Report from 3.1.1:

Boundless Basins: What are the successes and failures of hydro-solidarity?

Three questions posed by the Chairman:
1) Are there any examples of international water agreement based on *hydro-solidarity*?

First of all, what is “hydro-solidarity” (HS) in an international context?

One interpretation could be that “hydro-solidarity” forms the basis for any agreement; if there are not any compromises on either side, there will probably not be any agreement!

Another interpretation is that the signatories in a water agreement have developed this in “good faith and intentions”.
However, it is wise to assume that “states act according to their strategic interests – whether that is social, economic, security, and/or political interest”.
In essence, no concrete examples of HS were presented in the Session, although the “French experience”, “Prust-river (East Europe), and the Orontes Rivers (Lebanon and Syria), as well as agreements on the Rhine, Rhone and Danube rivers – and not at least the water commissions of US/Mexico and US/Canada shed light of interesting lessons learnt.

The latter “water commissions examples” are probably the closes to HS – However, they might better been terms as lasting agreements due to sustained bilateral relationships.
2) To which extent is “power-asymmetry” determining the outcome of water agreements or lack of such?

- Cooperation among riparians might - in some cases when they are not ‘effective’ – function as a “smoke-screen”

- Asymmetric power influences control over allocation of shared waters.

- Prevailing practice is “hydro-sovereignty” versus “hydro-solidarity”
• “The notion of benefit-sharing” as to be assessed in each case, but it will probably not replace “water sharing - including water allocation/quality concerns.

• Some sort of “perceived water cooperation” might also cement “hydro-hegemonies”.
3) Is the notion of “sharing benefits” a way forward?

• Today, there are no international water agreements world-wide that is solely based on “sharing benefits”!
• There are several that contain internationally accepted principles like allocation and water quality – as well as sharing benefits (e.g., dams) (cf. the ‘international water-agreement data-base of Oregon State University, US).
• Sharing water (quantity and quality) and benefits should also include provision of risk management – due to climate change.
Two points for further reflection:

1) Is “transboundary water” a dubious term?

   a) Does it include only water that is not divided along a (water) ‘mid-line’, or, if not;

   b) Is “transboundary water” replacing the commonly accepted term (by the UN), “international water resources”?

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2) ’Great nations’ tend to take environmental, social and economic responsibilities that go beyond the narrow definition of ‘national sovereignty’