

Transboundary Water Relations in the Asi Basin: The Case of Syrian-Turkish Relations

Aysegül Kibaroglu and Vakur Sümer

aysegul.kibaroglu@mef.edu.tr

Dept. of Political Science and International Relations, MEF University, Istanbul

vsumer@gmail.com

Dept. of International Relations, Selcuk University, Konya

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1. Introduction

This paper aims to analyze transboundary water relations in the Asi River Basin by utilizing some relevant assumptions of contending approaches to transboundary water politics. It starts with a theoretical discussion on how contending approaches differ in their main units of analysis, and issues they tend to prioritize. Then it follows with an assessment of transboundary water relations between Syria and Turkey in the Asi basin particularly by scrutinizing the dynamic set of relations in political-economy domain.

Diplomatic negotiations and legal treaties on water sharing provide sources of the formal status of transboundary water relations between riparians. However, such analyses need to be complemented with studies focusing on the political-economy aspects of the constantly changing set of relations among riparians.

2. A theoretical discussion on transboundary water relations

There are a number of scholarly approaches dealing with the nature and scope of transboundary water cooperation among states, including studies on the Asi River Basin. These might be grouped into two broad categories of analyses. The first category of analyses tends to focus more on the politico-legal dimension of transboundary cooperation with an interest on how the competitive use of water resources by the riparians may have an impact upon the treaties regulating water sharing among countries. They tend to see the nation-states as unitary as well as the main actors of policy. Another common theme within this category of studies is describing transboundary water issues as high-politics and sometimes security-related issue. These studies treat transboundary water problems as a reflection of the power distribution in the basin. In order to overcome the power-based asymmetries in water sharing, legal norms are of great significance.

One of the early examples in the category of studies focusing on the legal regimes in transboundary waters is Caponera's (1993) analysis of transboundary legal aspects of, inter alia, the Asi River Basin. Caponera, following a discussion on the basic features of legal agreements in the basin, calls for establishment of a

“regional water authority” where all riparians would join and an adherence to Helsinki rules (1966) which envisage “the equitable apportionment and eventual joint monitoring, inspection, and control of the water resources”. Thus, according to Caponera, solutions must rely on agreements based on sound legal principles.

Except from basin-specific studies as exemplified by Caponera’s, there are also works on the generic capacity of international water law at theoretical and practical levels. For instance, through in-depth analyses of the basic premises of international law on transboundary waters as well as a number of selected cases (the Zambezi, Niger, Mekong, Danube, and Drin), Wouters (2013) provided a general survey of the challenges of the international water law, which, according to her, mainly stem from the irreconcilable interests of sovereign nation-states, and highlighted the need for improvements in coherence and consistency of the international water law. In a similar vein, McCaffrey (2014), following a summary of selected recent developments in the field of the law of international watercourses concluded that despite a number of defects (such as the ILC’s draft articles on transboundary aquifers which emphasize sovereignty and overlaps with the 1997 UN Water Convention), international water law has demonstrated a capacity to promote and facilitate cooperation in transboundary basins.

Studies focusing on the unsettled legal entitlements and subsequent confrontational relations in transboundary river basins generally resonate the premises of political realism. The realist paradigm in International Relations (IR) argues that states are the ultimate actors in international relations. Realism in IR sees the interstate relations as anarchic with no superior authority above nation states (Mearsheimer 1994). In such a setting, states are preoccupied with their national interests that center around the main goal of “survival” (Mearsheimer 1994). Besides survival, all other interests are secondary. This brings the analysis of politics in two distinct realms: “high politics” versus “low politics”. While high politics relates to vital matters for state survival, such as the classical understanding of national security that sees military-related issues as the key dimension, low politics pertains to issues of allegedly lesser importance such as economic or welfare related topics. Since distribution of power among states is the main determinant of what states may realize in terms of their interests, states have a natural inclination for more power. Because the only thing states can depend on for their survival is their power. Power, as perceived by realists, is basically made up of material capabilities (Hensel 2005).

