

**EMWIS
Information Seminar**

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Introductory speech of

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Excellences, Minister, Ambassadors, Ladies and Gentlemen

First of all, I would like to thank you all for your participation in this seminar dedicated to the sharing of the scientific, technical, social and political knowledge in the water sector.


Let me also thank His Excellency the Minister of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment for welcoming us today and for the strong commitment of Cyprus authorities from the early stage of EMWIS in 1996, when this initiative was born during the Euro-Mediterranean Conference on the Local Water Management in Marseilles. After a one year feasibility study, the Conference of the 27 Euro-Med General Directors on Water, held in Naples, formally approved EMWIS: the Euro-Mediterranean System of Information on the know-how in the Water Sector.

EMWIS is based on a common need expressed by the EU countries and their Mediterranean Partners: the need to improve the water management practices and, also, to share the information about that. Both ideas were the foundations used to build up the EMWIS, a void structure to be filled with hard work, enthusiasm and sense of future.

Now, EMWIS has become the reality we know: a system for exchanging information on know-how in the water domain and also a cooperation tool among its partners, and among every person concerned or interested by water management in the Mediterranean region.

Today EMWIS is the first tangible regional co-operation tool in the water sector within the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership also known as the Barcelona process. As you know, since last May, the Partnership is taking a new dimension when 8 new countries became members of the European Union. Among those, Cyprus and Malta, both important supporters of EMWIS, changed their original condition as Mediterranean Partners and now participate like states members of the Union.

With this new geo-political environment, 20 of the 35 countries of the Partnership have created an EMWIS National Focal Point and 15 national systems are available on the Internet and are daily used by people interested in water management. This structure, I must recall, is served by a Steering Committee, a Coordination Committee and a Technical Unit based in France.



I would like to take a few minutes to remind that the knowledge, as a result of the most genuine function of the person, the ability of reasoning, always concludes as a part of the human heritage. The logical conclusion is that knowledge transfer is a matter of justice, making reality the right to participate in the intellectual achievements of mankind.

This principle can be easily applied to the scientific, technical, social and political knowledge in the water sector, the kind of knowledge that EMWIS deals with. But reality, sometimes, is very stubborn: at this very moment, we can realize that a part of the sufferings of men are closely related with water: scarcity, pollution and inefficient distribution.

Regrettably, it is well known the tendency that have some social groups to appropriate in their own benefit the resource with no consideration about others lacking of it.

Otherwise, there is an increasingly number of voices proclaiming that water supply and sanitation should be included in the list of human rights and, for that, should be carefully protected.

All these considerations are part of the framework of the questions that appear in the areas with water scarcity problems.

If well-administered knowledge is the keystone of problem-solving activities, there is no doubt about a real bottleneck: the diffusion of the knowledge. At that point, EMWIS is at work to fill the gap, following the above-mentioned idea of justice.

In this way, EMWIS activities are backed by international laws, conventions and recommendations like the European Commission Directive 90/313, the Aarhus Convention and the Recommendation 1472/2000 of the Council of Europe.

The success of EMWIS has been acknowledged at the highest levels. In October 1999, the Ministers of the 27 countries and the European Commission asserted again their commitment to use EMWIS more efficiently. In November 2001, in Madrid, the General Water Directors reviewed the positive results and approved a development plan. In 2003, the EMWIS was presented as a cooperation model during the 3rd World Water Forum in Kyoto. At the end of 2003, the European Commission awarded a 3 years grant to implement the plan approved in Madrid two years before.

From this successful past, we face the future with pride and hope. To consolidate the system, increase the number of National Focal Points and web servers and to continue the way of a larger dialog with the use of the Arabic language and thematic activities to share knowledge, for example, on the Water Framework Directive or Non-conventional Water resources. These are our challenges.

We face this labour considering that our efforts will contribute to open the social groups to the scientific and technical advances in the water knowledge domain. Always, looking for the human person as the centre of our activities. So, from this point of view, EMWIS can be considered as a useful instrument in the process to reach the peace of water.

Cyprus is a key partner that we really appreciate as Vice-President of the Steering Committee. With the current demonstration, by presenting the excellent results obtained, Cyprus shows once again its solid commitment and its big interest for a common policy of the water in the Mediterranean area.

By putting in place and running its National Focal Point, Jordan shows concretely its commitment in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and underlines the new spirit of this process in which every country gives effectively something for the general interest.

In the same way, we could stand out the effort of countries involved in our System. We are sure that in each case all are doing as much as possible to share, develop and apply the principles of EMWIS.

Finally, some special mentions must be granted to the Governments of Spain, Italy and France as well as the European Commission for their political and financial support to the initiative from the very early stages.

Thank you very much, Minister, for the Cyprus support to EMWIS, for the efficient work of your team, and, of course, for excellent hospitality. Sincerely, the EMWIS representatives, today here in Cyprus, we fell at home.

Juan CÁNOVAS CUENCA

President of the Steering Committee of the EMWIS