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الجمعية البرلمانية للبحر الأبيض المتوسط

**2nd Standing Committee on Economic, Social and
Environmental Cooperation**

Special Rapporteur on Water: Sen. Jacques Blanc (France)

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At the closing of our meeting in Limasol, we had validated the idea of being able to establish each year a brief annual report which focuses on both statistical data regarding water and on new initiatives and major debates on water.

It is in order to be truly effective in action that our Assembly has already, following our meeting in Monaco in 2008, decided upon the principal of the nomination of a Permanent Rapporteur on water and therefore, to remain permanently focused on this issue.

So as to make rapid progress on these subjects, we need to start from the finding that we have already established and attempt to analyse potential solutions that our Assembly could propose.

I. Statistical Data on Water in the Mediterranean.

We know, as Mediterraneans, by our lived experience that the Mediterranean is among the regions of the world where the lack of water is the most evident and one of the subjects most discussed.

A 2006 report by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) stated that by 2025, 90% of the population of the Middle East and North Africa should be living in countries suffering from water shortages. To take data from studies published in 2007 by the Blue Plan “*The Mediterranean is home to 60% of the world’s ‘water poor’, disposing of less than 1000 m³/inhab/yr*”¹. This simple figure succeeds on its own in illustrating the extent of the importance for the Mediterranean space to act to preserve, economise and find the water resources necessary for its proper development.

We can, by referring to the statistics provided by the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) through its AQUASTAT tool, highlight several valuable lessons which corroborate the observation made two years ago by the report cited above.

¹ *Improving water use efficiency for facing water stress and shortage in the Mediterranean, Blue Plan, December 2007*

According to the data (Annex 1) of the AQUASTAT study in March 2009, one notes that on the data that we have for 24 members of PAM, **one indicator is particularly interesting and disturbing: that is the water which is available to each country per year and per inhabitant in m₃**. This data, as we have seen above, is used to define the threshold of 1000m₃/inhab/yr, the level below which one can consider as “water poverty”.

If one considers the raw figures for 2006, one can see that **11 members** out of the 24 for which we have data are **in a situation of water poverty**. The situation is particularly worrying for 5 members who fall at less than a third of this threshold. (Israel, Jordan, Libya, which with 99m₃/inhab/yr possesses the lowest level, Malta, Palestine).

Even more significant is **the observation over time** of this same indicator between 1990 and 2006. One notes then **a decrease in this rate for all the members already with a shortage of water for 22 of the 24 PAM members** for which we have statistics.

Among the lessons over time, one notices as well that between these two dates, 4 members of PAM (Cyprus, Egypt, Morocco and the Syrian Arab Republic) fall under the 1000m₃ threshold. In this respect, Lebanon falls dangerously close.

All this data that we have can now provide the opportunity for everyone to know their ranking and to above all be aware of **a very serious situation**. Even more so, these are the developments over time that the observer should question the most in the sense that they demonstrate an **undeniable tendency to the deterioration of the situation**.

One limitation to this data lies in the nature of the national figures put forward that sometimes very poorly cover the regional disparities which characterise certain countries. We can notice that Greece’s situation seems, with a simple reading of the figures, relatively enviable. And yet we must consider the many islands, for which the actual figures are certainly below the national figure of 6676m₃/inhab/yr.

The observation of all these indicators, about which one can lament the fact that a UN body does not sufficiently ensure multilingual publication, confirm our finding: **if we are not careful and if we do not make any efforts to reverse this trend, water stress will only grow and lead to serious crises with human, social and geopolitical consequences that are difficult to measure**.

Concerning the collection of new data in the future and the analysis of this data, and more generally “databanks” on water in the Mediterranean, I presented during our meeting in Limasol some examples of what the Blue Plan has published.

