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## Information Note

### 'Progress towards a Roadmap and associated Work Plan for a Water Agenda in the Mediterranean'

#### *1. Why a common Water Agenda for the Mediterranean?*

Water is fundamental to human development, key to health, social and economic growth and has a crucial role in the provision of ecosystems services as well as being critical to environment quality. The provision of water as a service to the community is furthermore a key factor of legitimacy for those who are providing it. Being a limited natural resource, with a variable geographic distribution, water requires effective policies and management practices at all levels, including, national, basin-wise, sub regional and regional, in order to secure its availability and quality for all. Extreme phenomena like floods are on the increase throughout the region, while droughts have become more frequent and persistent, often leading to severe land degradation and desertification. **The social, economic and environmental impacts of water challenges, and their associated costs in human lives and in monetary terms, are considerable and are rising, making the need for action and cooperation pressing.**

As for the UfM region, especially the Mediterranean is shaped by its unique geographical, ecological, geopolitical and cultural features. Sustainable access, provision and use of water are key concerns in all Mediterranean countries. Particularly the areas along the southern and eastern shores of the region are among the world's most water-scarce, with more than 150 million people facing water stress<sup>1</sup> as well as water pollution problems. In the UFM Countries, transboundary water resources are extremely important, as many countries are sharing river basins and many others sharing the same ground water sub-basin which require extensive joint and coordinated management approaches.

Overall, the region is facing many developmental challenges including water scarcity, demographic change, unemployment, poverty, changing consumption patterns including rising water and food demands, urbanization, growing energy needs, environmental degradation, climate change, gender disparities and more. Part of the region currently faces an enduring economic crisis, socio-political instability, conflicts and large-scale migratory movements often under dramatic conditions. **The vast majority of these conditions have a direct impact on the availability and quality of water resources for people and nature in the Mediterranean.** However, the UfM countries' commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals as part of the Agenda 2030 give new impetus to countries to take action on action on sustainable management of water resources and efficient implementation of related policies.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC), this figure is set to rise by a further 80-100 million inhabitants by 2025.

## **2. Why act together?**

Each Mediterranean country responds to water challenges through various approaches at national level to meet the increasing demand with decreasing resources. Cooperation at basin, sub-regional, regional, and global levels **adds greater effectiveness to national policies and contributes to more coordinated approaches**, enhancing as well the linkages with other sectors in which there are existing **UfM Ministerial mandates**, such as environment and climate change, de-pollution, blue economy as well as energy, women empowerment and regional cooperation, among others.

At the same time, **a common regional framework offers guidance for donors and investors, including from development cooperation**, as it assists defining where to most effectively invest, by:

- facilitating and supporting experience sharing;
- replicating best practices and preventing repeated failures by lessons learnt approaches;
- promoting common regional approaches after adaptation to local needs;
- prioritizing and implementing joint pilot projects;
- prioritizing and implementing national projects with a regional impact;
- applying innovative practices including through knowledge transfer; and
- increasing and facilitating access to funding and donations.

Hence, UfM **countries through their Water Expert Group (WEG), created by the 2008 Water Ministerial Conference (Dead Sea, Jordan), call for a reinforced common regional policy framework with a clear financial strategy and financing mechanisms towards achieving an inclusive water agenda for the UfM countries**, through application of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) approaches at all levels.

The suggested common regional policy framework would aim to **address the needs and opportunities across the Mediterranean and to create a more conducive environment for investment and development cooperation, while facilitating tangible cooperation between countries as well as with financial actors**.

Good governance, sound river basin planning processes, water efficiency, pollution prevention and de-pollution, surface and groundwater protection, transboundary cooperation, sustainable water financing, operational partnerships, reliable data and information, technology transfer, education and awareness as well as human and institutional capacity building, should be promoted with such a common regional policy framework as key ingredients for achieving such objectives.

