

**Monitoring Department**

**Water Supply Issues in Kosovo**

July 2008

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## **1. Executive summary**

In the summer of 2007, the Municipal Teams of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo (OSCE) reported on human rights and community issues with regard to severe water shortages throughout Kosovo, raising serious concerns on the supply and access to water for all communities. To raise awareness of the problem, the OSCE organized work shops, distributed leaflets on water conservation, and engaged in other activities, often together with KFOR and UNMIK representatives.

Although the water supply situation in summer/fall 2008 might not be as problematic as in 2007, it is still far from being satisfactory and likely to result in a precarious situation already in the next year. Bearing in mind many different risks, such as drier winters, health risks linked with the contamination of water sources, and the bad condition of much of the water infrastructure, the situation in Kosovo urgently needs to be addressed.

However, effective mechanisms or long-term planning have not been established at the municipal or regional level. This could not only again lead to the infringement of human rights as regards access to water, but also to problems on the political level, as measures to limit access to water could be highly disputed. Though the OSCE could not identify patterns with regard to discrimination based on ethnicity, this issue could become acute in case of future water shortages.

The OSCE also observed that Kosovo municipalities are not adequately prepared to tackle acute water shortages. Especially rural areas do not have access to running water but are dependent on local wells and springs with questionable water quality. The municipalities seem not to be sufficiently aware of their responsibilities as well as of the risks and dangers they might be facing in the future. Furthermore, most of the Kosovo municipalities are highly dependent on support from KFOR and international donors to implement necessary water projects.

With all this in mind, the OSCE publishes this report to raise awareness of the responsible authorities in Kosovo and to initiate a constructive discussion on how to deal with water shortage problems in the long-term and in a sustainable and responsible manner. The report also shortly mentions potential regional co-operation as regards the management of water resources and the prospects of water management after the closing down of the Kosovo Trust Agency, which was responsible until June 2008.

This report first gives an update regarding the situation in spring-summer 2008 and informs about the municipal authorities' perspective and their ability to cope with possible water shortages in the future. It then explains the role of regional water companies, provides a risk assessment, and gives recommendations on how international and local actors could raise awareness of the recurrent water supply problems in Kosovo. In some chapters, the report specifically focuses on Prishtinë/Priština, as this region faces particular challenges through the concentration of the population, the ongoing population growth, and the building boom.

In short, the most significant findings like a steadily increasing demand for water combined with a low and insufficient water supply, the lack of waste water treatment and its medium-term consequences to the ground water, uncertain developments in the administration and supervision of the regional water companies, the unsettled distribution of water competencies, an old and decrepit water infrastructure and an alarming payment behaviour suggest a precarious situation in Kosovo in 2009 and a more serious threat to sufficient water supply in the years to come.

## **2. Flashback: severe water shortages in summer 2007**

Before 2005, water cuts in Kosovo were mostly of a technical nature. After new pumping stations were built, the water supply situation significantly improved in 2005 and the beginning of 2006 when Prishtinë/Priština mostly was provided with water 24 hours per day. However, due to the particularly dry weather during the winter of 2006/2007<sup>1</sup>, the water supply again had to be cut back. The water situation significantly worsened in the summer of 2007, where severe water shortages were reported all over Kosovo, affecting individual consumption, agriculture, and industry. The authorities consequently came up with certain emergency measures intended to restrict the use of water. Villages were cut off from water supplies for hours or days. In July 2007 the local water company in Podujevë/Podujevo introduced ten hour shortcuts in the town after the dramatic decrease of the level of Batllavë/Batlava lake. The Municipality of Prishtinë/Priština issued a regulation banning the use of water for washing streets, cars, or watering gardens in March 2007. However, respective instructions were not implemented in a consistent way. The rather wasteful use of water in Kosovo, e.g. the watering of pavements and streets as well as car washing has added to the already problematic water supply situation.