Despite our certain capacity to analyse, we often quickly find ourselves faced with the lack of precise indicators and new concepts such as, for example, the one I could mention as “virtual water”. We also see that raw data can only be interpreted along with multiple other data to make any sense (and for the same data in terms of rainfall precipitation, the conclusions drawn will not be the same depending on the absorption capacity of soils, the evaporation rate associated with temperatures etc...).

It is for this reason that we raised the question whether a partnership with this organization was desirable. As our Special Task Force had invited us to do, I pursued a relationship with the Blue Plan authorities.

The Blue Plan is an association under French law which assumes the functions of the Regional Activities Center within the framework of the Mediterranean Action Program, itself under the aegis of the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP). The contracting parties to the Barcelona Convention decided, in 1996, to put into place a Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development (MCSD), then adopted in November 2005 a Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (MSSD) whose first of the seven priority areas for action concerns the integrated management of water resources and demands. This is a new dimension compared to the original themes, focused on the depollution of the Mediterranean Sea.

Its Secretary General, with whom I have entered into contact, expressed that he was very interested by the implementation of a partnership in the form of a *framework agreement* type MOU which would allow our two institutions to develop regular links through:

- for our Assembly, the benefit of detailed work and expertise recognized from regular appearances before our Committee;

- for the Blue Plan, the assurance of seeing its work and analyses brought to the attention of the representatives of the people concerned at the forefront of its purpose.

It is worth recalling that the Mediterranean Action Plan's Phase II mentioned the issue of water, in particular the concern of *"the assessment and monitoring of the qualitative and quantitative status of water resources in each country, inter alia through pertinent indicators."*

Our recommendation would be to task the Secretary General of PAM, who has already initiated the necessary steps with the Blue Plan, with finalising this framework agreement by working on the elements that we should find in the data that we are looking to collect.

We could imagine, as well, that our Assembly could alert the Blue Plan on certain subjects which particularly concern some of their members in order to consider the possibility that these themes are developed by them.

We must, however, recall a difficulty tied to the legal status of the Blue Plan, based on the 1976 Barcelona Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea Against Pollution, this organization does not provide data concerning, in particular, many members of our Assembly which are not parties to the Convention. This is the case for Jordan, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Portugal.

We put forward the idea of studying in what context we could try to have the possibility of the data be collected at the level of the Blue Plan so that its scope of investigation and analysis fits with our statutory structure. It seems that the first contacts taken with the Blue Plan quite strictly encompass these possibilities.

On this point, it should be noted, however, that your Rapporteur considers that the case of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia could be understood within the frame of the Mediterranean catchment area. This issue should also be raised for what concerns Jordan, a country for which the collection appears to be more complex. As for Portugal, the fact that the

original European Communities are contracting parties to the Barcelona Convention could contribute to a positive line of argument.

II. Some “Food For Thought” on the problem of water management in the Mediterranean.

The figures we have just noted quickly call forth a simple conclusion: the inhabitants of the Mediterranean shores and their governments and representatives cannot continue on the current trend. Many options arise before us, mainly two; one old – **to increase water resources** – and the second, which developed its own pathway more recently – **to limit the consumption and economise its usage** through measures aimed at the efficiency of its use.

In the years to come, we must always therefore imperatively articulate these two levers that should be able to take up the challenge which must be ours, namely to **assure to all Mediterraneans just and equitable access to water.**

A/ Greater water resources.

During our meeting in Limasol, many delegations had mentioned the possibility of finding additional water resources to cope with the chronic crises arising in the Mediterranean basin which should, in the future, not improve under the **dual combination of changes in climate and a steady population growth around the Mediterranean.**

For several years or several decades, many countries, especially those that have known major water stress (Cyprus, Malta), have had a massive recourse to the procedure of water desalination in order to help meet the needs of the people and the activities of these countries. These methods, which are improving as a result of technical progress are often, however, costly in energy and deserve efforts to continue in order to reduce the financial and ecological costs.

Access to water and the search for more drinking water should not be to the detriment of the environment and fragile ecological balances.

