

**UfM Water Expert Group
5th Meeting**

23-24 November 2015, Luxemburg

Concept Note

List of Abbreviations

AMCOW	African Ministerial Council on Water
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
GWP-Med	Global Water Partnership–Mediterranean
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
ICZM	Integrated Coastal Zone Management
IWRM	Integrated Water Resources Management
LAS	League of Arab States
MAP	Mediterranean Action Plan (of UNEP)
MED EUWI	Mediterranean Component of the EU Water Initiative
MENBO	Mediterranean Network of Basin Organisations
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
RCC	Regional Cooperation Council
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEE	South-eastern Europe
SWIM-SM	Sustainable Water Integrated Management-Support Mechanism (EU Programme)
SWM	Strategy for Water in the Mediterranean
TDG	Technical Drafting Group (of the WEG)
UfM	Union for the Mediterranean
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
WACDEP	Water, Climate and Development Programme (of GWP)
WEG	Water Expert Group (of the UfM)
WFD	Water Framework Directive (of the EU)

The 5th UfM WEG Meeting is co-chaired by the UfM Co-Presidencies, Jordan and the European Commission. It is organised by the UfM Secretariat-Division of Environment and Water. It is co-sponsored by the EC through the Sustainable Water Integrated Management-Support Mechanism (SWIM-SM) Programme and the GWP Water, Climate and Development Programme (GWP WACDEP).

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1. Purpose of the document

The Water Expert Group (WEG) of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) convened for its 5th Meeting on 23-24 November 2015 in Luxemburg. Mandated by the Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on Water (Dead Sea, Jordan, 2008), the WEG delivered the draft Strategy for Water in the Mediterranean (SWM) through an intensive technical process (2009-2010). The SWM failed to achieve political approval at the UfM Ministerial Conference on Water (April 2010). The latest 4th UfM WEG Meeting was held in May 2011.

This Concept Note aims at providing background on the state of play, objectives and contents of discussions of the 5th UfM WEG Meeting, including a suggested outline of possible next steps.

2. Setting the scene

2.1. Water challenges in the Mediterranean

The Mediterranean region is shaped by its unique geographical, ecological, geopolitical and cultural features. In a rapidly changing world, the region is challenged by natural conditions including water scarcity, demographic change, unemployment, poverty, changing consumption patterns, urbanisation, rising water and food demands, 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.

Water fosters human security, supports economic growth and provides for environmental needs. The Mediterranean is faced with varying water-related situations and challenges in its different rims. The **southern shores** of the region are among the world's most water-scarce areas, with more than 150 million people facing water stress. According to the Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC), this figure is set to rise by a further 80-100 million by 2025. The **northern shores** are better off on water availability, but increasingly encounter extreme phenomena like floods while droughts have become more frequent and persistent. Furthermore, water deficit is becoming common in the northern part, particularly during the dry seasons. **Modification of water bodies**, including due to **pollution**, is a threat in all Mediterranean countries.

With **agriculture** consuming up to 90% of water resources in some countries, efforts towards increasing water use efficiency and productivity (more 'crop per drop') and controlling pollution from fertilizers and pesticides need to be enhanced. With 60% of the region's population living in cities, **urban** water supply and sanitation services need to be rehabilitated and expanded, including through employment of green and innovative solutions. Similar has to be the effort in **rural** communities, particularly those provided with poor services. As **groundwater** reserves, including non-renewable fossil aquifers, are being depleted in many areas of the region and heavily polluted by agriculture, industry and domestic

uses, their mapping, protection and management need to be urgently improved. **Industry**, though not the major water consumer, is a significant source of pollution. Overall, more effort is required to protect the **environment** and maintain environmental services including in wetlands and coastal areas, and to improve water quality safeguarding both ecosystems and **public health**.

Climate change effects, including more extreme phenomena like droughts and floods, are likely to exacerbate the situation both in the south and north of the Mediterranean. Adaptation measures will require effective water resources management. Given that several climate-related aspects remain uncertain, 'no-regret' actions present a sustainable way for responding to challenges. Furthermore, aiming at adaptation-mitigation co-benefits through interlinking water, land, energy and environment interventions could provide tangible solutions and promote innovation in the region.

