

INTERNATIONAL NEGOTIATIONS

The Caspian Dialog

Science for International Understanding

The Processes of International Negotiation (PIN) Program of IIASA has just opened a Dialog among representatives of the five littoral states of the Caspian Sea to discuss matters of a nondivisive nature pertaining to environmental and energy security.

The strategic and financial importance of the Caspian Sea's rich resources, including oil and natural gas, has given rise to an often contentious debate among the five Caspian littoral states—Azerbaijan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, and Turkmenistan. Unsurprisingly, no overarching agreement has yet been reached on the division of the Sea and its resources. Moreover, the Caspian, though historically known as a sea, is classified by most geologists as a lake, and there is no precedent for determining its international legal status as one or the other.



Photo: Jacques Descloitres, MODIS Rapid Response Team, NASA/GSFC

IIASA's Processes of International Negotiation Program (PIN) are no strangers to the Caspian debate. In the course of PIN's 2003 Roadshow in Tehran, a seminar on the topic was organized in conjunction with the School of International Relations in Tehran, and PIN Steering Group members Victor Kremenyuk and Paul Meerts subsequently edited a report on negotiating a Caspian regime.

It was former IIASA Director Howard Raiffa who first encouraged the Institute to deploy scientific information and systems analysis in the service of international understanding, and thereby contribute to conflict management. It was thus a natural step for PIN to open discussions, not about divisive issues like the partition of the Caspian, but on important topics such as pollution, environmental regimes, land use, water, and energy security. The first Caspian Dialog—the precursor, it is hoped, to a series of biannual meetings—took place from 13 to 15 May at the Topkapi Palace in Istanbul. The meeting was co-sponsored by IIASA and the Hollings Center which operates under the auspices of the Council of American Overseas Research Centers.

The Dialog opened with wide-ranging discussions on the Caspian's regional and global importance. Its legal and security status have remained undetermined since the breakup of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, making it a potential source of enormous conflict in an already insecure region. Professor I. William Zartman of PIN looked at the Caspian's future under a sea or lake regime: how its mineral and biological resources would be handled, as well as its function as a linchpin in security and transportation issues.

The serious ecological decline of the Caspian, caused by toxic waste dumping, agricultural runoff, and overfishing of the caviar-producing sturgeon fish, was covered by other IIASA scientists: David Wiberg of the Land Use Change Program, Fabian Wagner of the Atmospheric Pollution and Economic Development Program, Ulf Dieckmann of the Evolution and Ecology Program, and Yaroslav Minullin of the Environmentally Compatible Energy Strategies Program.

The Caspian Dialog has immediate practical implications and direct interest not only for the five littoral states but also for the largest oil contractor, the United States, as well as Turkey and the United Kingdom, two of which (Turkey and the United States) acted as observers.

Common brainstorming about various approaches to many topics can lead to the creation of a problem-solving attitude that, eventually, can prepare the terrain for constructive approaches to the more divisive issues. The first Caspian Dialog in Istanbul can certainly be seen as an important start to this new venture in conflict management. ■

Further information IIASA's Process of International Negotiation Program (PIN) at www.iiasa.ac.at/Research/PIN

Professor Rudolf Avenhaus, H.E. Ambassador Franz Cede, Professor Guy Olivier Faure, Professor Victor Kremenyuk, Paul W. Meerts, Professor Gunnar Sjoestedt and Professor I. William Zartman make up PIN's steering committee.

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