In this field of research in new solutions to increase the resources available, it is necessary to **share experiences between our various members** so that each can compare its own system and draw upon the contribution of the others on elements that can improve their own system. For what concerns, for example, desalination operations, it is also necessary to promote the most energy efficient methods.

Our Assembly, following its desire to be a **forum of parliamentarians from the Mediterranean**, does not have efficiency if it does not highlight the best practices of each that can be taken up by the greatest number. At the meeting in Limasol on the issue of water, our Moroccan colleagues stressed the need to reinforce “North-South collaboration on this topic”, and even going further, we must stress the interest in multilateral exchanges which nourish reflections.

We must also be conscious that the growing mobilisation of water resources should not, nor can be, the only line of research to address the problem of water stress.

It cannot as we will see it later, for the simple reason that we are collectively responsible for a resource to which **we do not have absolute rights** and vis-à-vis which we must show spatial solidarity – towards our contemporary Mediterranean neighbours – and temporally – management of the resource for future generations.

It cannot because as the Jordan delegation strongly reminded in Limasol, **a number of our members cannot mobilise new resources** and often find themselves in these cases confronted with legal issues regulating the sharing of water resources between many States.

In this sense it seems necessary to stress the usefulness of international conventions such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses, which contribute to extending cooperation between States in this area.

B/ Promote conservation of resources and water savings.

The need to find new water resources in order to respond to that which we have called many times water stress should not, however, obscure a second lever on which it seems imperative to work and educate on: water savings and its rational management.

-economise water resources:

In Limasol we mentioned the important issue of the quality of water conveyance networks: indeed, half the water can be lost between the water supplier and the consumer. This thought was one among many pertaining to the search for new water resources, should take the time to measure if:

- water is always well-used;
- water losses do not exist through inefficient conveyance systems and leakages in the networks;
- everything is done in order to recover water from precipitation.

It seems that the different actors would be in a win-win situation if efforts are undertaken in order to **avoid wasting which, in the Mediterranean is more than anything a luxury that we cannot afford.**

In this area, it is necessary to involve all players in our thinking, starting with communities and local entities, citizens' organizations and industries and professionals on the issue who work to improve systems and alert populations on the required efforts needed to be achieved.

Meetings with those who manage the problem of water more closely must be pursued. In this area we could, as mentioned in Limasol, follow the establishment of the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM) in order to consider how to come together on these specific issues with local entities.

Within the framework of the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development adopted in 2005 in Athens, one of the main objectives was *“to stabilize water demand through the reduction of water losses and the wasteful use of water and increase the added value per cubic meter of water used.”* The Blue Plan had been tasked with developing a water

efficiency indicator – composite index. An initial study showed that for the Mediterranean countries, **the total efficiency of water usage ranged on average between 50% and 85%.**

The Republic of Cyprus placed at the top of this indicator in 2005 with a total rate of efficiency around 84%. More generally, the observers indicated that **from 1995 to 2005, nearly all countries showed encouraging progress in the field of efficiency.** In a report from 2005², the Blue Plan indicated that **close to a quarter of the total demand for safe drinking water could be saved** considering the misuse of it that can be made in the Mediterranean.

We all have within our countries systems which have improved the consumption of water by agriculture, which continues to be one of its biggest consumers. What comes to mind is drip irrigation, which was a real success, or even the development of rainwater recovery systems.

It would be useful for us to look into, in the future, another large consumer of water: the tourism sector. Tourism and water is an issue addressed less often than the question of agriculture, yet it seems essential in the Mediterranean as many of the economies of our members are strongly linked to tourism. The influx of tourists, however, is certainly synonymous with economic development but must also be measured against the non-negligible, supplementary demands it generates on water.

In the future, our Committee could meet on this specific issue, which should be the object of a meeting bringing together technical experts on water issues and professionals from the tourism sector around the Mediterranean parliaments which we represent.

