

A “Mediterranean Water Agency” to move from strategy to action

Handing over regional cooperation to hydrographic basin professionals



SUMMARY

EVEN WITHOUT THE IMPACT of global warming, the Mediterranean is already experiencing problems in access to water and sanitation that at times lead to water conflicts. Yet water could become the cornerstone of a high-level economic channel and an ambitious international cooperation programme that could contribute to making the Mediterranean a leading “eco-region” on the international scene.

The priorities are well known: water demand management and efficient use of water; improved local and national governance; pricing that is economically appropriate and socially fair; and legal and financial security of investments to facilitate

public-private partnerships, especially for sanitation. Since 1976, Mediterranean water issues have been at the centre of numerous debates, and yet results have not made much progress.

The Mediterranean Water Strategy can only become fully operational if a Mediterranean Water Agency is created. Its role would be to step up and coordinate the resources and actions of NGOs and institutions focusing on water in the Mediterranean before gradually being handed over to professionals working in Mediterranean hydrographic basins or other relevant areas depending on the countries concerned.

UFM'S PROPOSITIONS FOR ACTION

UFM member states that choose to would create a Mediterranean Water Agency to coordinate and implement water projects and action in the Mediterranean. This Agency would be made available to the UFM General Secretariat for the Mediterranean Water Strategy's plan of action.

- Charter: The Agency would be based on a Mediterranean Water Charter, which would echo the common principles of the Mediterranean Water Strategy and would need to be respected to receive funding from public and private international donors.
- Missions: information, documentation and observation; promotion of new water practices for agriculture; exchange of experience and expertise; vocational training and research,

with the Agency playing the same role in the water domain as CIHEAM does in the agricultural domain, and drawing from a network of science parks around the Mediterranean; “hydro diplomacy”, modelling of Mediterranean hydrographic basins, debates on planning regional infrastructures, debates and mediation on managing transboundary waters and exceptional crises and situations; appraisal of projects submitted to the Secretariat General and then, as rapidly as possible, power to make decisions on Euro-Mediterranean projects.

- Funding: governments in the region that choose to would participate in financing the Agency according to a formula to be decided, possibly reflecting countries' wealth, the rate of flow of Mediterranean rivers that cross

them and the waste they discharge into the Mediterranean. Donors would participate.

- Governance:
 - A “Euro-Mediterranean Water Council” would group representatives of Heads of State of participating countries, major towns in the region and directors of NGOs and institutions working with water in the Mediterranean, to determine the Agency's strategic lines;
 - The running of the Agency itself and its executive decisions would be entrusted to professionals representing basins or other relevant areas depending on the country concerned, to provide the best mix of public and private water stakeholders at the right level, covering all actions necessary for integrated water and sanitation management.

1. The challenges are well known

1.1. Insufficient access to drinking water and sanitation

Even without counting the degeneration linked to exploding demand and climate change, which is going to be particularly severe in the region, 180 million Mediterranean inhabitants are already experiencing water stress, especially in the South; 20 million have no access to drinking water and 47 million do not have access to adequate sanitation. The solution is not to simply mobilize non-conventional water sources.

1.2. Priority to water demand management and efficient use of water

Demand for water in the North is likely to be 18% higher in 2050 than it is today, and 30% more in the South. The best way to respond is to increase the efficiency of supply networks, since water that is drawn then lost or unused represents 40% of demand. Improving the efficiency of water used in farming, and introducing new agricultural practices that help save this rare resource are key factors, because irrigation represents two thirds of water demand in the region, and more than three-quarters in the South.

1.3. Improving governance is a key to providing water services in the Mediterranean

Improving water governance in the Mediterranean is the system's lynchpin: national arbitration on water uses; clarifying the tasks of the contracting party and the contractor; drawing up contracts (either with private or public operators) and stable contracts; mobilizing local stakeholders and developing their technical, financial and human capacities; involving users and improving relationships between operators and consumers; ensuring the durability of the service through pricing; managing drinking water and sanitation together at the appropriate scale for basins and towns.