Although the municipalities stress that they provide services based on a non-discriminatory basis, non-Albanian communities in some regions perceived cuts in their water supply in the recent years as disproportionate and ethnically motivated. However, the OSCE is not aware of any significant incident of ethnic discrimination throughout Kosovo in connection with water supply. On the contrary, OSCE Municipal Teams reported that municipal authorities were particularly supportive to vulnerable groups.<sup>2</sup>

OSCE Municipal Teams have engaged in raising awareness of the water problems at the municipal level in 2007. For example, in August 2007 the Municipal Team Prishtinë/Priština organized workshops on water conservation with representatives from civil society, the municipality and the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning. The main recommendations included the launching of a media dissemination campaign about responsible water consumption, the request for strict law enforcement against illegal tapping and unpaid water bills as well as a responsible and accountable administration in maintaining an effective water system.<sup>3</sup>

## **3. Update: preparedness of the municipalities in spring 2008**

### **3.1 Kosovo's water reservoirs and management, situation May 2008**

The five main water reservoirs in Kosovo are Gazivode/Gazivodë, Batllavë/Batlava, Badovac/Badovc, Përlepnicë/Prilepnicë, and Radoniq/Radonjić.

Although in Batllavë/Batlava lake, which provides about 70% of the water supply for Prishtinë/Priština, the water level of May 2008 was higher than in 2007, other water reservoirs contain less water than last year. The overall situation is not alarming in the short run; however, it remains to be seen how this situation will develop throughout the forthcoming months.

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<sup>1</sup> The Water Section of the Kosovo Trust Agency names two periods in the last decades as exceptionally dry: Winter 1966/67 and 2006/07.

<sup>2</sup> For example, in Malishevë/Mališevo and Rahovec/Orahovac, the municipalities provided free water-supply to families receiving social assistance or offered extra provisions to non-Albanian communities.

<sup>3</sup> Also in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, Obiliq/Obilić, Viti/Vitina, and Pejë/Peć, OSCE Municipal Teams took initiatives to raise the issue with municipal authorities and the water company and organized meetings with the relevant stakeholders. Some municipalities then took immediate remedial measures to ease the situation together with the water company or with the assistance of KFOR.

In Kosovo, there are six regional water companies which are publicly owned.<sup>4</sup> These companies usually cover various municipalities. According to a representative of the Kosovo Trust Agency<sup>5</sup>, regional water companies in Kosovo, which are registered as incorporated joint stock companies, are currently well functioning. This is partly due to the Agency's changes in the senior management, focussing on professional considerations only. Besides, most of the regional water companies are able to cover operating costs without the need of financial backing.<sup>6</sup>

In Leposavić/Leposaviq and Shtërpçë/Štrpcë, on the other side, water issues are managed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management and the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning respectively (through offices located in these municipalities). In the northern part of Mitrovicë/Mitrovica region, water issues are managed by companies which are part of Serbian parallel structures.<sup>7</sup> According to an OSCE study of April 2008, the municipalities claim to be generally satisfied with the co-operation between the local and the regional level regarding water issues.<sup>8</sup>

Guidance by the central level has been given so far to five municipalities, including guidelines on the quality of water and notice on efficient usage of water as well as on decisions on the limited use of water and on penalties in case of water misuse.<sup>9</sup> More than half of the municipalities claim not to have any contact with the central level. With the exception of Podujevë/Podujevo municipality, which received a water strategy during the summer 2007, none of the municipalities reported to have received such a strategy from the central level. Only eight municipalities feel responsible for monitoring the level of the local water basin, which is mostly done on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. All other municipalities believe that this falls under the responsibility of the regional water companies.

### **3.2 Level of awareness in the municipalities and measures taken**

About 80% of all Kosovo municipalities have suffered from water shortages in the last five years, in 70% of which cases the situation became more severe in the recent years.<sup>10</sup> Most municipalities expect water shortages in summer of 2008 due to droughts and other reasons.<sup>11</sup> Water shortage in urban areas is often connected to lack of electricity. Almost all municipalities perceive their individual situation as being better compared to other municipalities and regions.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, all affected municipalities claim to be aware of their situation as regards past and upcoming water shortages. However, only 25% of them have an emergency plan for times of acute water shortages, relying mainly on mobile water tanks and better maintenance of the pipes.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The Regional Water Company in Prishtinë/Priština, "Hidroregjioni Jugor" in Prizren, "Hidrodrini" in Pejë/Peć, the Regional Water Company in Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, "Hidrosistemi Radoniqi" in Gjakovë/Dakovica, and "Hidromorava" in Gjilan/Gnjilane.

