

# Towards a Euro-Mediterranean Water Strategy?

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A glance at the map (see map A7 in the annexes) of the world's fresh water availabilities makes clear a common characteristic of the countries to the south and east of the Mediterranean: all of them, from Morocco to Palestine, are among the countries with under 1,000 m<sup>3</sup> per inhabitant per year of available water, the lowest levels in the world and well below the threshold of 1,700 m<sup>3</sup> of renewable water laid down by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) as the minimum necessary to cover the basic needs of the population. Half the world's population suffering this type of "water poverty" lives in the Mediterranean. In this situation of "water stress", access to drinking water has already become one of the main factors of social instability – in some cases, like Algeria, the first water riots have already occurred (for example in November 2007 in the municipality of Reghaïa, on the outskirts of Algiers) – and a recurrent source of conflicts in the region.<sup>1</sup>

The figures are eloquent: 30 million inhabitants of the Mediterranean partner countries have no access to a source of safe drinking water, and 35 million have no access to sanitation, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is already forecasting that the Arab countries will not reach the Millennium Development Goal consisting in "by 2015, reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water". Besides this, the distribution of water resources between the north and the south of the Mediterranean is as unequal as that of income: the north accounts for 75% of the to-

tal renewable water resources in the Mediterranean Basin, the east for 13% and the south of the Mediterranean only for 10%, whereas more than 80% of land in North Africa is desert. The demand for water in the countries on the south and east of the Mediterranean, which has already grown by 60% in the past 25 years, is set to continue growing, and the scarcity of water in the south can only get worse in the coming decades, especially as a result of demographic growth (an increase is expected from the present 270 million inhabitants to 370 by 2030) and growing urbanisation, but also of the increase in agricultural production (FAO calculates that irrigated lands will grow by 38% in the south and 56% in the east of the Mediterranean by 2030), together with climate change and the desertification of part of their lands: according to estimates by Population Action International the per capita water availabilities will remain at stable levels between 1995 and 2005 to the north of the Mediterranean, and will be reduced by 40% to the south and east of it.

Thus the question of water needs to stop being treated, as hitherto, as a merely environmental problem: it is an essential factor in economic development (especially in relation to agriculture, which consumes between 70 and 85% of available fresh water, but also in relation to tourism and industry), and it is also a social question of major importance (it should not be forgotten that access to drinking water is, above all, a human right), central to the poverty-fighting strategies in the region, besides being an ever more pressing geopolitical problem. But all this should not make us forget that the question of water is, above all, a question of efficiency in the management of available resources: between 40 and 50% of available water is lost in leakages from the distribution systems (see the

<sup>1</sup> Agua y conflicto en el mundo árabe. Notas del Foro Socioeconómico de Casa Árabe no. 04/2008, January 2008. [http://publicaciones.casaarabe-ieam.es/foro/notas/notas\\_4\\_agua.pdf](http://publicaciones.casaarabe-ieam.es/foro/notas/notas_4_agua.pdf).

article by Mohammed Blinda), and that the management of demand will be the key to the sector's future. Political co-operation in the water sector in the Mediterranean is of long standing, for it is one of the axes of action both of the Plan Bleu (Mediterranean Action Plan) launched in 1976 and focused on forward-looking analysis, overall studies and a system of indicators for the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development, and also of the Mediterranean Commission for Sustainable Development (MCSD) set up under the Barcelona Convention. In the Algiers Declaration adopted at the first Mediterranean Water Conference held in May 1990, the importance was affirmed of a common strategy of water management, and the process culminated with the adoption of the Mediterranean Water Charter in Rome in 1992, in which twelve Mediterranean countries committed themselves to applying common measures of water planning and management and regional co-operation, together with the creation of the Mediterranean Water Network, although the operative dimension and the resources mobilised have been rather scarce during these 30 years.

It has to be recognised that until now water has not been a priority area for action in the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, even though the Work Program annexed to the Barcelona Declaration mentioned water as one of the areas of economic co-operation, with the modest objectives of "to take stock of the situation (...) to identify ways of reinforcing regional co-operation, to make proposals for rationalising the planning and management of water resources, where appropriate on a joint basis, to contribute towards the creation of new sources of water." But the fact is that for a long time the question of water has been treated more as a technical and environmental question than as an economic, social and political priority.

Despite this, political leaders have always been aware, and increasingly so, of the importance of water in the Euro-Mediterranean context and the need to tackle it at the regional level, albeit with ups and downs, as is shown by the conclusions of the successive Euro-Mediterranean Conferences of Foreign Ministers, especially in Stuttgart in 1999 and in Lisbon in 2007. In November 1996 one of the first Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conferences held in Marseilles focused on the subject of water, and in October 1999 there was another in Turin on the local management of water in which a "Action Plan" was adopted with six priorities, which gave rise to two small regional projects,

although since then the water ministers have not had another meeting in a Euro-Mediterranean context.

