

Implementation within the UNECE region: Mediterranean Component of the EUWI

1. Context – Background – Political Commitment

Water supply in the Mediterranean region is unequally distributed in space and time, both at regional level and within each country. In certain countries, exploitation indexes of renewable natural fresh water resources have reached 100%. The intensive extraction and use of water for domestic, agricultural and industrial purposes, without proper provisions for the protection of the resource, has led to serious water pollution of surface and ground water bodies. Agriculture consumes 70-80% of water in the Mediterranean countries. Many countries in the region are currently in a stage of institutional reform, orienting priorities and practices towards an integrated water resources management (IWRM) approach. Major investment on water infrastructure in the Mediterranean countries has been made through bilateral and multilateral agreements. The EU Member States and the Commission are among the major donors in the region, including support to water sector, constituting a major force towards economic growth and transition.

MED EU WI, announced during WSSD, currently runs its Design Phase, giving particular emphasis to Mediterranean and Southeastern Europe priorities.

The Mediterranean Component (MED EUWI) is an integral part of the EU WI and shares its overall objectives, aiming to:

- assist design of better, demand driven and output oriented water related programmes,
- facilitate better coordination of water programmes and projects, targeting more effective use of existing funds and mobilization of new financial resources and,
- enhanced cooperation for project's proper implementation, based on peer review and strategic assessment.

Political commitment for the development of MED EUWI has been already expressed in various Ministerial Conferences (**see annex**) and fora, inter alia, the *EU Informal Council of Environment Ministers (May 2003, Athens)*, *5th Pan-European Ministerial Conference of the "Environment for Europe" process (May 2003, Kiev)*, *Euro-Mediterranean Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs (May 2003, Crete)*, *two meetings of the North African Ministers Council on Water (February and October 2003, Cairo) etc.*

2. Thematic Areas

The MED EU WI focuses on the following Themes:

- Water supply and sanitation, with emphasis on the poorest part of the societies
 - Integrated water resources management, with emphasis on management of transboundary water bodies
 - Water, food and environment interaction, with emphasis on fragile ecosystems
 - Non-conventional water resources
- while as horizontal Themes are identified
- Transfer of technology, transfer of know how, capacity building and training
 - Education

Key areas where the MED EUWI could make a difference are likely to include:

- Promoting water as a cornerstone of sustainable development
- Raising the programmatic profile of water in PRSPs and NSSDs of partner countries
- Coordinating funding for water in a better way among the partners of the Initiative
- Linking together the wide range of financing ideas, networks and mechanisms that currently exist for water in the Mediterranean and Southeastern Europe
- Supporting better project preparation facilities

- Supporting the elaboration of a wider range of models for water sector restructuring in addition to involving private sector participation by competent international operators.

3. Actors

The area of activity of MED EUWI comprises, the following *partner countries* :

In the Mediterranean – Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Israel, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestinian Authority, Syria, Turkey, Tunisia.

In the South East Europe – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Romania, Serbia and Montenegro.

MED EUWI is also serving as a platform for promoting strategic partnerships between the EU and the Mediterranean and Southeastern European countries as well as between government, civil society and the private sector. Non-EU donors and international organisations (including the UN family and the IFIs) are also contributing to the Component through the promotion of synergies and development of building blocks at sub-regional level.

A regional Multi-Stakeholder Working Group assists in the development of the MED EU WI. The Component is led by the government of Greece while the MED EUWI Secretariat has been undertaken by the GWP-Mediterranean Secretariat.

4. Activities

Within 2003, a set of activities have been developed aiming to reach consensus on the objectives and modalities of the Component, develop a sound background, secure political commitment and raise awareness.

In June 2003 during the Hellenic Water Week (17-20.6.03) a detailed Operation Plan for the Component was presented, describing the context, basic content and proposed structure of the MED EUWI as well as the steps to be taken until the end of 2003. Within the Operation Plan, a Call for Building Blocks was launched aiming to collect by the end of 2003 a first pile of on-going and new projects that will consist the start-up working platform of the MED EUWI.

With a view to achieve early and tangible results and move on fast to the Implementation Phase of the Component, Greece, together with the EC, partner countries and other Organisations is designing further steps to be made on the short and medium run, especially with regard to financial support for the Component and awareness-interest raising among partners and donors. By the end of January 2004, a detailed Activity Plan for 2004 -2006 will be developed, describing the type of interventions to be undertaken, also taking into account the analysis of building blocks. Proposals for demonstration projects may be part of the Activity Plan, pending on donors' interest. Emphasis for the Implementation Phase of the Component will be given to actions like elaboration of assessments of financial requirements for meeting MDGs / WSSD targets in the region and establishment of a related regional monitoring system, facilitation of country dialogues for prioritization of national needs related to water ODA and identification of existing gaps, exploration of the possibility for establishing a project preparation facility, facilitation of transboundary / national IWRM plans, etc.

Annex

Some of the most important political events that took place during the 1st semester of 2003 and are related to the Mediterranean Component, with a particular relevance to water issues for the countries of South East Europe (as a UNECE sub-region) are:

- a. The **Informal Council of Environment Ministers** organized in Athens on 3-4 May 2003, during which EU Ministers have stressed the importance of promoting an efficient subregional cooperation in South East Europe and the Mediterranean by intensifying transboundary cooperation on environmental matters by encouraging common work on transboundary waters. More specifically, they recognized that a number of the most pressing environmental problems throughout the SEE region are directly related to water problems due to the poor management of water resources, conflicting uses, lack of planning, improper monitoring and uncoordinated policies at local, national and regional/transboundary level. Ministers also noted that Integrated Water Resources Management of transboundary waters offers a new attractive, viable option for a peaceful and prosperous future, to overcome tensions and conflicts in the region. In this respect, it was suggested that countries of SE Europe should be facilitated to prepare good bankable projects for water infrastructure that should be geared towards compliance with EU environmental law. Concerning the necessary legal and institutional reforms, the EU Water Framework Directive should be used as an appropriate water governance framework that will also facilitate the development and implementation of Integrated Water Resources Management Plans for the transboundary water bodies in SEE.
- b. The **International Conference on “Sustainable Development for Lasting Peace, Shared Waters, Shared Future, Shared Knowledge”** that took place immediately after the Informal Council and was coorganised by the Hellenic Presidency and the World Bank (Athens, 6-7 May) also stressed the importance of developing joint integrated water resources management plans for the shared waters in South East Europe and the Mediterranean, as a means for improving efficient transboundary cooperation, with water as a catalyst. To this end, the Hellenic Presidency together with the World Bank and other IFIs are exploring the modalities for initiation of specific framework programmes for drafting IWRM and water use efficiency plans for major rivers and lakes in SEE and for major shared aquifers in the Mediterranean. A comparative assessment of regional and national frameworks for implementation of IWRM in countries of Southeastern Europe and the Mediterranean is also envisaged to be carried out, in this context.
- c. The Ministerial Declaration of the **5th Pan-European Ministerial Conference of the Environment for Europe process** organized in Kiev on 21-23 May, that welcomes and acknowledges the initiatives and intentions of the countries of South-East Europe and the Mediterranean to promote peaceful and productive cooperation for introduction of integrated water resource management approaches for transboundary waters in the context of the Mediterranean Component.