Antecedent of this argument, namely the “upstream unilateralism” traces back to several decades. Lowi (1993), for instance, argues that upstream states, due to geographical advantage (which, indeed, is an element of power), do not necessarily need to bother with downstream demands; they can do as they please (especially if they are the powerful riparian states and have the technological capabilities). However, while upstream riparians may use water to gain political control, downstream riparians tend to use military power to gain more control of the water, according to Warner (2004).

Maximization of power with all possible means appears to be one of the main side effects of “anarchic international arena” understanding of realists. This manifests itself in efforts towards increasing economic assets of the state, alliance formations, armament, and even war. Based on this rather pessimistic view of international relations of the realists, then, cooperation is less likely than conflict. However, conflict can be averted if the most powerful riparian in a river basin can provide guidance to transboundary water relations. Having inspired by realist and constructivist accounts, Zeitoun and Warner developed hydro-hegemony as a framework of analysis of transboundary water affairs. According to Zeitoun and Warner (2006), the so-called hydro-hegemons are able to exert varying degrees of influences over other riparians based on their riparian position (upstream vs. downstream), power, and exploitation potential. In this respect, through their capabili-

ties in writing and rewriting the rules of the game, hegemony may bring peace to a transboundary water context.

A recent work by Comair and Scoullos (2015) also argued that hegemonic countries in the Asi Basin which had the superior political and military power, were able to “influence and dictate the negotiation process” preceding the bilateral agreements. They argued, for instance, the first bilateral agreements in the Basin were concluded under the French dominance, while 1994 Agreement was signed under Syrian influence (Comair and Scoullos 2015). They, thus, see power asymmetry as one of the “fundamental aspects” of hydro-political negotiations between riparians.

All in all, as it can be inferred from the analyses above, state-centrality is one of the indispensable elements in the realist framework. The analyses falling within the realist paradigm generally tend to adopt zero-sum logic, i.e. the water amount to be shared in a given river basin is constant and thus, one party’s gain needs to be the other’s loss. This type of approaches run the risk of ignoring the broader benefits that might be created around the river, which could even go beyond the direct benefit that apportionment of water might yield.

A different category of studies focuses on the political economy of relations between riparians; as well as on the actual network of relations and practices created by this broader setting. The political economy of water is defined by Jensen and Lange (2013) as “the interests vested in water resources by public and private stakeholders from multiple sectors; the institutions established by authoritative stakeholders to secure these interests; and the processes that create, sustain and transform institutions and stakeholder relationships over time.” Economic dimensions of water management are intertwined with the political situation in a given basin, which in turn creates the foundations of transboundary relations. According to this view, water-related economic relations between countries of a shared basin may go beyond the framework drawn by the treaties and demonstrate more dynamic features. On the other hand, transboundary diplomatic relations, which could be traced in international agreements over water allocation generally reflect somewhat suboptimal solutions.

In other words, as Mirumachi and Allan (2007) observed that “the invisible and silent political economy processes” are quite significant. Analysis of politico-economic interactions may shed more light on capturing the “actual/practical” ways of cooperation in a given transboundary river basin. As Mirumachi and Allan noted, “cooperative transboundary waters behavior and the evolution of transboundary regulatory institutions and agreements are closely associated with the diversity and strength of the economies of the riparians.” The authors argued that there is a correlation between wealth of riparians and their propensity for cooperation, i.e. richer riparians have the resources to use in cooperative initiatives over transboundary waters than leaders of economically and institutionally challenged poor economies. This means a diverse and strong political economy will be more able and inclined to cooperate.

Blatter and Ingram’s work (2000) also fits in our analysis. While they accept that states still play significant roles in domestic politics and international arena, they are “neither the only powerful hierarchical actors in domestic politics nor the sole representatives of a monolithic national interest in international politics.” They argued that the laws and treaties governing transboundary relations represent ineffectiveness of inter-state relations. Instead, to Blatter and Ingram, the main actors in transboundary water policies are “collective and corporate actors, including agencies from different sectors and levels of government, non-governmental organizations, corporations, and scientific communities”. Therefore, there is not a central actor or arena for decision-making processes in the transboundary water realm.