<sup>5</sup> Meeting with a representative of the water sector of the Kosovo Trust Agency on 29 April 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. According to the representative from the Kosovo Trust Agency, only one company, the Regional Water Company in Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, needs financial support.

<sup>7</sup> For example, the water supply company *Ibar*.

<sup>8</sup> However, Kaçanik/Kačanik, Kamenicë/Kamenica, Viti/Vitina, Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, Mamuša/Mamushë/Mamuša, Hani Elezit/Deneral Janković, Gjilan/Gnjilane, and Novobërdë/Novo Brdo describe the relations with the regional level as not good or non-existent.

<sup>9</sup> It should be mentioned that only nine municipalities have addressed requests to the central level.

<sup>10</sup> In some extreme cases, like in Zveçan/Zveçan in the north of Kosovo, some rural areas were completely cut off from water supply for months.

<sup>11</sup> The municipalities' estimations are mainly based on past experience, the geographic location of the municipality and on the current levels of water reservoirs.

<sup>12</sup> Only Zveçan/Zveçan, Kamenicë/Kamenica and Malishevë/Mališevo perceive their situation as the worst in their region.

<sup>13</sup> Only Prishtinë/Priština, Leposavić/Leposaviq, and Zubin Potok/Zubin Potok review their emergency plan on a regular basis.

In mountainous areas, villages often have access to different mountain water sources but they are usually more dependent on electricity because of lower water pressure. In general, rural areas have less access to water than urban areas. However, in times of excessive water shortages many remote rural villages can resort to their own water wells and natural water springs, even though they are often contaminated. Another problem throughout Kosovo is leaking water pipes. Valves get stolen regularly and pipes are often not sufficiently maintained for financial reasons.

Most Kosovo municipalities which have suffered from water shortages have issued municipal legal acts in order to regulate the water usage, e.g. prohibitions of activities like washing cars, watering streets and wasteful backyard irrigation. These prohibitions are mostly linked to sanctions for misconduct. However, measures have hardly been fully implemented and enforced. Only in a few cases, municipal inspectors cut off consumers from the water supply after issuing warnings. Other measures that have been taken are public meetings to discuss the issue of water shortage with the inhabitants, carrying out awareness activities on rational use of water (e.g. in schools and through media), guarding valves of the piping system to prevent illegal tapping, and building more cisterns and wells in the affected areas. Also, investments by municipalities (servicing pumps and pipes, drinking water treatment, etc.) have increased slightly.

Municipal officials do not perceive political problems such as ethnically motivated power cuts (water pumps run on electricity) and the like. Only in the Mitrovicë/Mitrovica region are difficulties expected as regards non-payment of water bills by Kosovo Serbs.

## 4. Legal framework

### 4.1 Competences for water management

The protection of water resources and the management of water supply is regulated by the UNMIK Regulation 2004/41.<sup>14</sup> According to this Regulation, the competent authorities for water management in Kosovo are the following: the Government, the Water Authority of Kosovo, the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning<sup>15</sup>, the River Basin District Authorities, and Municipalities.<sup>16</sup> Article 20 of the Kosovo Water Law foresees that the municipality administers water supply sources at the local level as well as the natural water springs, public springs, public wells and ditches.

The municipalities can hand over their responsibilities for water supply to regional water companies through signed contracts. Such service agreements cover a wide range of rights and obligations, e.g. the water companies' duties to "operate the system in an efficient and effective manner, and fulfil the performance improvement targets set forth by the Board of Directors"<sup>17</sup>. The advantage of such agreements is often that the regional water companies have better know-how and equipment in order to ensure continuous maintenance.

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<sup>14</sup> UNMIK Regulation 2004/41 on the Promulgation of the Kosovo Water Law Adopted by the Assembly of Kosovo (Kosovo Water Law).

<sup>15</sup> According to Article 18 of the Kosovo Water Law, the responsibilities of the ministry are the following: "a) determination and implementation of policies for water development in Kosovo, as well as the achievement of approved objectives from the programme of the Government; b) management of Water Resources; c) drafting of the Water Strategic Plan and other plans for Water Management pursuant to this law; and d) accomplishment of management and related professional tasks, as well as other organizational and development tasks pursuant to the provisions of this law." The ministry has also issued a number of instructions on water issues (see Annex).

