



Joint Spain-Algeria Initiative for Water Strategy in the Western Mediterranean Basin

Spain and Algeria are active members of the United Nations, the Union for the Mediterranean and the 5+5 Dialogue for the Western Mediterranean. Both countries are active in promoting cooperation initiatives in the Mediterranean basin and are committed to the UN Millennium Development Goals and the implementation of the human right to water and sanitation. Algeria and Spain hosted the Western Mediterranean ministerial conference on the environment and renewable energy (Oran, 2010) and believe that the United Nations International Year of Water Cooperation provides an opportunity to promote the adoption of a strategy for water in the western Mediterranean basin and to launch a new phase of sectoral cooperation with respect to water in the context of the 5+5 Dialogue.

Aims

Algeria and Spain have decided to jointly promote a series of seminars, in association with the countries of the 5+5 Dialogue, to develop a water strategy for the western Mediterranean basin. The aim of this strategy is to promote sustainable water use at local, regional, river basin and national levels, through the adoption of cross-cutting goals, management criteria and operational objectives, in order to harmonise water policies and to find synergies in the Mediterranean. Spain and Algeria are actively involved in the peaceful resolution of international conflicts and hope this strategy may constitute a tool of preventive diplomacy, contributing to maintaining international peace and security by facilitating international cooperation on water issues.

Spain and Algeria favour development cooperation in the framework of a strategy for water in the western Mediterranean. In the framework of this cooperation, support should be given to instruments such as technology and knowledge transfer, capacity building in the fields of human resources and management, and investment promotion, in order to ensure economic, environmental and social progress. Also, the environmental objectives of the EU Water Framework Directive should be taken into account as guidelines.

Concept

Water is essential for the development of societies, but it is also a scarce resource, particularly in the Mediterranean basin. Water deficits arise, on the one hand, from the increase in population, the intensive exploitation of groundwater resources for domestic, agricultural and industrial needs, thus provoking marine intrusion into



coastal aquifers, and on the other hand, from climate changes, particularly in semi-arid or even arid areas.

It is estimated that the volume of water resources in the Mediterranean has declined by 25% in recent decades, with no major differences between the western and eastern basins of the Mediterranean. This reduction is due to alterations in precipitation patterns, increased evapotranspiration and the greater frequency of droughts. Climate studies have highlighted a generalised trend toward drought conditions and global warming. Since 1970, temperatures have risen by about 2 °C in SW Europe and North Africa. Moreover, the annual rainfall has decreased by 20% in different regions of Europe, where, nevertheless, rainfall continues to be more abundant than in the neighbouring countries to the south of the Mediterranean. Water resources in Mediterranean countries are limited, vulnerable and unevenly distributed. The predicted impact of climate change in the 21st century make the current challenges an issue of even greater urgency.

The countries in the Mediterranean area are slipping toward a situation of semi-aridity and the risks of desertification remain very high. This outlook suggests natural conditions will become more difficult, the consequences of which are already becoming apparent in many of these countries. Accordingly, all the estimates calculated from historical data on the natural cycle, which constituted the basis for investment decisions in the water sector, must now be reviewed in the light of the new climate data available. Thus, adaptation to climate change will underpin the new model of water resource mobilisation and consumption in the region.

Drought, forest fires and floods are the most important natural risk factors provoking the decline of biodiversity in the countries of the western Mediterranean.

It is of crucial importance to improve our understanding of the evolution of the status of water resources. Real time surveillance systems, providing data on both the quantity (rainfall, water levels in reservoirs, rivers, canals, aquifers, etc.) and the quality of water are essential for its effective management, both under ordinary circumstances and in the case of extreme or accidental events (such as flash floods, inundations, drought and water contamination).

In addition, decreases in rainfall make it necessary to manage the water resource more efficiently prior to creating any new infrastructure to regulate water resources and to effectively manage high-water conditions, especially when there is a risk of flooding.

In the next ten years, water problems will multiply, as a result of climate change and the increasing needs of developing countries, among other factors. Consequently, water crises will occur more frequently and could provoke internal instability if countries cannot satisfy the water needs of their populations.

Therefore, it is crucial to deploy preventive diplomacy and to achieve international development cooperation, working at the national and sub-regional levels to prevent



water problems from limiting development and from becoming a cause for concern among governments.

In view of these foreseeable challenges, Mediterranean countries are reforming their national water policies, reorienting priorities and practices toward the integrated management and river basin management of water resources. Water policies and infrastructure projects are being considered from a new outlook, seeking to make the best use of available water and not just store it in reservoirs.

Faced with intense and increasing water demand, accentuated by competing uses (drinking water, irrigation, industry, etc.), the need to reconsider water policies will become ever more pressing, and the authorities will be called upon to enhance the mobilisation and rational use of water resources.

In general, water use is currently far from efficient, particularly in agriculture¹. Accordingly, the 5+5 countries, including Spain and Algeria, have taken steps to develop water-saving irrigation systems and to assess the use of treated wastewater in agriculture. Common rules should be defined on wastewater reuse to ensure that there is no health issue and that this represents a relevant source of water.