The benefit sharing approach which could be regarded as part of the liberal political economy school, focuses on the sharing of benefits rather than physical water. (Sadoff and Grey 2002; Sadoff and Grey 2005; Phillips et al. 2006; Dombrowsky 2009). The concept of benefit sharing is defined as “the process where

riparians cooperate in optimising and equitably dividing the goods, products and services connected directly or indirectly to the watercourse, or arising from the use of its waters.” It is accepted that the prospect of potentially gaining higher benefits by cooperating rather than by maintaining the status quo or by taking unilateral action may encourage states to cooperate with each other in their use of shared rivers. According to benefit sharing framework, riparian countries can turn allegedly zero-sum game of water sharing, into a positive-sum setting, which would translate into situations where all riparians are better off (Biswas 1999, Giordano and Wolf 2003). Instead of focusing on the volumetric formulations of water sharing, riparians need to deal with increasing the benefits that they can harvest from river waters they use. Benefits may include anything provided that the society deems it as valuable: livelihood improvement, food security, gender equality, amelioration of ecosystems and biodiversity, aesthetics, ethics, etc. (Tafesse 2009). Therefore, although the approach of benefit sharing coincides largely with the liberal political economy framework, in the sense that economic relations can nurture peace and prosperity, the extent of available benefits (e.g. ecosystem, biodiversity, aesthetics, ethics) makes it broader than an understanding that takes economic activity as its center of attention.

On the other hand, Jaubert et al. adopted a critical approach in examining political economic processes in the Syrian part of the Asi River Basin. They have recently published a report (2014) making assessments of the impact of the Syrian civil war on population displacements, drinking water availability, domestic and agricultural water infrastructures, and agricultural development in the Asi River basin in Syria. Jaubert et al. conclude that mainstream approaches in assessing water security in the Middle East have primarily focused on transboundary issues *per se*. Re-capitulating the fact that there is not a basin-wide agreement on the sharing of water resources in the Asi River basin, like other basins in the Middle East, Jaubert et al. examine the actual implementation of the bilateral agreement (1994) between Lebanon and Syria. While Jaubert accepts that the agreement between Lebanon and Syria is still valid on paper, he notes drilling illegal wells in Lebanon actually violates the Agreement. However, as Jaubert notes, this is to be read as part of a broader and tacit network of relations among various stakeholders in both parts of the border. Jaubert also emphasizes the holistic nature of groundwater resources in Lebanese and Syrian parts of the Asi basin (Northern Bekaa valley), which creates a zero-sum setting in which one party’s extraction would mean the other’s loss. Additionally, ignoring groundwater in water sharing formulations can partly be explained by corrupt intentions of bureaucratic elites in both Syria and Lebanon (Jaubert 2015).

As such, Jaubert et al.’s approach differs from conventional international relations perspectives; be it legal or realist, by stressing the growing concerns in recent years on “the increased pressure on water resources and water quality”. They are also critical of the lack of scholarly interest on “the rampant social and political crisis in the Syrian section of the basin, which is one of the causes of the ongoing conflict” over water resources. Jaubert et al. also diverge from liberal political economy accounts on the grounds that transboundary water relations along Syrian-Lebanese borders are seen to be framed by exploitative and power-based class structures in both countries, rather than mere rational economic logic as liberals think.

As illustrated in the discussion above, the studies dealing with political economic relations in transboundary water contexts cover a lot of ground over a wide-range of issues. One of the most notable strengths of these approaches is related with its capacity to capture the actual interconnectedness of the economic and political spheres within the context of water management, and linkages among economies of riparian countries in a river basin, regardless of suboptimal bilateral agreements on water sharing. So, these analyses are more interested in how we can

better understand the evolving set of transboundary relations in a given river basin through explanations concerning the alterations in politico-economic activity.