Governance remains a key challenge. Efforts focus on improving policymaking and action planning, institutional settings, law and regulation, enforcement mechanisms, innovative financing, application of cost recovery and the polluter pays principle, etc. To achieve sustainable models of development, water must be mainstreamed into other sectoral policies such as agriculture, land planning and use, energy, industry, tourism and trade. Political will is key for making this happen. The importance of **cross-cutting issues**, such as gender, equity, poverty and rights, is increasingly recognised but is still relatively poorly tackled.

Financing of appropriate water and sanitation services as well as water pollution abatement does not meet the needs. It may require new tools and partnerships, including through socially-sensitive engagement of the private sector. Understanding related options, adapting them to national needs and developing capacities are ingredients for advancing the agenda according to country choices. It will be necessary to include in the equation the contribution to and benefits from ecosystem services. Quantifying the cost of inaction towards water and environmental degradation can help managers and decision makers to assess the importance of investment.

2.2. Approaches to address challenges

The **Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM)** approach has been introduced seeking solutions at basin, local, national and regional levels going beyond administrative borders. Joint methodological approaches between **IWRM** and **Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM)** add value in taking action on the Mediterranean coast that receives great developmental pressures while hosting important ecosystems. The implementation of a **Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystems Nexus** approach can further contribute to optimising the use of vital natural resources while addressing environmental needs and climate variability and change impacts.

Better planning and effective **implementation and enforcement**; reliable metering, data and exchange of **information**; coordinated monitoring of progress achieved against objectives set; greater and more efficiently employed **investment**; transparency; awareness; capacity building, and meaningful **stakeholder participation** are needed **to achieve a sustainable future**. **Education** remains the most rewarding long-term investment.

Recognising this, Mediterranean countries have engaged in long-term **water sector reforms**, involving state and non-state actors as well as donors where relevant. Among them, the role of river basin organisations and local authorities is increasingly recognised and supported. The positive outcome of these processes is visible in many countries, though a number of obstacles remain. Furthermore, **new**

challenges emerge like those linked with changing consumption patterns; climate change including extreme events; increased migration flows due to conflict, social unrest and degradation of natural resources; unsustainable tourism development, etc.

With natural water supplies no longer meeting growing demand in several countries throughout the region, **non-conventional water resources**, such as treated wastewater reuse and desalination, are increasingly becoming an additional contributor to water availability. Related environmental, energy, health and other impacts need to be carefully considered while defining the potentials and limitations of such options. Improving non-conventional options demands better governance, planning and regulation; coordinated investment; monitoring of operations and quality information; building managerial capacity; and, where relevant, mitigating their negative impacts including along the coastline. Overall, where development of non-conventional options is necessary, they should not be considered in isolation but combined with water demand management actions (which should run in parallel and with the same intensity) and considered as part of an integrated water resource management approach.

A large percentage of the region's water resources are shared between countries. Sustainable management of **transboundary water resources** through integrated approaches presents a unique opportunity for avoiding conflicts and can assist advancing cooperation towards shared benefits. Tackling transboundary water pollution is a key area for improvement. Particularly in the north of the region, hydropower production in transboundary basins remains challenging in terms of securing the ecosystem's integrity. Food security is more in the focus in the southern Mediterranean. Successful cooperation cases in the EU and the Balkans (e.g. the Danube, Rhine, Sava and Drin) may inform and inspire transboundary synergies throughout the region.

2.3. The role of regional cooperation and related regional processes

Regional cooperation adds value to national efforts by facilitating and supporting experience sharing; replication of best practices; promotion of common approaches after adaptation to local needs; joint pilot projects; innovative practices including through knowledge transfer; and access to funding. These are promoted through regional political and technical cooperation processes, initiatives and programmes. Such regional undertakings also assist in raising the political profile of water issues and foster inter-sectoral synergies that may not advance as fast at national level, where more traditional development policies are, at times, applied.

