



**United Nations Economic
Commission for Europe**



Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean
Secrétariat de l'Union pour la Méditerranée
الأمانة العامة للإتحاد من أجل المتوسط



**Ministry for the Environment,
Land and Sea**



INTERNATIONAL ROUNDTABLE ON TRANSBOUNDARY WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT IN THE SOUTHERN MEDITERRANEAN

26 - 27 November 2012
Chamber of Deputies, Rome, Italy

Information notice

The International Roundtable on Transboundary Water Resources Management in the Southern Mediterranean is jointly organized by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), the Global Water Partnership Mediterranean (GWP-Med), the Global Environment Facility (GEF) International Waters Learning Exchange and Resource Network (IW:LEARN), and the Mediterranean Component of the EU Water Initiative (MED EUWI), with the support of the Italian Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea.

The Roundtable will be held prior to the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) that will take place on 28-30 November 2012.

I. Background

Water is an increasingly scarce resource in the Mediterranean, unevenly distributed in time and space, and heavily exploited. Many countries in the Southern Mediterranean are highly dependent on shared water resources, both surface and groundwaters. With the current and expected demographic growth, impacts of climate variability and change, and economic and social changes, water management poses a major challenge, and transboundary cooperation becomes more and more crucial in order to prevent conflicts between riparian countries, optimize the use of resources and ensure sustainability, therefore contributing to stability, peace and prosperity in the region.

Though successful examples of efforts towards joint management of transboundary surface and groundwater resources exist in the Southern Mediterranean, effective collaboration among countries remains generally limited. Conflicting water uses, diverse legal and institutional frameworks, different political priorities and strategic interests, and sometimes unequal level of overall development are some of the obstacles inhibiting cooperation. In some cases, turbulent political relations have brought coordination efforts to a deadlock.

A number of actors including the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), UNECE, UfM, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the European Union Water Initiative, GWP-Med as well as number of bilateral donors are

working at the regional, sub-regional, national and water body levels to assist in overcoming these obstacles and promoting enhanced cooperation for the sustainable management of transboundary water resources management.

The exchange of experiences building on the benefits stemming from cooperative management of shared waters proved to be able to catalyze further progress, as demonstrated for instance by the Regional Dialogue on transboundary water resources management issues in the countries in South-Eastern Europe under the Petersberg Phase II / Athens Declaration Process, UNECE and the UNDP-led GEF IW:LEARN.

The Water Convention has, since its entry into force in 1992, provided an important framework for improving the management of transboundary surface and groundwater resources in the pan-European region. Building on the successes achieved over the past 20 years, the Parties to the Convention adopted an amendment in 2003 to open the Convention for accession by non-UNECE countries. With few ratifications missing, the amendment is expected to enter into force by the end of the year. The Water Convention will thereby turn into a global multilateral legal framework for transboundary water cooperation, open for ratification by all UN Members States. In that context, the Water Convention can offer a solid cooperation framework also for the countries in the Southern Mediterranean. The experience and the policy and technical guidance developed under it can be of help for Southern Mediterranean countries to develop cooperation at the regional and basin level, along with the potential transferability and replicability of successful examples/experiences in the Southern Mediterranean region.

In view of the fact that freshwater resources originating outside the Arab region contribute more than half of the renewable water available in the Arab countries, securing rights to those resources has become an element of national and regional security. A common vision and a legal basis for managing shared water resources – whether internally between the Arab countries or externally with neighbouring upstream non-Arab countries – can constitute a major step towards achieving water security in the Arab region. To this end, the Arab Ministerial Water Council (AMWC) requested the League of Arab States Center for Water Studies and Arab Water Security and ESCWA to prepare a legal framework on shared water in the Arab region. The aim of the legal framework is to set the main principles upon which cooperation, management and allocation of shared water resources between riparian countries and aquifer States are to be based. On the basis of AMWC resolutions, the preparation of the legal framework is well under way through a consultative, inter-governmental process. A third round of consultations will be organized prior to the deliberations that will take place at the next ministerial session of the AMWC in mid-2013. Additionally, ESCWA and the ESCWA-BGR Cooperation have been supporting the management of shared water resources in the region through expert consultations and the preparation of the Inventory of Shared Water Resources in Western Asia.