The degree of power of explanation in this line of studies basically stems from the fact that they go beyond the basic “ladder of cooperation” arguments that sticks to the diplomatic realm and legal agreements pertaining to water sharing. They also provide more nuanced analyses on how the river creates a number of (sometimes differing) venues for interaction between various stakeholders including non-state actors, and in examining the ways the river sets the limits for cooperation.

Another point is that these studies tend to take the “relational” dimension of politico-economic setting among the riparians, unlike “situation-oriented” studies. That is to say, rather than elaborating on the actual status-quo as a finished case, these analyses are more interested in the changes in relations among riparians. In so doing, these analyses may provide more robust scrutiny over the “flux” of transboundary water relations, instead of dealing solely with the “status”. This provides the former with strength in perceiving the changes in the level of cooperation between riparians more swiftly. Because some of the material-level changes observed in the politico-economic framework can either be translated into water sharing agreements much later, or have never been reflected in the water sharing treaties. And finally, these studies generally do not put the state at the center of their analyses. In other words, in an implicit fashion, they go beyond the realist analyses confined to focus on inter-state relations, which are only able to produce written agreements.

Analyses of politico-economic aspects are rather interested in the practical and influential, but informal exchanges in the basin. The implementation of Syrian-Lebanese Treaty of 1994, and its amendment in 2002 is illustrative of this view. While the Agreement remains intact on legal level, the actual implementation provides a different story. Creation of a quasi-economic network across the border have resulted in concurrence of violations of the Agreement through triggering uncontrolled expansion of groundwater use in Lebanese part of the Asi River Basin.

3. Transboundary relations in the Asi basin: The case of Syrian-Turkish relations

This section of the paper deals with transboundary water relations between Syria and Turkey in the Asi River basin with an eye on the changing dynamics of the broader political-economic relations between two countries. It could be argued that changes in political and economic realms of relations might provide alternative departure points for analysis regarding the transboundary water relations in the Asi Basin.

3.1. Basic features of the Asi River basin

The Asi is a transboundary river which originates in Lebanon in the springs of Labweh near the city of Baalbek in the northern part of the Bekaa Valley and in the Al-Zarqa spring near the city of Hermel; it discharges onto Syrian territory near the town of Al-Omeiry, passes through the cities of Homs and Hamah, and crosses the fertile Syrian Al-Ghab region. It forms the current Turkish-Syrian border for 27 km, flows through Turkey where it unites with the Karasu and Afrin rivers before discharging into the Mediterranean Sea in Turkey. It has a total length of 404 km, of which 38 km are in Lebanon, 280 km in Syria, 27 km along the intentional border between Turkey and Syria, and 59 km in Turkey (UN-ECSWA and BGR 2013).

Asi is one of the most significant watercourses in Syria. It provides 25% or one fifth of the total water resources in Syria. Additionally, the Asi basin has provided a quarter of the agricultural output as well as a third of the industrial production

of the whole country. It has been argued that the significance of the basin for the country's economy is related to the availability and access to water resources (SDC 2014). Besides, the Asi basin in Syria is said to have a "highly strategic nature" based on the diversity of its population, the existence of bordering areas with Lebanon and Turkey, and its location enabling access to the coastal areas and the Damascus–Aleppo highway (SDC 2014).