Discharges of domestic, agricultural and industrial wastewater have deteriorated water quality. The pollution must be addressed at the source and that water must be treated and reused.

With appropriate surveillance and monitoring, priority must be given to eliminating water-borne diseases and preventing the emerging and/or re-emerging health risks that can arise from poor quality water.

Enhancing capacities for the monitoring and control of water quality, and training staff to implement the necessary techniques and measures (such as the “polluter pays” principle, etc.), are important both for public health and for the protection of water quality.

Public participation should also be enhanced to ensure acceptability of the necessary water saving measures taken. Moreover water-pricing policies should provide adequate incentives for users to use water resources efficiently and should ensure that “water pays for water”.

In recent decades, investment in the water sector has been concentrated on the intensive development of infrastructure for the mobilisation, management and control of water resources, through irrigation networks, drainage systems, urban water supply, the treatment of wastewater and the generation of hydraulic power.

Non-conventional water resources, including the desalination of seawater, represent a strategic choice to ensure the availability of drinking water, contributing to

¹ Water abstraction for agriculture can be up to 80% of total water abstraction in South European countries according to the EEA report “Water resources across Europe — confronting water scarcity and drought”, 2009.



environmental protection and to agreements for the redistribution of water from surplus to deficit areas in order to maintain the water balance among regions.

Other water management technologies, such as “natural” water retention measures (rainwater runoff collectors) and artificial recharge of groundwater systems must also be taken into account as they help to increase resource availability.

Algeria and Spain have developed an exemplary level of cooperation in water issues. In water governance, it is essential to share experiences with a view to improving management indicators and to ensure sound investment planning. A regulatory and institutional framework is needed to manage investments and to plan future actions, hence the importance of implementing a policy of water resources based on the right to access clean water and sanitation.

The importance of achieving close, action-oriented cooperation among the Mediterranean countries has been reflected in various regional processes, such as the Union for the Mediterranean and the 5 +5 Dialogue. Since its creation, the Mediterranean Process has addressed environmental challenges and water problems. On 29 October 2008, the third Ministerial Conference was held in Jordan to address these issues, and the ministers agreed to establish a strategy for water in the Mediterranean, as a necessary step to resolving the water problem in the region and to preserving the future of the Mediterranean basin. Thus, the broad policy directions were established and a strategy developed, with the support of the European Union.

To mark the UN International Year of Water Cooperation, Spain and Algeria have suggested the re-launching of preliminary work toward the adoption of a water strategy. The Heads of State and Government of the 5+5 Dialogue approved this proposal at the Malta Summit held in October 2012.

On 16 April 2013, the Foreign Ministers of the 5+5 Dialogue adopted the Nouakchott Declaration, which recalled the decision adopted at the Malta Summit, welcomed this initiative and requested Algeria and Spain to work in conjunction with the European Union to develop the water strategy for the western Mediterranean.

Spain and Algeria consider the adoption of a water strategy for the western Mediterranean basin is a necessary step toward achieving a common policy in the Mediterranean region that could help prevent conflict, make a reality of the human right to water and sanitation, protect or restore the environment and promote co-development.



Aims

1. To initiate the debate and enable the exchange of views and experiences among the 5+5 countries on water policies and best practices in the western Mediterranean basin, like managing water demand, and to come up with pragmatic approaches to implement those policies and practices.
2. To support and facilitate the participation of all involved, in the diverse areas and levels of society.
3. To facilitate the creation of synergies and to enable coordination among the key river basin, sub-regional, regional and international actors with respect to water policies.
4. To determine the specific characteristics of the western Mediterranean basin and the challenges to be addressed.
5. To ensure the practical application of the right of access to clean water and sanitation.
6. To promote co-development through associations and collaborative efforts, at river basin, national, sub-regional, regional and international levels.
7. To prepare a strategy for water in the western Mediterranean basin, to be adopted by the 5+5 Dialogue ministers responsible for water resources, marking the launch of a new phase in the 5+5 actions on water. This initiative can also be a basis of the Mediterranean Process's message for the next WWF to be held in Korea in 2015.
8. To consider extending this strategy to other Mediterranean countries when appropriate conditions are met.

Necessary stages in the process

- The Algerian Foreign Minister and his Spanish counterpart announced the joint was officially launched during the 68th Session of the UN General Assembly in New York. It was officially launched at the first 5 +5 economic forum, held in Barcelona on 23 October 2013.
- The first expert-level meeting has been held in Valencia (Spain) under the auspices of the General Secretariat of the Mediterranean Network of Basin Organisations (MENBO) on 26th February 2014.
- Algeria will host another meeting of experts in mid-2014.
- If necessary, a third such meeting will be held in September 2014.
- Algeria and Spain, with the support of the European Commission, will organise preparatory meetings.
- The strategy should be ready for adoption in late 2014.