

Water Strategy in the Western Mediterranean

9th Technical Working Group

Valencia, 10th March 2022

Draft Minutes

The 9th Technical Working Group Meeting of the Water Strategy in the Western Mediterranean, was organised back-to-back with the 3rd Ministerial Conference of the 5+5 Dialogue on Water, hosted by the Spanish Presidency of the Dialogue.

The meeting started with the intervention of the **Director General** for Water of the Spanish Ministry of Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge, Mr. **Teodoro Estrela**. Mr. Estrela, chairing the session, welcomed the participants and referred to the wording of the Ministerial Declaration adopted in the morning of the same day, where the Ministers entrusted the Technical Working Group with the elaboration of a Training Programme for capacity building in the Western Mediterranean.

Subsequently, the coordinator of MENBO, Mr. **Ramiro Martínez**, presented the draft Training Programme for capacity building, previously prepared by the MENBO Secretariat.

Mr. Ramiro Martínez, referring to the mandate given by the Ministers to elaborate and develop the Training Programme, underlined that the Draft Programme includes a list of proposed courses on a number of subject-matters that were chosen, account taken of the most pressing water challenges in the Mediterranean and as a means of progressing in the implementation of the Action Plan of the WSWM.

Moreover, he pointed out that the proposed Training Programme implements Priority 4 of the WSWM, namely capacity building, and that it is equally in accordance with Action 3 of the Action Plan, i.e. training and capacity building. More concretely, Mr. Martínez reminded that the Strategy highlights the need to disseminate and promote the application of knowledge, tools and methodologies to improve water resources management and water-related services by documenting and distributing good practices through tailored-made capacity building programmes and knowledge platforms, for actors to share experiences, insights and perspectives on water management.

He went on briefly addressing a number of proposals regarding the format of the Programme, the organizational aspects and the financing needs, as they are set out in the introduction of the draft Programme. He then outlined the proposed courses describing each of them as they appear in the draft Programme.

Following the intervention of Ramiro Martínez, the Chairman proceeded to give the floor to the member countries and organisations inviting them to express their views on the Draft Programme.

Discussion

The first intervention was made by the representative of the **Union for the Mediterranean (UfM)**, Mr. Almotad Abadi, Managing Director at the UfM Secretariat.

Firstly, Mr. Almotaz congratulated the Spanish Presidency on the adoption of the Ministerial Declaration and offered the full support of the UfM to the MENBO Secretariat.

He then made the following comments regarding the draft Training Programme:

- He supports the proposed Programme as drafted and stated that it is coherent with the political process. However, he advises to update the terminology used; for instance, instead of referring to water information systems, it should refer to digitalization. It should also refer to the WEFE Nexus, renewable energy and green economy.
- All themes mentioned in the draft Programme are important;
- He advised on the inclusion of water regulation, besides water governance;
- Non-conventional water resources has to be linked to the green circular economy;
- There is a need to advance on the Project of the Mediterranean Knowledge Platform by revitalizing it;
- Nature-based solutions is an important element of the EU Green Deal;
- He suggests going hand in hand with PRIMA (Partnership for Research and an Innovation in the Mediterranean Area). He informed that PRIMA is currently launching a Community of Practice.

Reacting to the intervention of Mr. Abadi, the Chairman, Mr. **Teodoro Estrela**, conceded that the terminology of the Strategy needs to be updated and in particular by referring to the WEFE Nexus, digitalization, green energy and nature-based solutions. He illustrated this need by stating that since the adoption of the Strategy, little time has passed but many things have happened in the meantime.

The next intervention was made by the representative of **Algeria**, Ms. Dahlab, Director of Climate change at the Algerian Ministry of Environment. She fully supported the sheer need to develop and offer training on water management in the Region. Besides, she advises to strengthen cooperation between academic institutions.

She then underlined the necessity to pay particular attention to climatic modeling given the increase of extreme weather events, referring to the latest IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) of the United Nations.

Further, she claimed that it is important to integrate prevention and control of flood risks, droughts and wild fires.

Finally, she urged the Secretariat to foresee specific courses related to the management of the Nexus Water-Energy-Agriculture.

Following this intervention, Mr. **Teodoro Estrela** mentioned that in Spain Climate Change Adaptation Plans have been foreseen at the basin level. He also agreed on the need to reinforce cooperation between academic institutions.

Later, the representative of **Mauritania**, Mr. el Moctar Taleb stated that the most pressing issues are those related to the adaptation to Climate Change. He considered that the training programmes should focus on practical aspects to help improve access to water. He equally underlined that integrated management of water resources and renewable energies for water

pumping are issues that should be prioritized. Finally, he agreed on the need to reinforce cooperation between universities.

The representative of **Italy**, Mr. Roberto Nocella (Italian Embassy) stated that it is crucial to boost and spur the Action Plan of the Strategy by means of a training programme in order to seek concrete solutions. Thus, Italy welcomes the proposal of a training program to promote the exchange of experiences.

He reminded that non-conventional resources are of key importance as the ramping pollution and the excessive exploitation of the resources, worsen the problem of water scarcity. In this context, he pointed out that it is necessary to create advanced technologies based on the principles of efficacy and effectiveness.

In addition, he informed the participants about the recent introduction in Italy of the so-called River Contracts as a novelty that helps involve all interested parties in water management, and offered to provide further information on those.

