

The UN Convention on International Watercourses: Do we Need it?

Vasiliki Maria Tzatzaki*

PhD Candidate, University of Athens (tz_vicky@yahoo.gr)

UN Convention on the Law of the Non Navigational Uses of International Watercourses: adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 05/1997

Main Characteristics:

- framework convention setting out guidelines for future regional agreements between riparian states
- obligation to cooperate between riparian states
- obligation not to cause significant harm to other riparian states when using a transboundary watercourse
- reasonable and equitable utilization of freshwater resources
- obligation to protect the environment

Efficiency of the Convention and Consequences:

- It is considered to be a weak legal framework, since it has not gained the necessary number of ratifications in order to enter into force.

Fragmented suggestions to strengthen it:

- ecosystemic approach, focusing on the aquatic environment of the freshwater resources
- human right to water approach, focusing on the fact that water is an indispensable good

Proposed Method for the Sound

Management of Freshwater

Resources:

- The international legal framework needs to be improved. An integrated/holistic approach is necessary, as it is going to take into account the economic interests of the riparian states, the social needs of the population, the protection and preservation of the environment and the sustainable development of the basins.
- The UN Convention on International Watercourses is the legal framework of the international community for the sound management of international rivers and lakes. A view of the international basins *in toto* is a step forward in order to reinforce the text of the Convention and contribute to integrated exploitation of freshwater resources.