<sup>16</sup> Kosovo Water Law, Article 16; The Water Authority of Kosovo and the River Basin District Authorities do not exist so far.

<sup>17</sup> Extract from an example service agreement between a municipality and a regional water company. These agreements "may not be modified except in writing and signed by both parties and the KTA" (Kosovo Trust Agency).

## 4.2 The future of water supply management in Kosovo

In June 2008, the Kosovo Trust Agency, which administered the regional water companies, closed its operations without officially handing over the responsibilities to any other authority. The Kosovo Assembly adopted legislation to take over responsibility for publicly owned enterprises from the Kosovo Trust Agency, including water companies. It is expected that additional legislation will grant municipalities ownership in the form of shareholder responsibilities for the joint stock water companies. In this regard, the Kosovo government also considers establishing a successor organization to the Kosovo Trust Agency, which should be under the government's supervision.

However, it remains to be seen what effect the closure of the Kosovo Trust Agency, i.e. the withdrawal of the only international regulatory institution supervising the water sector in Kosovo, will have on the level of functioning and professionalism of the regional water management after June 2008. A political vacuum after June 2008 could have negative effects on the functionality of the water sector. Factors such as political influence and positioning should be avoided, for example filling positions according to the political rather than the professional background of candidates. International donor organizations supporting the water sector could, however, have some influence in this regard, as investments will probably be avoided if the level of transparency and professionalism decreases. Thus, it is in the interest of the Kosovo government to ensure that the political influence in the sector is limited to a minimum in order to attract international donors.

## 5. Risk assessment

In a recent issue of *The Economist*, the author of an article on rivers and conflicts states that “drought, desertification and food shortage are among the factors that foment conflict within states by tipping some areas, at least, into social collapse.”<sup>18</sup> One cannot deny the various kinds of threats to a sustainable water supply in Kosovo in the future. There is a range of dimensions to bear in mind for a risk assessment in this regard. These dimensions are very often interlinked and can thus lead to “domino effects”.

### 5.1 Higher demand

Especially in the Prishtinë/Priština region the high number of new users adds an additional burden to the existing water supply system.<sup>19</sup> Estimates on the total population of Prishtinë/Priština vary considerably, ranging from 300,000 to 500,000 inhabitants currently living in the municipality. This reflects the dramatic increase of water consumers since the 1980s when the population of Prishtinë/Priština was as low as 70,000 inhabitants.<sup>20</sup> For financial reasons it is not clear whether many of the new buildings in this region can be connected to the water system. This is also due to the fact that the two main water processing factories cannot treat more water. Similarly, other regions in Kosovo will not be able to cope with more consumers.<sup>21</sup>

Severe water cuts could affect the individual consumer as well as the industry or the agricultural sector of Kosovo (or all of them) which ultimately could have repercussions on the supply of

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<sup>18</sup> The Economist, *Streams of blood, or streams of peace*, Volume 387, Number 8578, 3 - 9 May 2008, page 66.

<sup>19</sup> According to a representative of the Prishtinë/Priština Water Company, there are around 300 new consumers on a monthly basis in their area of responsibility and the number of consumer bills in the region has almost doubled since 1999.

<sup>20</sup> Prishtinë/Priština Water Company, Feasibility Study, summary report, 2002.

<sup>21</sup> The Director of the Prishtinë/Priština Water Company refers to Prishtinë/Priština, Gjilan/Gnjilane, and Ferizaj/Uroševac; whereas Pejë/Peć, Prizren, and Mitrovicë/Mitrovica would enjoy better conditions.

important goods and services. Independent of the extent, rural and remote areas are more likely to be affected by water cuts than other regions

## 5.2 Environmental factors

Water issues in Kosovo do not only concern supply and access to water, but also access to safe water. According to the World Water Council, “because of the lack of adequate sanitation systems, about 80% of rural population [in Kosovo] consumes contaminated water from domestic wells”.<sup>22</sup> There are various risks for the water supply and the (ground) water quality, depending on the region and the respective water source. The main environmental risks identified are the contamination of water reservoirs, rivers, groundwater and wells.