Asi is also significant for Turkey in terms of irrigation, flood control, water quality issues (Kibaroglu and Sumer 2015), hydropower generation (Kibaroglu et al. 2005), and environmental protection (Ozsahin 2010). Turkish section of Asi basin is highly dependent on waters from Asi and its tributaries (Afrin and Karasu) (UN-ECSWA and BGR 2013: 231). Amik Plain is a notable agricultural area which was reclaimed from a lake in 1940s. Frequent floods in the area destroy agricultural lands, cause harm to lives and property (e.g. Hatay Airport). There is growing thirst for electricity in the region due to increased industrialization, population growth and intensified agricultural activity. Both countries, Syria and Turkey, agreed to establish a joint dam on the border, in the late 2000s, in order to, inter alia, produce electricity for the region. Should established, the so-called Friendship Dam will produce a considerable amount of hydropower (16Gwh/yr) (UN ECSWA and BGR 2013: 236) which is needed in Hatay province and beyond. Water quality in Turkish part of Asi basin is problematic mainly due to pollution in the Syrian segment of the basin, and has serious ramifications for human health (Kibaroglu and Sümer 2015). The refugee influx in Turkey has exacerbated the situation, with risks of open defecation, exposure to animal excreta, lack of adequate hygiene supplies and lack of garbage collection. Last, but not the least, there are environmental concerns. The Asi Delta has been a vital natural habitat for migratory birds, among other species, that need to be protected. Thus, sustaining environmental flows is crucial in this regard.

3.2. Understanding riparian relations between Syria and Turkey: How explanatory contending approaches are

There has been extensive literature (Aras and Polat, 2008; Altunisik 2008; Hale 2009, Hinnebusch and Tur 2013; Kibaroglu 2013) on different aspects of the Syrian-Turkish relations which are generally characterized by a cyclical pattern. In a synopsis, Mahfudh (2012) concluded that "the Syrian-Turkish phenomenon is an example of the working of two opposing dynamics, the first being the policies and factors of rapprochement, intersection, and mutual dependency, and the second representing the policies and factors of separation, disengagement, and antagonism."

Relations between Ankara and Damascus started in a context driven by problems of Ottoman legacy. First and foremost, for the Syrians, the Ottoman Turks were their repressive historical enemy. This long-lasting antagonism was exacerbated when France decided to withdraw from Hatay province (Alexandretta) in favor of Turkey in 1938. Although it was mainly aimed at maintaining Turkish neutrality in an approaching war (World War II), one of the side-effects has been the revival of Arab nationalism within Syria, which later culminated into the Baath Party, ruling the country starting 1963 onwards (Phillips 2011). Secondly, the resolution of the issue of Hatay at the expense of Syrian demands appeared to be a stumbling block for more than six decades between Syrian-Turkish relations.

Following the Second World War, in 1946, Syria became an independent country. Soon after the independence, Syria began to find itself within the Eastern Bloc, whereas Turkey has increasingly engaged with the Western Allies, eventually becoming a NATO member in 1952. Syria first needed Soviet backing in order to firmly establish their national army following the country's independence. Soviets, then, sought to support Syria when it, in 1955, refused to join the Baghdad Pact that United Kingdom and United States had facilitated. Continued Soviet military aid to Syria during the Cold War raised Turkish concerns and caused an impediment

to the progress of relations. Hence, in addition to long-lasting antagonisms, two countries ended up in different camps during the Cold War, a context of interstate relations which was mainly defined by superpower rivalry. Within this atmosphere, the relations between two countries remained stagnant. To illustrate, in fifty years of independence no single Syrian head of state had ever visited the Turkish capital (Phillips 2011).

In brief, greater power struggles between two superpowers of the Cold War reflected on the relations between Syria and Turkey. Being in two opposing camps, and preoccupied with their survival and security interests (i.e. high politics), two countries were not able to circumnavigate the Cold-War conditions and find ways for cooperation in issues of low politics. This dominance of realism which, thus, went hand in hand with limited economic relations between two countries, continued for around five decades.

Relations between two countries deteriorated in the midst of ethnic separatist terrorism in Turkey, which had been allegedly substantially supported by the Syrian regime during most of the 1980s and 1990s, through hosting a number of terrorists within its territories, including its leader Abdullah Ocalan. It increasingly became unbearable for Turkey to endure with Syrian support for terrorism, which was perceived by Turkish authorities as a clear hostility. Finally, it was in October 1998, when Turkey deployed 10,000 soldiers in areas close to Syrian border and threatened Syria with the use of force, Hafez Assad agreed to expel Ocalan. Soon after this, signing of the Adana Security protocol on October 20, 1998 started a new positive era in not only political but also in economic relations between two riparians of the Asi.