1.4. Managing conflicts of access and distribution

International tensions linked to water access make this a crucial domain for Mediterranean cooperation (e.g. the Red Sea to Dead Sea conveyance programme, transboundary management of aquifers in North Africa, management of transboundary surface and ground waters, etc.).

1.5. Developing treatment and reuse of wastewater

Sanitation is required to protect inhabitants' health, but also for rivers, water tables and the sea we share. Several of the region's countries have expert knowledge of the controlled reuse of wastewater, and this is an essential component of the New Water Mass.

1.6. Huge long-term investment needs

Pricing needs to at least cover current operating and maintenance costs. However, huge funding still needs to be found for modernizing and extending water and sanitation networks, involving several tens of billions of Euro. Upgrading existing water treatment facilities in line with the rising urban population would entail more than 10 billion Euro up to 2025.

2. Favourable context for moving from conventions to action

WATER HAS BEEN AT THE HEART of the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation's concerns since the Barcelona Convention in 1976. Integrated water resource management is one of the priorities of the Mediterranean Commission for Sustainable Development created in 1996. Several international conventions regulate this cooperation, covering for example, operating aquifers in North Africa (Sahara Sahel Observatory), the common strategic debate on the Nile basin (Nile Basin Initiative), and the protection of the Danube, etc.

A number of tools have successively been put in place to further the cooperation's operational side: EMWIS, Plan Bleu, Unep-Map, International Office for Water, Mediterranean Water Institute, GWP-Med, the Mediterranean component of the European Water Initiative, Euro-Mediterranean Network of Basin Organizations, etc. They are currently small and scattered, and have produced few tangible results.

In Europe, since 2000, the Water Framework Directive has determined the main regulations on protecting water resources, making hydrographic basins the scale of reference for analysis and action. The declaration of the EU's Council of Ministers on 22 March 2010 attaches greater value to the access to safe drinking water, declaring that it is "closely related with individual human rights (...) is a component element of the right to an adequate standard of living and is closely related to human dignity". In SEMCs, national legal frame-

works are converging when it comes to clarifying governance, inter-ministerial coordination, pricing, facilitating public-private partnerships, combating leaks in the network and managing by basin or any other relevant area.

Water stakeholders in the region are ready for a new stage in Euro-Mediterranean cooperation. Donor coordination is developing, as seen by the Commission’s Horizon 2020 initiative and the EIB’s project to protect the Mediterranean Sea from pollution. Although it was relaunched at the 2008 ministerial meeting in Jordan, the project for a Mediterranean Water Strategy has not yet come to anything. To do so, it must be given a tool for coordination and execution.

3. A “Mediterranean Water Agency” run by professionals from the basins

3.1. A Mediterranean Water Charter overseeing funding for projects

The Agency’s action would be based on a Charter for water in the Mediterranean, the main lines of which already exist (i.e. the Barcelona Convention and the Mediterranean Water Strategy). It would underline: the three dimensions of sustainable development (ecological, social and economic); the imperative of water efficiency (primacy of demand management); the imperative of sanitation as much as access to drinking water; the protection of the quality of water resources; the importance of integrated resource management; good governance rules in delivering the service; drawing up contracts between public powers and the operator, whether private or public; the necessity of pricing to ensure the durability of services and social balancing-out; the preference for management by basin or any other relevant area.

On this basis, quantifiable targets would (1) provide long-term benchmarks for the Mediterranean Water Strategy, (2) serve as a common reference for national decision-makers to help them devise a national water policy, (3) show projects’ eligibility to receive funding from international public and private donors. Broken down by country, the targets would be the same as the Plan Bleu’s for the region, i.e.: economize a quarter of the overall demand for water by 2025, reduce leakage rates in drinking water supply to 15% and the rate of loss during transport and supply for irrigation to 10%, increase the efficiency of irrigation to land parcels to 80%, and expand industrial water recycling to 50%.

3.2. The Agency’s missions

INFORMATION, DOCUMENTATION, OBSERVATION AND STANDARDIZATION. The Agency would be responsible for collecting studies and making them available to all. In line with the recommendations of the Mediterranean Water Strategy for creating joint tools, the Agency would be assisted by Plan Bleu and EMWIS to develop a regional observatory to aid decision-making, involving standardizing and collecting data and promoting common standards for documentation.