- **Contamination of water reservoirs:** The Badovac/Badovc reservoirs – one of the main water supply providers for Prishtinë/Priština region – is situated next to a road where, among other heavy traffic, trucks carrying hazardous goods pass by at a high speed. The road borders the lake over a distance of six kilometres, most of which is not protected with appropriate measures that prevent those vehicles from falling into the water in case of an accident.<sup>23</sup>
- **Contamination through leaking pipes:** The water from the water reservoirs might be contaminated through the old and sometimes leaking pipe system. The fact that drinking water pipes and waste water pipes are often placed next to each other adds an additional risk, potentially leading to a health risk to parts of the population.
- **Contamination of rivers and ground water:** The waste water from households and factories in Kosovo is not treated at all and thus flows directly into rivers and fields. This leads to many rivers in Kosovo being highly contaminated and also poses a threat to the ground water in the long-run. In fact, the recent chemical and bacteriological monitoring shows that the majority of rivers in Kosovo are polluted and may not even be used before prior water treatment. While most rivers at the source are of good quality, this quickly changes as the rivers pass towns and industries downstream.<sup>24</sup>
- **Contamination of wells:** Especially in rural areas, many people depend on water from local wells.<sup>25</sup> However, many of these wells are often highly contaminated and pose a health risk to the population. With no alternatives in place, the people will continue to use water from these wells. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to also connect remote villages to a functioning water supply system.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> World Water Council, *The Right to Water in Kosovo*, in: News Update No. 22 February 2007, page 4.

<sup>23</sup> The Badovac/Badovc and Batllavë/Batlava reservoirs provide 90% of the region with water. The water from Badovac/Badovc is processed by a water treatment plant built in the 1960s. The water from Batllavë/Batlava is processed by the so-called Albanik water treatment plant, built in the 1980s and secured by KFOR. The other 10% are provided through various smaller plants in the region, supplied for example by groundwater.

<sup>24</sup> UNMIK/Provisional Institutions of Self-Government, *Kosovo State of Environment Report*, 2003, page 18; in the village of Laplje Selo/Llapllasellë, part of Prishtinë/Priština Municipality, the river is extremely contaminated by rubbish and waste water. In summer, village leaders complain about the unbearable smell particularly stemming from the sewerage and the health threat to the village population.

<sup>25</sup> According to an estimation from a representative of the Prishtinë/Priština Water Company, about 10% of the population in the Company’s area of responsibility is not connected to the general pipes network.

<sup>26</sup> Kaçanik/Kačanik, Mamuša/Mamushë/Mamuša, Shtime/Štimlje, Suharekë/Suva Reka, Klinë/Klina, Obiliq/Obilić, and Gjakovë/Đakovica are highly dependent on underground sources like local wells and water springs.

### **5.3 Financial restrictions**

Leaking pipes, illegal connections, and avoidance of the payment of water bills form the main reasons for water loss throughout Kosovo, in both material and financial terms. According to a representative of the Prishtinë/Priština Water Company, only 62% of the consumers pay their water bills. In addition, there is a huge water loss through leaking pipes and illegal tapping. The lost earnings would be needed to:

- Maintain the existing water pipe system and connect new users;
- Maintain and partly renew the water treatment plants;
- Engage in trans-regional projects to find long term solutions for sustainable water supply for all regions in Kosovo, for example through building dams to save water and laying pipes to transport this water from water-rich regions to water-poor regions;
- Engage in environment awareness raising campaigns;
- Develop projects to process waste water in order to avoid rivers and wells being contaminated.

### **5.4 Risk of chain reaction**

Kosovo Energy Corporation's Kosovo B power station in Obiliq/Obilić needs a large amount of cooling water which is currently provided by the Gazivode/Gazivodë reservoir in order to be operational. A potential disruption of water supply from Gazivode/Gazivodë could create a chain reaction. This is due to the fact that many water pumping stations rely on electricity supply. Electricity cuts, emanating from a lack of cooling water, could thus lead to more water cuts, originating from non-functioning pumps.

### **5.5 Political risks**

The Gazivode/Gazivodë reservoir in Zubin Potok in northern Kosovo is one of the biggest water reservoirs of its kind in Europe and one of the most important assets for the Kosovo economy.<sup>27</sup> It provides cooling water for the Kosovo Energy Corporation's power station Kosovo B in Obiliq/Obilić and was in the past vital for the Ferronickel/Feronikal company and the Trepça/Trepča mines. Furthermore, it supplies the area between Mitrovicë/Mitrovica and Prishtinë/Priština with irrigation and drinking water and constitutes the emergency drinking water reservoir for the city of Prishtinë/Priština.