- preserve water quality:

A second challenge lies in ensuring the development of wastewater retreatment facilities in order to finally ban, definitively, the practice of discharging untreated wastewater in waterways or directly into the Mediterranean Sea.

It is helpful to recall the European Communication COM (2006) 475 supporting the involvement of all partners of the Euro-Med process and the collaboration with UNEP/MAP for depollution of the Mediterranean, which is one of six objectives which had been selected by the members of the UfM to give substance to this initiative. It is also **one of the key points that we find in our own Charter of the Mediterranean.** We must not doubt that the action plans in this area will certainly be particularly supported in the future and that it will be necessary for our Assembly to be able to propose actions in a positive direction and that we can eventually commit ourselves to develop in our legislations elements to effectively fight against the pollution of the Mediterranean and more generally, for the treatment of wastewater.

On this point – in the mid-term – it would also be useful to have a comparative study of the legislation in each of the PAM member in this area.

Finally, it is worth recalling that the Secretary General of the United Nations, at the last Davos summit in early 2009, had called for actions to be put into place in the framework of a green “New Deal” - the preservation of water and the better management of water resources can be

² *A Sustainable Future for the Mediterranean, Blue Plan's Environment and Development Outlook (2005)*

a vehicle for job creation – which is inscribed in the theory of promotion of green growth. This would show **how the issue of water in the Mediterranean could lend itself to bringing about a response to the global crisis that we are all currently involved in, participating in the improvement of its usage and its preservation.**

Additionally, on the issue of the best place for the implementation of this dialogue together on the themes linked to water in the Mediterranean, last February our work had allowed several delegations to mention the need to create structures – an Office or a Water Agency – in the Mediterranean area which could collect all the data relating to this issue, including that of the available stocks. The host delegation of Cyprus stressed the need for such an organization and our Jordanian colleagues discussed their desire to see an Office moved to their country, which would also have symbolic value due to the delicate dimension of the water supply in Jordan.

It seems to us that, without ignoring the interest that such an Agency could have, it is difficult for us, for reasons both financial and material, to be behind the creation of such a structure **without neglecting the support that could be ours in this initiative in which we could recognise.** Moreover, before setting up a new structure, we should exploit all existing avenues such as MED EUWI, a strategic partnership amongst all types of actors (regional, national, international) and which contribute to the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

The periodic report that we propose should be the embryo carrying our thoughts, which should result in specific thematic meetings, sources of ideas and innovation for each of our parliaments.

-Managing one's own water

Finally, the report would be incomplete if it did not include a reference to the complex issue of water as a stake of territorial conflict in our region, in particular in the Middle East. Political solutions only can help in finding lasting solutions to quarrels linked to property, utilization, exploitation and management of water among neighbors or in the case of the delicate issue of the occupied territories in the Middle East.

We must recall that in any event it is imperative that the use of water for vital reasons with the populations takes precedence over any other use.

III. Water in the Mediterranean and the 5th World Water Forum in Istanbul.

This year, the issue of water was marked by **the major and important event, which was the World Water Forum, held in Istanbul from 16 to 21 of last March.** In their 3rd report on water resources, published a few days before the beginning of the United Nations Forum, deplored the **chronic lack of political interest in the vital issue of water.**

The five-day meeting in Istanbul which brought together several thousand people – more than 20,000 – allowed many decision-makers in the field of water and all stakeholders to meet and to exchange in a very fruitful way. As you all had asked me at the meeting in Limasol, I wanted to get to this important meeting in order to prepare an analysis of the debates:

- The ministerial declaration adopted on 22 March includes many positive results, among which we should point out:

-the necessity for sustainable recovery of the costs of water services by the combination of affordable tariffs and the appropriate public subsidies to finance the sector and the need to increase funding to achieve the Millennium Development Goals in the area of access to water and sanitation;

-the fight against water shortages and adaptation to climate change;

-the need to save water in the field of agriculture;

- the interest in management, **including cross-border water management ;**

-mobilisation on sanitation for better collection and better treatment of wastewater.