PROMOTING (WITH AGRICULTURE MANAGERS) NEW PRACTICES FOR WATER IN AGRICULTURE. Agriculture is the sector that uses by far the most water. The Agency would therefore develop, in coordination with CIHEAM, specific action to promote reasonable agriculture, drawing from SEMCs’ know-how, efficient use of water and modern irrigation techniques as well as fair water pricing.

EXPERTISE. The Agency would solicit existing institutions and activate a network of experts capable of responding to questions from states, local authorities and other water stakeholders that are currently confronted by plentiful but hard to mobilize potential expertise. It would participate in modelling hydrographic Mediterranean basins in order to ensure water demand management and inform strategic decisions on hydraulic infrastructure and exceptional crisis management.

EXCHANGE OF EXPERIENCE. Exchanging experiences is indispensable for circulating good practices, developing the self-assessment of services, and comparing points of view on contracts, especially PPPs. Existing exchanges of this type are scattered and rarely followed up, and therefore do not result in an accumulation of known-how or sufficient collective emulation, nor the adoption of common norms and standards. The Mediterranean Water Agency would facilitate decentralized cooperation and coordinate exchanges of experience between the region’s basins.

PROFESSIONAL TRAINING, RESEARCH, PROMOTION OF SCIENCE PARKS. Human resources are crucial (whether technical, economic, legal, administrative, financial, managerial or commercial). The development of skills calls for ambitious training policies at all levels of the profession. The Agency would be a central information point on all existing options. It would run a Mediterranean network of vocational water training centres similar to the International Network of Water Training Centres being developed by the International Office for



Water, and would circulate relevant research results. It would play the same role in the water sector as CIHEAM does in the agricultural domain. Around the Mediterranean, a network of science parks with a focus on water could bring together the circulation of good practices (aimed at professionals but also the general public), vocational training, circulation of research results and be an incubator for start-ups. It would encourage water-energy alliances.

“HYDRO-DIPLOMACY”. In the face of a risk of water conflicts, the Agency would be a tool for dialogue, debate and mediation and could become a cornerstone of Mediterranean cooperation. It would promote the management of transboundary basins and international waterways, taking into account environmental sustainability, public health and food security in border countries, economic development of basins and new technologies to increase the resource to be shared (the “new water mass”, including conventional and non-conventional waters). It would implement a New Water Culture founded on values of dialogue, justice, equality and collective commitment, and so prevent water issues from immediately getting caught up in international political power struggles and degenerating into conflict.

PROJECT APPRAISAL. The Agency would be asked by the UFM’s General Secretariat to appraise projects of regional interest. Projects would be assessed in line with the general objectives of the Charter and the quality of governance put into place. The projects’ quality criteria would be defined subject to concerted analysis with national and local water stakeholders. The criteria would vary according to

the country, the use of water (domestic, industrial or agricultural), and would always: (1) respect the general principles of the Mediterranean Water Charter, (2) lead towards the country’s achievement of the targets set in the Charter, (3) involve diverse local stakeholders in the participative process (e.g. associations of irrigators) under the auspices of institutions in the basin or other relevant area. After this, and as soon as possible, the Agency would become a decision-making body.

3.3. Governance of the Agency: the tool of professionals

Governments in the region that choose to would participate in financing the Agency, depending on each country’s wealth, the rate of flow of Mediterranean rivers crossing it and its pollution, based on rules to be defined.

Governance would be on two levels:

- A “Euro-Mediterranean Water Council” grouping representatives of heads of state of participating countries, major towns in the region, directors of NGOs and institutions working with water in the Mediterranean, would determine the Agency’s strategic lines;
- The running of the Agency and its executive decisions would be entrusted to professionals representing basins or other relevant areas in order to avoid cooperation deadlocks from inter-governmental power struggles and international conflicts. Basin institutions, towns and regions are best placed to involve public and private water stakeholders at the right level; they cover all integrated water management actions. They should therefore be at the root of the Mediterranean Water Agency’s operations.

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