One of these regional projects is the Euro-Mediterranean Information System on know-how in the Water sector (EMWIS). EMWIS commands a budget of 3.3 million euros (2 millions under the MEDA Program and the rest contributed by Italy, France and Spain) for 2004-2008, and besides the compilation and dissemination of information it aims at promoting cooperation programs between the national Directorates with competence in the area of water. The MEDA Water Programme (Euro-Mediterranean Regional Programme for Local Water Management [www.medawater-rmsu.org](http://www.medawater-rmsu.org)) for its part has a budget of 40 million euros for the period 2003-2008, and has focused on nine pilot projects with priority status, besides the financing of water-related activities of public authorities and NGOs. Nevertheless, in practice these projects have not yet emerged from the study phase, and it does not look as if they are going to result in the articulation of a real regional project. The managers of these programs themselves admit that the results fall below what the expectations, their importance and the needs called for, and that they have not succeeded in addressing the water question in an integrated way, although this was one of the axes of the Turin Action Plan. Precedence has been given to a strictly local approach which has given rise to a proliferation of initiatives with no synergies between them.

### Integrated Management

In the discussion running up to the adoption of the Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean partnership, in the course of 2007 and 2008, the question of water emerged again as a political priority in the region. In the Joint Declaration of the Paris Summit for the Mediterranean held on 13th July 2008 the importance of water was acknowledged, and it seems that at last a qualitative leap has been made in the way of approaching this subject, since a mandate is issued to the Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on water planned for October 2008 in Amman (it will be the third, nine years after that of Turin) to define a "Mediterranean water strategy" promoting conservation of water resources, diversifying water provision resources and efficient and sustainable use of water.

According to the experts who took part in the workshop on water held as part of the *Encuentros del Mediterráneo*

## INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT AID IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AREA WATER SECTOR

Presented at the Regional Workshop on Water and Sustainable Development in the Mediterranean, the Georges Corm study is a detailed analysis of Official Development Assistance (ODA) given to Mediterranean countries by the various financing organs. This detailed quantitative analysis is based on OECD data in respect of aid provided by the countries of the Development Assistance Committee, the European Community, and the United Nations financing organs and agencies for the 1973-2004 period, thus allowing us to analyse major sector aid trends.

Water is not a new issue for international co-operation, the first major conference on water having been held in 1977: it was the United Nations Water Conference at Mar del Plata in Argentina, which established as fundamental the "need for access by all human beings to good quality drinking water in sufficient quantity."

This principle remains the basis for international conventions and conferences, which over 30 years have sought to define cooperation priorities, and is found once more in the Millennium Development Goals enunciated in 2000.

The Mediterranean region is at the heart of the problem and the substantial hydro-resource deficit experienced by the countries of the Basin makes it the region where the percentage of public aid reserved for water is highest.

Water is similarly defined as a priority in the arena of regional cooperation; it has constituted one of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership's six priorities for economic and financial cooperation since the signing of the Barcelona Treaty in 1995. Since then, a large number of environmental programmes have been implemented around the Basin, within the Barcelona Process framework, but also at the initiative of Arab regional financing bodies, such as the Arab Development Fund, or the African Bank.

Yet, the state of water resources and their inefficient use remain extremely worrying in the region. Such a finding begs the question as to whether financing made available through international cooperation is suited to these countries' needs, and whether they effectively follow the recommendations expressed in the many world summits and action plans.

An analysis of global ODA data published by the OECD does indeed reveal shortcomings in the policy for cooperation in the water sector in the Mediterranean Basin.

Above all, it is particularly concerning to observe that, despite the increasing attention from the international community, there is generally a downward trend in financing commitments. The 1980s, followed by the decade of the 90s constitute the two periods of abundance in terms of the levels of ODA given over to water, which reached as much as 1.539 billion dollars at constant prices in 1996, a level since unequalled and in continual decline. Nevertheless, sums committed have once more gone up since 2002, although not regaining the annual average for the sector over the 1973-2004 period. The share of the water sector itself in ODA totals granted to Mediterranean countries has shrunk over recent years, ending up lower in the 2000-2004 period (6.9%) than it had been for the whole 1973-2004 period (8.8%), a fall which is clear evidence of the diminishing importance given to the water sector, despite all recommendations.

It is harder to arrive at an analysis of sums actually distributed, since the OECD disbursement database only begins in 1990. Nevertheless an increase in disbursements can be observed since 2000, but it is worry-

ing in consequence to find that new annual commitments are less important than annual disbursements.

Secondly, such financing is highly concentrated, both in the restricted number of countries and in the limited number of projects. Of the 2039 projects surveyed in G.Corm's classification between 1973 and 2004, the 229 most costly transactions, 11.1% of projects financed, took up 76% of ODA resources for the water sector; conversely, 922 transactions for less than 500,000 dollars, or 45% of projects financed, only benefited from 0.08% of the ODA total.

The largest projects in terms of financing (in excess of \$100 million) are targeted at large-scale food infrastructure projects, and waste water disposal in large towns. These projects relate to just four countries: Egypt, Turkey, Morocco and Tunisia, to which 81.83% of aid is allocated. However, looking at ODA disbursed per inhabitant, it is small countries such as Albania or Tunisia that are ahead of larger countries. The Palestinian territories lead the list with 47.1 dollars per inhabitant.