Water has been one of the variables during the process culminating into Adana Protocol. One of the aims of the Syrian regime of Hafez Assad, allegedly, was to use its backing for terrorism as a bargaining chip for getting more water from Euphrates (Fawcett 2013). Turkey, in response, promised to release 500 m³/second of water from Euphrates in a bilateral Protocol in 1987, hoping that this would satisfy Syrian demands on water and thus it would not support terrorism in Turkey. However Syria did not fulfill its promise and continued to support separatist terrorism in Turkey until the Adana Protocol.

It is interesting to note that until the period of rapprochement started in 1998, negotiations between Turkey and Syria over the Asi River were tied the Euphrates-Tigris which was shared between Turkey, Syria and Iraq. Since the start of negotiations between Turkey, Syria and Iraq under the mandate of the Joint Technical Committee in the early 1980s, Turkey and Syria adopted conflicting strategies with regard to the subject of negotiation. While Turkey insisted that negotiations would encompass all regional transboundary waters including the Asi, the Euphrates and the Tigris, Syria refused to formally discuss the Asi with Turkey. Syria considered the Turkish province of Hatay, through which the Asi flows and where it discharges into the Mediterranean, as Syrian territory, and hence regarded the Asi River as a “national river” (Kibaroglu et al. 2005).

There are two trends that contributed to convergence of Syrian and Turkish interests in 2000s. One is related with Syrian external relations. This country faced with a strong wave of isolation when the EU, US and Arab countries started a diplomatic boycott in 2005 on the grounds that Damascus was behind the assassination of Rafiq Hariri, former Prime Minister of Lebanon. In this process, Turkey -although it joined the international coalition demanding Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon- appeared to be a friend that Syria can approach and escape from isolation (Phillips 2011). Secondly, Turkish economy had entered a booming period after the crisis of 2001 and began to search for new markets. Syria, with its relatively significant potential as a market for Turkish goods and services, has rapidly become a notable trade partner of Turkey (Phillips 2012).

In addition to improving diplomatic and political relations after the Adana Protocol of 1998, which was illustrated by reciprocal visits of Syrian and Turkish Pres-

idents and Prime Ministers in early 2000s, there has been significant progress on the economic dimension of the relations: bilateral trade numbers have risen to \$724 million in 2001, from negligible amounts prior to 1998 (Oktav 2003). On December 22, 2004, two countries signed the Agreement on Avoidance of Double Taxation and Agreement on Reciprocal Promotion and Protection of Investment which further fostered economic connections between Syria and Turkey. This trade agreement also included an anticipation of the establishment of Syrian trade missions in Hatay which was considered by Turkish authorities as de facto recognition of the international borders of Turkey, particularly with regard to the Hatay province (Scheumann et al. 2011). It was after this agreement negotiations over Asi River gained momentum which finally evolved into the project of “Friendship Dam”.

Within this context, in 2009, Republic of Turkey and the Syrian Arab Republic have agreed in principle to develop the “Friendship Dam”, to be built on the Asi River on the border between Syria and Turkey. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed on December 23, 2009, in Damascus, between two countries clarifying details of the project. According to the Memorandum, a technical working group was to be established under the co-chairmanships of the General Director of the State Hydraulic Works of the Ministry of Environment and Forestry of Turkey, and the General Director of the Water Resources General Commission of Syria (MoU, Article 2). It was decided that, following the studies of the technical working group, the construction work would commence through signing of “A Contract on Construction of the Friendship Dam” between Turkey and Syria on the one hand and the company/companies on the other (MoU, Article 5).