## **3. What is this regional common water agenda?**

**The suggested common water agenda in the Mediterranean may be agreed at a Ministerial Conference on Water. It is suggested to aim at** building consensus and defining the regional challenges, to promote coordinated policies and boost tangible solutions towards mutual actions for shared benefits. It also defines a mechanism, indicators and guidelines for implementation as well as which targets should be achieved and by when with a clear roadmap/calendar before and after the proposed Ministerial Conference on Water.

International and regional institution and policy frameworks provide platforms for promoting such collaboration. Among others, the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** provide an ambitious

framework for action towards sustainability, including on water (SDG 6) and inter-linked sectors and targets (tackled by a number of other SDGs). **The Paris Agreement (2015)** provides an accord for accelerating and intensifying actions and investments for combating climate change and for a sustainable low carbon future, including through “Intended nationally determined contributions” (NDCs).

In addition to the UfM, international and regional institutions and policy frameworks provide relevant platforms for water-related collaboration in the region including, *inter alia*, the Barcelona Convention and UNEP/MAP, the European Union, the League of Arab States water strategy, the Regional Cooperation Council, UN bodies including UN ESCWA, UNECE, UNDP, UNESCO, etc., AMCOW, the 5+5 Western Mediterranean initiative, etc. A range of regional, sub-regional and national water-related stakeholders, including their regional networks, and other partners contribute towards sustainable water management. It is important to ensure synergies and avoid duplication between these bodies and approaches.

The **UfM Water Expert Group (WEG)**, mandated by the **Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on Water (22 December 2008, Dead Sea, Jordan)** <sup>2</sup> provides a platform for information sharing and promotion of common objectives through synergies. It convenes the UfM countries at the level of Water Directors or high representatives, and it includes international and regional institutions, IFIs and stakeholders as observers.

The **5<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the UfM WEG** (23-24 November 2015, Luxemburg) reaffirmed the need for countries to join efforts to address water challenges, associating it to a potential ministerial process that may wish to consider providing strategic guidance on priorities and defining a mechanism to follow up through a tangible work programme. It also mandated a smaller **WEG Drafting Group** to further elaborate on these, in case the political partners decide to convene the suggested ministerial process. A great number of UfM countries, including all Mediterranean countries, participate actively in the WEG.

**Three Meetings of the WEG Drafting Group** were organized<sup>3</sup>: Pending decision by political partners, the WEG Drafting Group developed a number of issues, including:

- elements towards a common regional water agenda in the UfM framework, including for provision of Strategic Guidance towards water security in the Mediterranean;
- WEG Mode of Operations and a Roadmap/calendar of works;
- guidelines for a long-term WEG Work Programme, including a Financial Strategy, in order to provide the implementation framework for the Strategic Guidance.

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<sup>2</sup> The UfM Ministerial Meeting on Water (December 2008, Dead Sea, Jordan) concluded with a Declaration that outlined strategic priorities of a regional water agenda and mandated the WEG to prepare a **draft Strategy for Water in the Mediterranean (SWM)**. The WEG delivered the draft SWM through an intensive technical process (2009-2010). Despite overall agreement on its technical contents, the SWM did not advance for approval at the UfM Ministerial Conference on Water (April 2010, Barcelona) due to political reasons. Since then, though contents of water challenges remain similar, some approaches have evolved towards more integrated modes while reflection of water on social aspects and its interlinkages with economic sectors are better understood while related solutions are further articulated.

<sup>3</sup> WEG Drafting Group Meetings were organized on 5 April 2016, Athens; 26-27 July 2016, Malta; and, 26 September 2016, Brussels.

The **6<sup>th</sup> WEG Meeting** is suggested to be organized before the end of 2016 in order to take into account decisions by the current UfM SOM meeting (14 October) and continue work on the common regional water agenda, on the basis of the results of the UfM WEG Drafting Group meetings.

The process is facilitated by the UfM Secretariat, under the guidance of the UfM Co-Presidencies, with the technical support of the Global Water Partnership-Mediterranean and the EU-supported SWIM/Horizon 2020 SM Project.