While the Gazivode/Gazivodë reservoir is located in a Kosovo Serb inhabited area<sup>28</sup>, the water is processed in a Kosovo Albanian inhabited area.<sup>29</sup> Thus, the co-operation between Kosovo Albanian and Kosovo Serb personnel responsible for water supply and above all a co-operative attitude at a higher level are of crucial importance. Though the co-ordination currently seems to be functioning on the surface, there is a lack of actual co-operation among the actors involved in water supply issues.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> The water supply system was constructed in 1980/84, funded by the World Bank and with self-contribution of citizens of Zvečan/Zveçan and Mitrovicë/Mitrovica.

<sup>28</sup> With 15% of the reservoir belonging to Serbia proper.

<sup>29</sup> The water of the Gazivode/Gazivodë reservoir is processed in the "Water Factory" located in Sipolje/Shipole village, in the south of Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, and further distributed to the northern locations via a single pipe running under the main bridge. The water system linking the Gazivode/Gazivodë reservoir with the "Water Factory" is operated by the Javno Preduzece 'Ibar' company which is managed and financed from Belgrade.

<sup>30</sup> Neither Zvečan/Zveçan Municipality or northern Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, nor the Water Supply Company "Ibar" have access to the "Water Factory" in the south. The only co-operation with regards to the water supply is maintained with Zubin Potok Municipality where the Gazivode/Gazivodë reservoir is situated. The level of the Ibër/Ibar River is regulated by a hydro-plant barrier in Gazivode/Gazivodë reservoir. A Regional Working Group for water supply was established in 2006 aiming to co-ordinate activities between the main actors involved in water supply issues in

There is a risk that the relations between the communities in the north and the south might deteriorate in the future, as the Kosovo Serbs living north of the Ibër/Ibar River claim that they are discriminated against with regard to water supply. This perception partly stems from the fact that after the water is being processed in the south, the fresh water pipes first run through south Mitrovicë/Mitrovica before reaching the Kosovo Serbs in Zveçan/Zveçan and northern Mitrovicë/Mitrovica. Thus, much of the water is already consumed in the south, leaving the north with an insufficient water supply which led to serious water shortages in the last eight years.<sup>31</sup> This perceived ethnic discrimination might in the future lead to conflicts, especially if the water demand in the south further increases, which would even lead to less water reaching the remote parts including the north.

The OSCE was informed on 9 July 2008 that a local water supply company started the construction of a new pipeline to improve the water supply for around 1,000 inhabitants of northern Mitrovicë/Mitrovica. The project will be funded by United Nations Development Programme and implemented together with UNMIK.

## 6. The importance of regional and cross-national co-operation

There are three river basins flowing out of Kosovo into three different seas (Black Sea, Aegean Sea, Adriatic Sea, see table below), which is a rather unique situation. The Ibër/Ibar is the only major water source flowing into Kosovo.

**Table: River Basins in Kosovo**

River Basin	Catchment Zone	Area (Km2)	Average Flow (m3/s)
1."Drini i Bardhë/Beli Drin"	Adriatic (Through Albania)	4400	60
2. "Ibër/Ibar"	Black Sea (through Danube)	4700	33
3. " Morava e Binqes /Binačka Morava"	Aegean Sea (through Vardar)	1600	7
4. " Lepenci/ Lepenac"	Aegean Sea (through Vardar in former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)	800	8

Source: Database of Hydro-economy for Kosovo, 1983 Belgrade

The trans-national aspects of rivers usually lead to some degree of regional co-operation mechanism in order to avoid potential conflicts arising from the use and management of downstream water, e.g. pollution or the construction of dams. In this regard, regional or bilateral arbitration or compliance mechanisms are often established. Concerning rivers originating in Kosovo, no such mechanisms exist. In the future, such means to regulate cross-border management of the water flow of the White Drin (Drini i Bardhë/Beli Drin) flowing from Kosovo into Albania, might become necessary,

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the south and the north. However, the Working Group failed to address the issue properly since the problem was politicised. The Serbian representatives stepped out of the Working Group in 2007.