The memorandum adopted a rather flexible approach regarding the cost-sharing. According to MoU, the cost of the construction would be shared between two countries “in proportion to deriving benefits from the dam” (MoU, Article 8). According to feasibility studies, the Dam will produce electricity of 13,47 Gwh/year with an installed capacity of 8.94 MW. The Dam will irrigate some 8,000 hectares of land in Turkey and will protect 6,000 hectares of land from flooding (DSI 2012). The dam is expected to be approximately 15 m high with a capacity of 110 to 147 million cubic meters¹. 40 million cubic meters of water will be used to prevent flooding and the rest for energy production and irrigation.

After lengthy negotiations between two countries on the exact site of the Dam, the foundation was laid down in February 2011 with a spectacular ceremony attended by high-level officials from both Syria and Turkey. The Friendship Dam has been regarded -at the time of commencement- as the “jewel in the crown” of Damascus-Ankara ties, symbolizing a peak in Syrian-Turkish cooperation.

On the side of commercial relations, the pace of improvement continued unabated in the second half of 2000s. With the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) entering into force in 2007, volume of bilateral trade and investment grew exponentially (Butter 2015): Syria’s exports to Turkey rose from \$187m in 2006 to \$662m in 2010 (Phillips 2012, 2011). Turkish companies have built much-needed infrastructure, such as cement plants and hotels, and boosted the oil and tourism industry in Syria. One side-affect, though, was that the FTA caused superior Turkish manufactured goods to threaten previously protected Syrian businesses. For instance, the Kouefati Group, one of Aleppo’s oldest textile manufacturers, had gone bankrupt (Marshall 2009) within two years after the Agreement (Phillips 2011). On the other side of the border, Turkish exports saw a three-fold increase between 2006 and 2010, rising to a value of \$1.85bn, making Syria Turkey’s seventh largest market in the Middle East and North Africa (Phillips 2011). Reduced tariffs on overland trade also contributed Turkey to use Syria as a gateway to increase its exports to further south, to Jordan and the Gulf countries.

1 Second figure has started to be used very recently.

Deepening economic bonds and improving diplomatic dialogue encouraged two countries' authorities to take additional steps. Syria and Turkey agreed in September 2009 to abolish visa requirements between two countries (Bank 2011). Meanwhile, Syrian visitors to Turkey increased more than sevenfold between 2002 and 2011 to just under a million a year, significant enough to prompt a mini-tourist boom in the southern Turkish cities of Antakya and Gaziantep (Phillips 2012).

However, since the beginning of internal conflict in Syria in 2011, trade relations became a different story. Bilateral trade dropped away sharply after 2011, with Turkish sales reaching a low point of \$500 million in 2012 and Syrian exports dropping to \$67 million in the same year. However, Turkish exports to Syria have recently recovered to some extent. An important cause of this is related with outsourcing activities of Syrian companies. Butter (2015), who used data from Turkish official statistics, reported that about a quarter of the companies having foreign shareholders that were established in Turkey, in the first eleven months of 2014 included Syrian investors. According to Butter (2015) aid supplies through Syria-Turkey border have also partly contributed to recovering of Turkish exports to Syria. Although the biggest Turkish companies, or industrial cities (such as Istanbul, Bursa, Kocaeli) remain largely unaffected, Turkish border provinces that had benefited from the previous booming period have now been the ones most negatively affected. A notable example is Hatay province. President of HASIAD (Association of Businessmen and Industrialists in Hatay, Turkish acronym) has declared in as early as 2012 that Hatay was witnessing an unprecedented economic crisis (Radikal Newspaper 2012).