International processes are reflected at the regional and national levels. The region reached to a large extent the water-related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs, 2000). The recently approved (2015) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide an ambitious framework for action towards sustainability, including on water (SDG 6) and inter-linked sectors and targets. The coordinated implementation of SDGs provides new impetus for regional cooperation. The UN Conventions on water also provide important principles, instruments and approaches for managing water resources.

Regional and sub-regional institutions and initiatives provide the political and technical framework for advancing dialogue and action on shared objectives, bringing countries together on an equal footing, promoting stakeholder engagement and facilitating interaction with financiers. The most significant political initiatives active in the region include:

- the UfM, guided by the decisions of its Ministerial bodies and its Senior Officials Meeting;

- the European Union (EU), including its Water Framework Directive (2000), its Daughter Directives and the extended EU *acquis* on issues related to water, environment and climate change adaptation;
- the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), including its South East Europe 2020 Strategy (2013);
- the League of Arab States (LAS), including its Arab Water Security Strategy (2011) and other Strategies related to water, environment and climate change adaptation;
- the 5+5 Initiative for the Western Mediterranean, including its Water Strategy (2015);
- the African Ministerial Council on Water (AMCOW) and its decisions;
- the UNECE Water Convention (1992), that has been globally open since 2012;
- the Barcelona Convention (1974) including its Protocols and the revised draft Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (2015), serviced by the UNEP Mediterranean Action Plan and its Regional Activity Centres.

A range of regional and sub-regional programmes and projects are promoting IWRM aspects in the region. A great number of regional, national, local and transboundary institutions, organisations, donors and stakeholders (users, river basin organisations, local authorities, utilities, civil society, academia, private sector, media, etc.) are engaged in such efforts. The UfM has labelled and promotes a number of projects related to water and environment in cooperation with stakeholders and financiers.

3. The UfM Water Expert Group

Water had a prominent role in the **Euro-Mediterranean Partnership** (Barcelona Process, launched in 1995). A number of Ministerial Conferences and high-level meetings were organised between 1996 and 2008 aiming at promoting sustainable water management and regional cooperation on water. In July 2008 (Paris), the Heads of States of the Euro-Mediterranean countries launched the **Union for the Mediterranean**.

The **3rd Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on Water (Dead Sea, Jordan, December 2008)** reached agreement on a set of issues including the preparation of a shared and long-term **Strategy for Water in the Mediterranean (SWM)** and approved guidelines for its elaboration; see the Dead Sea Ministerial Declaration in Annex A.

The Dead Sea Ministerial Conference decided to set up a **Water Expert Group (WEG)** within the then newly announced UfM framework. The Dead Sea Ministerial Declaration provided the main elements of the WEG mandate in its Article 5:

Ministers task a Water Expert Group, composed of government-designated representatives of national authorities in charge of water policy of Euro-Mediterranean countries having the capacity to take decisions (e.g. water directors) and the European Commission to elaborate further the Strategy for Water in the Mediterranean as well as to assist its implementation and follow-up, in line with the guidelines described in Annex 1.

Furthermore, Article 14 of the Declaration's Annex 1 entailed that:

a. Under the political guidance of the Euro-Mediterranean Ministers responsible for Water, the Water Expert Group will:

i. carry out the tasks defined by the Ministerial Declaration on Water agreed in Jordan on 22 December 2008 including through the provision of technical inputs for ministerial meetings;

- ii. endeavour to provide technical input to water-related initiatives and processes in the region including recommendations to enhance effectiveness, coordination and complementarity of all key water related activities;*
- iii. develop a draft annual work-plan along the lines of the calendar and tasks defined by the Ministerial Declaration on Water agreed in Jordan on 22 December 2008.*

Article 14 includes more clauses (a. to h.) providing for WEG's working modes; see Annex A.