<sup>31</sup> The constructed capacity of the water supply system was initially supposed to meet the needs of only two municipalities: Zubin Potok and Mitrovicë/Mitrovica. In the period between 1984 and 1999, other municipalities were also connected to the network, already resulting in poor supplies in some rural parts of the region. The water supply situation aggravated further through the concentration of people in the urban area of south Mitrovicë/Mitrovica. Thus, the quantity of water reaching Zveçan/Zveçan and northern Mitrovicë/Mitrovica is insufficient to meet the needs of the current population in the north which increased by approximately 11,000 displaced persons. Another factor leading to less water supply is that Zveçan/Zveçan and northern Mitrovicë/Mitrovica are geographically on a higher position compared to the other municipalities in the region. In addition, there are losses in the pipelines due to the outdated infrastructure as well as to irrational expenditures by citizens. Due to these deficiencies, last summer the rural areas of Zveçan/Zveçan were completely cut off even for months.

bearing in mind the high degree of pollution of rivers in Kosovo. The same applies to river Sitnicë/Sitnica which is heavily polluted with industrial waste and runs into the Ibër/Ibar.

## 7. Conclusions and recommendations

The following conclusions can be drawn based on the findings of the research:

- The OSCE is not aware of a systematic discrimination or of any severe cases of selective treatment regarding water distribution or water cuts in Kosovo. However, water supply disputes in the future could lead to preferential treatment if resources become more scarce.
- There are substantial risks to the water supply in Kosovo implying that in the near future the water supply will stay the same or increase slightly at best, but not sufficiently. Remote and small villages are affected most by water cuts.
- The awareness level of municipalities and the government of the perils of water supply and water quality seems to be low throughout all municipalities, which is also a result of the allocation of competences to regional water companies. The lack of awareness is the main reason why measures tackling water shortages have been implemented and enforced in an ineffectual way.
- The complete lack of waste water treatment in Kosovo poses a precarious risk to the ground and drinking water and to nature in general. Certain forms of industrial waste can cause long-term harm to the environment.
- Due to the increasing population in Kosovo and the increasing number of households connected to the water system, the demand for water will increase heavily over the coming months and years.
- The drinking water and waste water system in Kosovo suffers from severe equipment failures and maintenance problems entailing a need for significant investments in water infrastructures. Necessary investments are further cut by the fact that a considerable share of the consumers do not pay their water bills.
- After the closure of the Kosovo Trust Agency, there is a risk of political vacuum affecting the management of water supply and water quality in Kosovo.
- The manifold nature and interlinked dimension of the resource water (e.g. its political, socio-economic, financial, ecologic implications) can create a domino effect potentially amplifying a water crisis.

It is doubtful whether Kosovo institutions, without financial backing from the international donor community, are able to cope with upcoming water shortages since they already rely to a large extent on assistance from international actors like KFOR.

Due to these negative prospects regarding access to water, the OSCE recommends that the central and local authorities engage in tackling the issue in both the short and the long term in the following ways:

- **Short term:**
  - Assess the needs of investments in new water infrastructure (including waste water treatment) and in refurbishing and maintenance the existing infrastructure to be presented to potential national and international donors as soon as possible.
  - Meet some of the risks identified immediately, e.g. through special safety measures for the road alongside Badovac/Badovc water reservoir.
  - Elaborate emergency plans together with each municipality on an individual basis.
  - Each municipality needs a clear line of responsibility regarding local water issues.
  - Immediately engage in awareness raising campaigns and educate people to be more responsible with water resources, e.g. through media campaigns and information leaflets.

- Restrict evident and gross wastes of water like pavement watering and the like.
  - Address the potential political vacuum after the closure of the Kosovo Trust Agency's operations in June 2008. Transparency and professionalism should be key in filling positions in the water sector.
- **Long term:**
    - Meet some of the risks identified through long term plans, e.g. develop measures to save water, to build new regional channels, and to maintain and expand the system.
    - Connect remote villages to the water supply system to avoid that the rural population be dependent on contaminated water from local wells.
    - Develop a long term water strategy in co-operation between the central level and municipalities.
    - Increase co-operation and information between municipal administration and the regional and central level.
    - Ensure law enforcement against illegal tapping and consumer debts.
    - Prevent possible discrimination of communities as regards limitation of water usage.