Even greater costs have been caused by huge influx of Syrian refugees into Turkey. It is estimated that 2 million Syrians are currently living in Turkey (ORSAM 2015). Turkish President Erdogan has declared that Turkey has spent some 5.5 billion USD for Syrian refugees by February 2015 (Hürriyet Newspaper 2015). Hatay is one of the cities most affected by the Syrian migration. A recent assessment on the economic impacts of Syrian migration into Hatay found out that without the influx of migration, imports would have been the same, whereas exports from the region would have increased by 24% (ORSAM, 2015). The same study also concluded that the prices of goods in the city went up after the arrival of Syrian migrants. Although demographic characteristics (age, gender, profession etc.) of the participants of this survey are not clearly defined, the authors of this study suggest that 78% of the respondents in Hatay perceived a downfall in wages and increase in rents with the arrival of Syrians (ibid: 18). Nonetheless an econometric assessment by Akgündüz et al. (2015) found that while housing and to a lesser degree food prices increased, employment rates of natives in various skill groups remained largely unaffected in migrant-receiving cities in Turkey. Given the current conditions, population related uncertainty might have long-term effects on the economy and natural resources of the region at large.

The Asi basin comprises some of the most conflict-affected areas in Syria. The city of Homs and the rural districts of Al Qusayr and Ar Rastan have been destroyed heavily. Two-thirds of the four million inhabitants of the basin have been displaced over the past three years (Jaubert 2014). FAO mission that took place in late January 2013 found out that Syrian agriculture -as a whole- is witnessing severe decline as the conflict continues, with wheat and barley production showing a 55% drop, vegetables 60%, and fruit trees and olive oil production 40% (FAO 2013). Moreover in a recent analysis, Jaafar et al. (2015: 9) found that irrigated agricultural production in Syrian section of Asi dropped between 15% and 30% in 2000–2013, with hotspots in Idleb, Homs, Hama, Daraa and Aleppo. Using GIS and remote sensing of vegetation, these authors suggest that northern Lathikiya (on the Syrian–Turkish border), the banks of the Asi River, parts of Idleb, and Aleppo were suffering from the highest EVI drops (Enhanced Vegetation Index, an indicator of agricultural production) (ibid: 9). Concomitantly, serious declines in agricultural activity in Syrian Asi basin suggest an increase in water flow to Turkey. This, along

with the diminished industrial production in the region, may also contribute to an amelioration of the quality of water entering Turkey. However, these predictions need to be tested and validated by systematic scientific studies. Additionally, the internal conflict in Syria caused a suspension in the construction of the Friendship Dam since mid-2012. At the time of writing, it was out of sight whether the works would resume soon.

4. Conclusion

This article analyzed the two categories of approaches in analyzing transboundary water relations, with a specific reference to Asi River Basin and Syrian-Turkish relations. It aimed at critically evaluating these approaches vis a vis Syrian-Turkish relations in the context of politico-economic setting created by the Asi River. While the first category of analyses tends to focus more on the politico-legal dimension of transboundary cooperation with an interest on how competitive use of water resources by the riparians may have an impact upon the treaties regulating water sharing among countries, the second line of argument deals more with the political economic evolution of relations between not only riparian states, but also non-state actors in a given basin.

In this context the article showed that Syrian-Turkish relations in the context of Asi Basin demonstrated a cyclical pattern: while political and economic relationships between two riparians of the Asi River during the Cold War era until the end of 1990s could be analyzed within the framework of political realism; the first political, and then economic rapprochement of late 1990s and 2000s has provided explanatory power to liberal political economic analyses. The demise of collaborative relations between Damascus and Ankara in 2011 appeared as the most recent turn in cyclical relations between two countries, which gave rise to state-centric and security-based realist paradigm.

In specific, it could be argued that political-economic dynamics in Asi Basin represent a more colorful picture than the legal framework, namely treaties, protocols pertaining to water issues. More broadly, the rise and fall of cooperative atmosphere in political and economic relations between two countries had reflections over transboundary water management. Laying the foundation stone of the Friendship Dam was made possible after a relatively long period of rapprochement between Damascus and Ankara. Counter intuitively, as happened in the recent recovery of Turkish exports to Syria, both amount and quality of water flowing into Turkey may get better because of the war in Syria, given the decrease in agricultural and industrial water use in Asi Basin in Syria.

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