#### **4. Why a Ministerial agreement on the common water agenda is needed and what it may include?**

In that context, **the organization of a UfM Ministerial Meeting on Water within the first semester 2017 is suggested in order to provide further deepened political impetus to the on-going process.** Malta has offered the possibility of hosting the event during its EU Presidency.

The **objective and opportunity of such Meeting** could be for the UfM Ministers responsible for Water to:

- act together sharing views on water policy in the Mediterranean;
- stress the key relevance of water in the Mediterranean region;
- renew the commitment of countries on the water agenda;
- Guide on contributions of the water agenda in responding to key objectives in the region.
- Create a positive environment for the private investment and map regional funding for water agenda through joint planning and mainstreaming

These objectives shall substantially facilitate also the **implementation of a range of other key regional sectoral and cross-cutting policies** including food security, energy security, environmental protection, climate resilience, employment, urban development, gender mainstreaming, migration etc.

The process that is suggested to be launched at the possible Ministerial shall **aim at bringing substantial and measurable positive impacts towards achieving livelihoods security** by:

- promoting economic growth, increasing competitiveness and employment, including through innovation and application of water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus approaches;
- tackling climate change impacts and increasing climate resilience, including through prioritizing 'no-regret' actions and applying adaptation/mitigation co-benefits approaches;
- meeting environmental and water quality objectives, including through source-to-sea approaches;
- tackling water and migration challenges, amongst countries and within one country (rural-urban migration);
- engaging new, operational and out-of-the-water-box partnerships, including with the private sector, for livelihood security;
- creating conditions for enhanced political and technical cooperation between States which share common water challenges
- safeguarding human rights particularly for the more vulnerable, promoting gender mainstreaming, securing transparency and improving accountability; in particular the human right to water and sanitation;<sup>4</sup>

These should further assist:

- meeting Sustainable Development Goals and Targets, in addition to the dedicate Water SDG 6, in the Mediterranean;
- promoting implementation of the Paris Agreement;
- assisting implementation of other regional and sub-regional policy frameworks and action plans in a coordinated manner;
- promoting peace, stability and prosperity in the region, including through application of development cooperation principles, implementation of multilateral cooperation agreements, utilization of water and green diplomacy, etc.

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<sup>4</sup> As recognized in the Resolution 64/292, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations, on 28 July 2010

The **key suggested outputs** of the possible Ministerial Meeting are:

- Strategic Guidance towards water security in the Mediterranean. Current pressing needs and gloomy forecasts on water resources in the region, including due to impacts of climate change, highly advocate for that, while the last such political guidance was provided at the 2008 UfM Ministerial Conference on Water (Dead Sea, Jordan).
- Mode of Operations and a Roadmap for the UfM Water Expert Group. The WEG, convening at the level of Water Directors or equivalent, could provide the technical mechanism for making real the possible ministerial Strategic Guidance.
- Guidance on a WEG long-term Work Programme, including a Financial Strategy. These could describe types of possible interventions towards operationalizing the Strategic Guidance. Such interventions could correspond to themes/areas of action to be described in an annexed thematic matrix.

The WEG Work Programme, and corresponding rolling biannual Work Plans, could be prepared in the follow up of the suggested Ministerial meeting, based on related political guidance. Examples of interventions could include, but not limited to:

- development of common technical guidelines on priority issues,
- development of joint technical approaches,
- coordinated knowledge management and capacity building,
- promotion of transfer of technological solutions,
- coordinated investment prioritization and utilization/development of financing opportunities
- Development of common demonstration activities and to overcome technical and political challenges, etc.

Defining and implementing a common agenda towards water security in the Mediterranean within the UfM framework, shall bring **multiple benefits far beyond the water sector**. Importantly, at a challenging time for the region, water can be a **catalyst for understanding and closer cooperation and collaboration**. The development of such a unifying regional agenda should not wait more.