- During this Forum, ten countries confirmed their willingness to quickly adhere to the 1997 United Nations Convention on Transboundary Waterways, which had not yet entered into force for lack of sufficient support.
- The discussions were attended by parliamentarians and heads of local authorities. It should be noted that Mayors and local and regional authorities signed the "**Istanbul Water Consensus**", by which they undertake to implement local plans with target objectives for improving the management and sanitation of water. This document's philosophy should be publicised by our Assembly in order to encourage local actors from our countries to join in on this initiative.
- This major meeting also provided the opportunity to highlight the multiplicity of initiatives on water existing, such as the **Mediterranean Union for Young Ambassadors (UMJAE)**. This initiative shows that the key issue at stake is the education of our youth on water problems in the Mediterranean. The Water Embassy is an association of French law 1901, which works at the national and international levels.

It is based on the right to water in France which allows for 1% of the water bill to be invested in the infrastructures of emerging countries provided that the elected officials who manage the water decide to help a project. The Water Embassy organizes classes on water in schools in order to educate children on water. Upon becoming adults, they will know how to take care of this vital resource.

At the same time, the Water Embassy, in partnership with the Mediterranean Network for Engineering School and Technical Universities (RMEI), has aimed to build a network of young ambassadors, which can aid local authorities of disputing countries in building projects to improve access to water and sanitation.

As a first step, during their 1st semester in 2008-2009, UMJAE organized classes on water in the countries of the Mediterranean shores. The key goal was to bring the students face to face with the realities of water and its stakeholders, taking into account the Mediterranean dimension. Students of each of the 11 participating countries (Algeria, Egypt, France, Israel, Italy, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Spain, Syria and Tunisia) and in particular, **students from engineering schools drew up a status report on water in their countries, including**

on the governance of water, to then propose a field of action in relation to the Mediterranean Sea.

This initiative, one among many, shows the **strength of initiatives** which can flourish in the Mediterranean centered around the issue of water and which, while acting in the sense of improving the overall situation of water in the Mediterranean, participate in **bringing together the Mediterranean youth and making them aware of their common destiny.**

Our Assembly, whose ultimate goal is the strengthening of human ties between our people, would be **inspired to support, by all means possible, the initiatives of young Mediterranean in all areas and in this case, those dealing with water.**

- It should be noted, however, that the success could have been much greater if the final Declaration had retained that the right to access to water and sanitation figure clearly, as many had wished. It is regrettable that this particularly important principal does not figure into the ministerial declaration. It seems necessary now, more than ever, to pursue efforts at persuasion in order to achieve this recognition, in particular within the framework of the United Nations.

We can **recall that the annex to the Charter of the Mediterranean, which underpins our common commitment, refers to, on the issue of water, the “extension of access to drinking water and sanitisation of water used”.** Our Assembly can only hope that the very near future sees the recognition of this fundamental right and the right to access to water, the essential foundation for many rights.

We can only repeat what the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights said, in a report on access to water published in 2007 which considers that, *“it is now time to consider access to safe drinking water and sanitation as a human right, defined as the right to equal and non-discriminatory access to a sufficient amount of safe drinking water for personal and domestic uses – drinking, personal sanitation, washing of clothes, food preparation and personal and household hygiene – to sustain life and health. States should prioritize these personal and domestic uses over other water uses and should take steps to ensure that this sufficient amount is of good quality, affordable for all and can be collected within a reasonable distance from a person’s home.”*

Overall, the 5th World Water Forum has brought many advances while being additional step for a better dissemination of **emergency messages on the danger which threatens if together, actors do not take their responsibilities on the issue of water.**

The 6th Forum in 2012 will be held in either the candidate cities of Marseille or Durban (South Africa), with the World Water Council making its decision in the month of June in 2009. It would seem logical that we would give our support to the Mediterranean candidate, however, our meeting in Istanbul will essentially be the occasion to take note of our final choice.