Aiming at **delivering the SWM**, consultations on the WEG launch were held in June 2009 (Paris). The WEG followed a structured, open and inclusive regional preparatory process involving national governments, local authorities and regional stakeholders. Three WEG Meetings were organised: 1st, September 2009 (Athens); 2nd, November 2009 (Cairo); and 3rd, February 2010 (Madrid). In between, two meetings of a WEG Technical Drafting Group (TDG) were organised: 1st, October 2009 (Madrid); and 2nd, February 2010 (Madrid). The WEG was co-chaired by France and Egypt as UfM Co-Presidencies. They were assisted by Spain (TDG Chair), Greece and the EC, and technically supported by the Mediterranean Component of the EU Water Initiative (MED EUWI) serviced by the Global Water Partnership-Mediterranean (GWP-Med). A great number of informal and technical contributions enriched the process through the organisation of regional and thematic multi-stakeholder dialogues.

The SWM aimed at providing a common policy framework for achieving IWRM in the Mediterranean countries, fostering effective cooperation between Euro-Mediterranean partners within the overall context of sustainable development. The SWM aimed to complement and not substitute other obligations undertaken by the countries and to promote internationally accepted principles such as the polluter pays principle, and common but differentiated responsibilities according to respective capabilities.

Responding to the guidance of the Dead Sea Ministerial Conference, the draft SWM was structured in four main themes/chapters:

- enhancing effective governance for integrated water resources management;
- adapting to climate change and enhancing drought and flood management;
- promoting water demand management, efficiency and non-conventional water resources, and protecting quality of water and biodiversity;
- optimising water financing, water valuation and appropriate instruments, with emphasis on innovative mechanisms.

Objectives, approaches/instruments and recommendations for action were summarised for each theme. Operational objectives based on short- (2012-2015), medium- (2016-2020) and long-term (2021-2025 and beyond) targets were also outlined as well as general technical criteria for selection of future projects.

It was envisaged that SWM could translate into both immediate and far-reaching policies, operational initiatives and tangible actions and projects at local, national and regional levels. In support of these measures, a future regional Action Plan (also mandated by the Dead Sea Ministerial Declaration) was envisaged to serve as a 'roadmap' to match policy choices developed in the SWM with major ongoing and future operational plans and the implementation of selected projects as well as promote new financial commitments from all partners.

Though consensus was reached on the technical contents, political reasons made it impossible to adopt the draft SWM at the **4th Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on Water (April 2010, Barcelona)**. Despite that, the draft SWM inspired advancements including the EU-supported SWIM Programme (€22 million), a number of UfM-labelled water projects, the elaboration of the 5+5 Western Mediterranean Strategy (led by Algeria and Spain, with technical support by MENBO) that received approval at Ministerial level (March 2015, Algiers), etc.

The UfM, through its Division on Environment and Water (established in 2010), carried on the Dead Sea Ministerial agenda. The WEG held its latest **4th Meeting in May 2011 (Barcelona)**, receiving information and concluding with a set of recommendations; see its Conclusions in Annex 2. The majority of the recommendations were followed up in practice. However, it was not before November 2015 (Luxemburg) that the WEG was convened for its 5th Meeting.

4. The 5th Meeting of the UfM Water Expert Group: towards advancing works

The 5th Meeting aims at re-launching a regular regional dialogue on water issues of common interest, building on the Dead Sea Ministerial Conference and the work carried out since then. The meeting is also expected to expand and build into the debate emerging issues like the Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystems Nexus as well as pressing challenges like climate change.

The draft Agenda is structured to assist sharing information and exchanging views on issues of common interest. It is expected that the meeting will conclude with a set of recommendations and agreements including on ways forward to re-launch a clear and focused joint water agenda according to modalities and guidance provided by the countries.

Suggested questions to facilitate discussions, spread across different sessions, include:

- *How could the WEG best assist in the implementation of the water related SDGs and their integration in the regional agenda?*
- *How could the regional and sub-regional processes enhance their cooperation? How could the WEG support this closer cooperation within the regional water agenda?*
- *Which of the thematic areas discussed over the two-day meeting would be a priority for the WEG, and how could they be best served within its capacity?*
- *What should be the next steps to operationalise further cooperation? What should be the roadmap for making these happen?*

More specific thematic questions are included in the agenda for further joint discussion.

Annex A.

Ministerial Declaration of the 3rd Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on Water (Dead Sea, Jordan, December 2008)

Annex B.

Conclusions of the 4th Meeting of the UfM Water Expert Group (Barcelona, May 2011)