expert exchanges, training programs and workshops, curriculum development, joint projects, site visits and stakeholder meetings. During the years 2005, 2006 and 2007 ETIC founding members and their invited riparian officials participated in international meetings in India, Sweden, Japan and Mexico. ETIC organized a training program on dam safety in collaboration with UNESCO for professionals from Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey. ETIC organized a stakeholder workshop and conference on Technical Cooperation for Regional Development in the Euphrates and Tigris Region. ETIC prospects were discussed and collaboration in ETIC activities by UNDP, SIWI, FAO and BRI were explored with the representatives who participated in the workshop. ETIC has been able to follow up the implementation of joint interventions by the riparian themselves, act toward decision-makers in a friendly and cooperative manner and be transparent in all actions. In its activities, ETIC endeavor to build confidence and trust among riparian officials, identify common needs and concerns, prepare and implement joint training and capacity building programs. Also, ETIC strives to mobilize faculty, university students and experts for supporting work and activities, work out joint pilot projects on regional development, promote dialogue and networking among riparian, sectors and stakeholders and support implementation of collaborative activities. However, ETIC is faced with challenges such as the need to establish institutional structure, linking with official institutions regionally and internationally, secure funding for projects implementation, detach collaborative activities from political conflicts and make ETIC advisory support to government institutions desirable. Projects concept have been worked out by founding members for implementation within the scope of ETIC activities to seek funding and partnership from interested agencies and institutions.