The concentration of donor countries is likewise striking, since the three major ones (United States, Japan, and Germany) make up 67.5% of the ODA total granted to Mediterranean countries.

Aid from these countries is concentrated on sewerage systems, food-stuffs, irrigation, and barrage construction.

Here the recommendations of the Millennium Goals are indeed reflected, since these large infrastructure projects are aimed at ensuring supply and access for all to drinking water, resource conservation and an integrated management of the sector. In this respect major donors mirror the priorities of the international Agenda. Such measures are certainly necessary, but not sufficient.

In fact, they pay little regard to the redirection of aid awaited by various regional authorities and initiatives, such as the Action Plan for the Mediterranean, which for several years has advocated placing the stress on *water demand management* (WDM) policies, to arrive at a rationalisation of management in the sector, improved supervision of supply and a reduction in leakage and improper uses.

Measures aimed at demand management are present in donors' policies (zero waste, water-saving measures...) and are included in the more general concept of "integrated water management." But the stress on demand management is only placed in a subsidiary way when it should become a priority in responding to the Mediterranean region's specific problems. Such a reorientation will take some time, policies impinging on demand being more difficult to put in place than those relating to supply, and comes up against the logic of the private sector, which has been assigned a significant part in the sector's management.

Cooperation on its own will not, of course, bring about a resolution of the water sector problems that have become structural in southern and eastern Mediterranean countries. It is essential for progress to be durable that there is a more vigorous mobilisation of States and local communities aimed at managing and renewing the sector with reference to problems identified in other sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture or tourism.

G.Corm, *Le secteur de l'eau dans la politique de coopération avec les pays méditerranéens*, Regional Study for the Workshop on Water and Sustainable Development in the Mediterranean, Zaragoza, 19-21 March 2007.

organised by IEMed in Barcelona on 12th and 13th June 2008, a Euro-Mediterranean water strategy should tackle the problem of water in an integrated way, from the capture stage and availability of water resources (including its creation by desalination) to de-pollution and coastal protection, passing through distribution, rationalisation of use, especially in the agricultural sector, and sanitation. This has not always been the case hitherto, despite the fact that integrated management already figured as one of the five priorities of the Short and Medium-term Priority Environmental Action Programme (SMAP) adopted at the Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference in Helsinki in November 1997. It also entails fixing the governance problems posed by water (multiplicity of operators and dispersion of competences among an excessive number of organisms, including the fact that the ministry responsible for water is frequently lacking any power for everything related to agriculture). In fact, one of the challenges that will doubtless arise from the implementation of this strategy will be that of involving the local authorities and companies that manage water distribution and sanitation, and in many cases water collection too.

The integrated management of the water issues links the management of fresh water to the de-pollution of the Mediterranean, although it is obvious that the northern countries tend to give priority to an environmental approach, while the southern countries attach greater importance, socially and politically, to the question of access to drinking water. In this respect, it is important to supplement the execution of the Horizon 2020 project for the de-pollution of the Mediterranean adopted as one of the initial projects of the Union for the Mediterranean in the Paris Summit with a series of initiatives that will tackle the question of access to water; in this respect the Mediterranean water strategy could be a suitable instrument for doing this if it does not remain at a purely declaratory level.

In conclusion, the three basic elements of a Euro-Mediterranean water strategy should be, according

to the experts: 1) institutional rationalisation; 2) a coherent policy of investments in infrastructures for desalination, distribution and sanitation, as well as irrigation (with the corresponding resources, which for the most part have to be public ones); 3) an integrated water management policy comprising a process of shared planning and information. To be effective, this Mediterranean water strategy needs to lay down specific common objectives (wherever possible, quantified) and concrete timetables, with common orientations on how to achieve them, a system of indicators to assess progress and the policies and instruments applied, and a sufficient pool of resources to support their implementation. The European Water Framework Directive, which lays down a common system of planning and information in a context of absence of community competences in the matter (water continues to be a matter of national competence), could serve as a model. At any rate the experts agree that, in the Euro-Mediterranean context, the key is in financial resources: "the issue of financing the investments for the supply of drinking water and sanitation (on the south and east sides of the Mediterranean), and that of recourse to economic instruments – subsidies, tarification etc. – to optimise the allocation of available resources are central for the future<sup>2</sup>."

If the ministers responsible for water measure up to the mandate they have received, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership could take its place at the centre of policies to tackle one of the economic, social and environmental challenges that most affect the everyday life of Mediterranean citizens. Nothing better to give impulsion to its visibility and its ownership by the general public, and an excellent test-tube to combine the project approach adopted as part of the Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean with the political strategy derived from the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and the involvement of non-governmental actors such as civil society (whose participation is essential for the local management of water), local authorities and business.

<sup>2</sup> "Faire face aux crises et pénuries d'eau en Méditerranée", Les Notes du Plan Bleu no. 4, October 2006.