

5th World Water Forum
Closing Ceremony of the Mediterranean Regional Session
Communication of the Spanish Minister of Environment, and Rural and Marine
Affairs, Mrs. Elena ESPINOSA MANGANA

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Mediterranean is a connection of three continents: Africa, Asia and Europe. This has given place to a region of inestimable value, both for its people and ecologic richness. It is a cradle of great civilizations, cultures and languages, whose legacy is alive in humanity; civilizations that have been created around specific geographic, economic and geopolitical characteristics.

Water treatment in our countries is also very characteristic. Water is an essential resource, and a basic element in many of our national policies, policies on environment, water resources or agriculture.

The Mediterranean Basin shares **specific problems and challenges** in relation with water resources, among which **water scarcity** is the main one. Others are also important, as extreme events associated with our Mediterranean climate, as droughts and floods.

Water must be an essential element in any mediterranean cooperation strategy. This was established by the countries that attended the Euro-Mediterranean Summit on Water, which took place in **Jordan** last December.

A **Euro-Mediterranean Union, with a clear Strategy on water**, would be helpful for the search of common solutions to these problems. Knowledge and technology transfer, or interchange of experiences of water related issues, would be very productive in this sense.

It is also necessary to have policies and institutions related to **integrated water management**, and that this work is carried out with a forward-looking environmental, social, and economic perspective.

Harmonizing sustainable demands and environmental protection will require a suitable water resources management policy, both in quality and quantity, and close cooperation between Authorities.

Spain is aware of this, and we can offer our total support to **strengthen the Institutional organizations** in the Region. For this reason, in the Ministerial meeting held in Jordan, Spain

suggested to **create and strengthen**, in the framework of the future Euro-Mediterranean Strategy on Water, **training and technology transfer programs** in the Mediterranean countries which could require them. This is a commitment to which we are still open to.

To achieve this it is necessary to promote funding incentives from other world regions, both public and private, and to **mobilize funds and projects** which strengthen the principles we protect today.

For this, the European Commission's cooperation projects and programs, together with bilateral or multilateral actions, or cooperation agreements in the Mediterranean region, are essential.

For example, Spain, presents a very positive and successful experience on **training** in water-related issues in Latin America. This experience could be easily extrapolated and produce positive results in the Mediterranean.

Droughts are a severe environmental, economic and social problem in Mediterranean Basin. This phenomenon is worsened by **water scarcity** which affects our countries due to the imbalance between demand and available resources.

Floods, another extreme event, can also have a disastrous impact, putting at a risk properties and even human lives.

In the future, **climate change** may increase the amount and the strength of these two phenomena, and decrease available water resources. For this reason, coastal countries of the Region must be involved in all **common climate change adaptation processes**.

This should include hydrological planning, and the **investing in warning systems** which prevent and help mitigate floods and droughts. **Spain has a proven experience** in these aspects.

Three years ago, we developed **Drought Management Plans** in each of our river basins. It was a resounding success. We have just suffered one of the worst droughts in our history, but in spite of this, no town suffered restrictions in water supply (a very common situation in the drought we suffered in the nineties). We also succeeded in alleviating its effects on agriculture, by modernizing irrigation or the transferring of water rights to farmers.

For the specific task of drought prevention and mitigation, it would be very useful to establish a **Common Drought Observatory**, which could collect suitable data and indicators of the Mediterranean Region.

Spain wishes to support other Mediterranean countries which need to implement **water resources integrated management**, sharing the experience aimed at sustainable development and efficiency in the use of water. We can rely on knowledge and technology transfer, as I said before, and on **joint projects**, which should be defined and approved in the framework of the Strategy defined in the Barcelona Process – Mediterranean Union, as agreed in Jordan.

We have valuable common structures to face up the challenges: Conferences and **meetings of Water Directors**, which have turned out to be key elements for knowledge exchange, identifying common problems, and developing technical working groups to tackle them.

Likewise, we must base our work on existing tools and networks, as the European Water Information System or the Euro-Mediterranean Water Information System, in order to acquire a knowledge base that can be shared.

But we must also rely on the use of new technological tools applied to water management. I am referring to **desalination**, new technologies of **water treatment** or **water reuse**, or **irrigation modernization** with the latest technologies of management, information and communication for an optimum water use. In all these fields, Spain has made very important advances in the last years.

These technologies provide very interesting management solutions, and although they require greater economic investments and efforts in research and development, they are valid and usable by all Mediterranean countries.

The 1995 Barcelona Process was the beginning of innovative alliance based on joint ownership, dialogue and cooperation.

The Mediterranean Union, launched by France last June, is aimed at instilling new vitality to the Barcelona Process and jointly building a common area of peace, security and prosperity.

Spain is firmly committed to the Barcelona Process – Mediterranean Union. For this reason, we wish to organize the next Ministerial Conference on Water, which Jordan's Declaration suggests for the first semester of 2010. This Conference would adopt the Mediterranean Strategy on Water.

For all this, I would like to take the opportunity of underscoring the interest of Spain in supporting a solid Mediterranean Water Strategy.

Thank you very much for your attention.