The representative of **Portugal**, Mr. Luis Morbey intervened by videoconference. He congratulated the Secretariat for the Draft Programme and stated that Portugal will send further comments once they analyze the proposal. He pointed out that financing is the most important issue to address.

Tunisia, represented by Mr. Ouasli Abderrahman contributed to the discussions by videoconference. He praised the approved Ministerial Declaration. As regards governance, he claimed that the term governance is too wide and that there is a need to be more precise regarding the fight against corruption and on non-conventional water resources (desalination and reuse).

Besides, he recommended to study the environmental impact of desalination and reuse. Moreover, she underlined that it is also important to address the Nexus water-climate change-migration and stated that women and vulnerable groups must not be forgotten.

Mr. Manuel Sapiano, representing **Malta**, congratulated Spain for the approval of the Ministerial Declaration, as, he said, it represents a tangible progress in the Action Plan. Mr. Sapiano considered that the efforts should be primarily focussed on the Western Mediterranean.

Malta fully supports the organisation of courses and the need for practitioners to work together, and sees a lot of benefits in this initiative. Mr. Sapiano offered full support from Malta to the Secretariat in this endeavour.

Regarding financing, he claimed that since some of the courses are closely linked to the Green Deal, the support of the European Commission, through instruments such as TAIEX, should be explored.

He underlined the need to engage with academia and to aim at the academic certification of the courses in a way that they can serve as credits to the students, whereby representing an incentive to enrol in the courses.

Following the intervention of Mr. Sapiano, **Teodoro Estrela** committed to contact the academic institutions in Spain, to explore the possibility for them to certify the courses.

Then, the floor was given to the representative of **Morocco**, Ms. Oualkacha (General Directorate for Water) who pointed out that the current context requires us to work in innovative ways. She stated that, often it is the implementation of laws and regulations that fails.

Regarding the involvement of academia, she warns that this might carry the risk to focus on theory rather than on practical issues.

She also recommended setting out a crosscutting theme that may be the protection of the environment. He went on stating that governance is a wide-ranging axis within which a set of priorities should be set up, namely tariffs, water counting, and contribution of the private sector.

She sees a possible overlap between courses 3 and 6 in the draft programme.

As regards information systems, she warned that the problem is often the sustainability of the systems put in place.

Finally, she considered that a list of priorities should be set up in the framework of a road map establishing the means, the milestones and deadlines.

Subsequently, Mr. **Teodoro Estrela** took the floor and reminded that the overlaps are due to the fact that the Strategy was adopted in 2016 and that since then, a lot of things have happened which may support the need for an updating of the Strategy.

The representative of France, Mr. **Emmanuel Cross**, from the French Embassy, first apologised for the absence of experts from France due to the overloaded agendas during the French Presidency of the EU. He then announced the support of France to the themes proposed in the Draft Programme.

Regarding the format of the courses, he reminds the possibilities offered by IT tools, in particular videoconferences.

Finally, he suggested to include courses related to law enforcement (*Police de l'Eau*) and stated that judges should be trained on water issues.

The **Maghreb Arab Union** (MAU) was represented by Ms. Faouzia. She congratulated the Secretariat on the relevance of the draft programme and made the following comments:

- She pleaded in favour of practical and concrete courses;
- Water users should be involved;
- Womens' representation should be reflected in the courses;

Moreover, Ms. Faouzia announced that the MAU is involved in a project with FAO on conventional water resources in the 5 Maghreb countries.

At this stage, **Mr. Estrela** mentioned that users' associations will certainly be fully involved mainly during the technical visits organised linked to the courses.

The last intervention was made by the representative of the **European Commission**, Mr. Alfonso Alcolea who first mentioned that he had been a trainer for TAIEX in the Valencia Region.

He offered the full support of the European Commission in the development of the Programme and pointed out the need to find funds.

In addition, he mentioned that the following issues should be tackled in the Training Programme:

- Circular economy and reuse, linked to the EU Directive on water reuse;
- Financing of infrastructures;
- Emerging pollutants;
- Link Energy-water management;
- Fight against corruption: he stated that the existing Network of European enforcement authorities on environmental laws could be of help;
- Climate modelling; and
- Management of plastics.

As a reaction to the intervention of the European Commission, **Mr. Estrela** made a plea to the Commission to support the courses financially.

Later, **Mr. Ramino Martinez** declared that if a country shows interest in a particular course, that country should be ready to contribute to its funding.

Moreover, **Mr. Miguel Polo**, Permanent Technical Secretary of MENBO and President of the Jucar River Basin Authority, stated that each country may not only declare which courses they can organise, but also which courses and themes they are most interested to receive.

Ms. **Conchita Marcuello**, Spanish General Water Directorate, requested each country to provide information on their respective academic institutions.

Main Conclusions and Follow-Up

The main conclusions drawn from the discussions are the following:

1. Finding funds for the development of the courses is key to the success of the Training Programme;
2. The Secretariat makes a plea to the European Commission to contribute to its funding;
3. The gender approach should be reflected in the courses;
4. The Secretariat urges each country to inform the Secretariat on the courses they can offer, the courses they are most interested to receive, and on the relevant academic institutions in their respective countries.
5. It was suggested and agreed to convene a new meeting before the summer 2022.