

Opening Speech

Fighting the Water Crisis in The Mediterranean Basin: An Emergency for the Euro INBO 2012

Since the beginning of the world, most human activities, whether economic or social, use water as indissociable to all life. This natural heritage vital to humanity carries with it one of the biggest challenges for our planet. Inevitably, this essential resource for sustainable development is becoming scarce.

The problem is particularly acute in countries in the southeast of the Mediterranean Basin, where water resources are naturally limited. The countries of this region, with a high population growth rate of 2.8%, have a very small percentage of fresh water. The average amount of water per inhabitant in the region is 1000m³ per year, inferior to the 7000 m³ global rate.

The need for water is increasing at an exponential rate due to the explosive population growth, the effects of global change, and increasing urbanization. Non-integrated and fragmented management of the resource increasingly compromises the development of the socio-economy of certain Middle Eastern countries characterized by an increasing demand for water though faced with limited supplies that are arbitrary and of poor quality due to pollution. Subsequently, this important natural resource is at the heart of diplomatic preoccupations of regional governments. Water is quickly becoming a source of cross-border issues and thus, of interstate concern. It is urgent to increase actions involving regional hydro-diplomatic relations for the equal sharing of water in accordance to the UN convention of 1997, since the consequences of water shortage could lead to dramatic situation on the geopolitical level in the Middle East.

The Eastern Mediterranean countries represent a reservoir of water for the Middle East, then over the past twenty years the blue gold has become a minor factor in the future development of these nations and an object of fierce competition between consumers and the governments. The situation is due to lack of “good governance” leading to weak management of our natural resources, aging infrastructure and environmental degradation. The situation could be summarized as following:

- **Daily problems in water distribution:** Water cuts, leaks in water distribution networks, etc.
- **Significant Waste:** Lack of income for surface water storage, groundwater recharge nonexistent.
- **Increase of water pollution:** Accidental and intentional contamination.
- **Diluted responsibility and Fragmented knowledge and insufficient skill:** Absence of integrated information systems about resources and their uses.
- **Bad demand management and inefficiency of networks in all sectors:** Lack of organizational and human resources, ineffective government and structural weaknesses.
- **Unusable non-conventional water resources:** REU , spring resurgences and grey water.
- **Excessive pumping of aquifers and unjustified energy spending:** Groundwater drawdown, pollution, salinity and seawater intrusion.

- **Insufficient customer management:** Impossibility to ameliorate service standards, inequitable tariff system, inability of citizens to pay for services.
- **Deficient budgeting:** Incomplete and obsolete files, recovery problems, and malfeasances.

A shortage crisis in the southeastern countries in fact threatens its citizens as the sad diagnostic of the water system shows. If nothing is done in the short term, the human, economic and social development of these nations will be in peril. The EuroINBO - 2012 meeting should clearly deliver this message , with an urgent tone, to be a main levers of action that service food, energies and social security will be met. The rigorous attempt to protect and better use blue gold in our countries, outlines short, medium and long-term visions in addition to a roadmap that indicates the essential pillars that need be erected to develop the sustainable use of the resource. Additionally, the Euro INBO - 2012 meeting should stress and reinforce the solidarity between the government and the private sectors and attempts to implicate civil society in the sustainable preservation of the water and food heritage.

“The Identification of Needs” should be the first issue of the Euro INBO 2012 raises. The application of good governance, promulgation of the water code and definition of an action plan for the Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) of basins in our countries. These are indispensable conditions for the efficient management of water which is not always renewable in the Middle Eastern region.

"Preserve and Manage Water Resources" is the second challenge. Developing strong and sustainable coordination mechanisms towards adequate water infrastructure limits waste emissions to the Mediterranean Sea and increases the efficiency of drinking water storages and irrigation networks. The private sector must cooperate in actualizing this objective, along with a non polluting energy within the framework of a Public Private Partnership (PPP) as Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) or Design-Build-Operate-Transfer (DBOT).

To ensure the sustainable management of Mediterranean water, it is necessary that more attention be paid to improving the efficiency of water use. Priority should be given to the agricultural sector, The main water consumer. Meeting demand requires a rationing of water for irrigation, and the use of both conventional and non-conventional new masses of water, such as waste water reuse, the sea water spring and grey water.

The problem of shortage could have dramatic consequences on the geopolitics of the Middle East and the need to avert this threat is urgent. The water problem cannot be regulated as a separate entity. It must be included in a global scheme of development that involves regional hydro-diplomatic cooperation for equitable sharing of the resource. This is certainly the first condition that needs to be fulfilled, to avoid water – energy – food conflicts.

In conclusion, “the food security” must remain a means of cultivating peace in the Mediterranean. We need to give a serious impulse to cooperation in the water and energy sector to preserve peace and food security. It is by sharing the resource that people will learn to know each other and live together in the trust, respect and prosperity.

We hope that the Euro INBO – 2012 conference will help meet the challenges and find solutions to the questions citizens and leaders continually asks.

- How can we limit the effects of global change on water resources without affecting the food security in the Mediterranean basin?
- How can we sustainably manage the New Water Mass in the Mediterranean?
- How can the threat of a water war between the riparian countries bordering the Transboundary basin be kept away?

All leaders of the Mediterranean should engage a comprehensive global process based on a strong willingness to anchor water energy and food policies. The consolidation of integrated watershed management is essential for achieving the objectives of the Euro INBO- 2012 program and optimizing the financial means to support sustainable infrastructure projects. The nexus water – energy has a vital impact on the food security of our basin if we don't meet a proper management for these components we will not be able to secure food for our future generation.

Investors need to assess the value of this initiatives that aims to strengthen the solidarity of citizens under the slogan "Together for proper water energy – food status in the Mediterranean".

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