From its very beginning in July 2008, the Union for the Mediterranean has highlighted the importance of developing a common framework within the region addressing the use and management of freshwater resources. The Annex to the Paris Declaration stated “the importance of water is acknowledged: the Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference in Jordan in October 2008 will define a Mediterranean water strategy”. The Statement of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs Meeting in Marseille (4 November 2008) went further in affirming the importance of elaborating a common framework stating “The Euromed Ministerial Meeting on water will be held in Jordan. Ministers agree to define the Strategy for Water in the Mediterranean along the lines decided by the Heads of State and Government in the Paris Summit for the Mediterranean. They encourage a swift implementation of partnerships in order to implement concrete projects in line with the guidelines of the strategy.” Four years later a common framework on freshwater in the Mediterranean region remains elusive although the UfM Secretariat perseveres in identifying projects aligned with the broadest objective of the Union for the Mediterranean.

II. Aims and objectives

The Roundtable will provide a platform for the exchange of information and experience and for a debate on the progress achieved and the challenges ahead.

It will allow representatives of countries in the Southern Mediterranean to work together and with other countries in the Mediterranean to:

- Debate the current state, the progress achieved and the prevailing challenges for cooperation on transboundary waters in the Southern Mediterranean
- Exchange experiences, lessons learnt and showcase good practices of transboundary cooperation from different basins/aquifers, both from the north and the south of the Mediterranean.
- Increase awareness on and understanding of the UNECE Water Convention and its work, including the technical and strategic guidance documents developed under its framework and the practical experiences of its application.
- Identify options at technical and policy levels for the way forward, including identify specific cases of cooperation on shared waters that present a certain level of maturity and could be promoted by the riparians as priority projects to be supported.

III. Organization of work

Key note presentations, facilitated plenary and breakout sessions will allow discussion on issues related to transboundary water management in the Mediterranean.

The Roundtable will focus on the following themes:

- **Setting the scene: Views from countries on state and future of transboundary water cooperation in the region, the progress achieved at the regional and the country level and the remaining challenges.**
- **Strengthening legal and institutional aspects of transboundary cooperation on surface and groundwaters.**
This session will focus on global, regional and basin legal instruments existing or under development and their institutional arrangements. The meeting will discuss the extent to which these instruments can facilitate and/or have facilitated cooperation.
- **Informing transboundary water cooperation.**
This session will focus on technical and strategic issues related to joint monitoring and assessment of transboundary surface and groundwaters, including information management and exchange. The Roundtable will discuss existing processes and good practices in the Mediterranean and beyond.
- **Managing the shared resource: Balancing different interests and uses in transboundary basins.**
This session will focus on how to ensure a reasonable, equitable and sustainable use of shared resources, building on positive examples of the application of integrated water resources management at the basin level, including for the protection of ecosystems.
- **Coping with changing conditions: Adapting to climate variability and change in transboundary basins.**
This session will focus on the challenges related to managing transboundary surface and groundwaters in conditions of climate variability and change and highlight good examples of approaches to deal with uncertainty, assess vulnerability, and jointly develop and apply measures to increase resilience.

- Creating the enabling environment for cooperation: Engaging stakeholders, enabling cross-fertilization and building their capacity.
The session will bring up the role of key-actors and stakeholders in promoting transboundary water resources management for greater participation, equity and accountability.
- Moving forward: discussion on opportunities and challenges for improving transboundary cooperation in the region, including identification of areas for priority interventions in specific basins and aquifers where there is wish by riparians to advance cooperation.

All participants are invited to contribute and engage in discussions at the Roundtable. **Countries, experts and other stakeholder organizations, intending to make presentations are invited to inform the organizers in advance at <chantal.demilecamps@unece.org> by 10 October 2012.**

The final Roundtable agenda will be made available in time before the meeting taking into account the requests for presentations received from countries, experts and other stakeholder organizations.

IV. Participation

The Roundtable will be attended by delegates from the Southern Mediterranean: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia. Representatives of countries in the North of the Mediterranean as well as relevant experts will also participate.

It is expected that participants of the Roundtable will be governmental representatives at the director level. Given the topics that will be discussed, delegations should include representatives from different relevant ministries, such as water, agriculture, environment, foreign affairs, etc.

The organizers can finance the participation in the Roundtable of up to 2 or 3 representatives per eligible country. Moreover, the UNECE Water Convention will be able to finance the participation of one Government representative per eligible country in the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties, from 28 to 30 November 2012.

International organizations, non-governmental organizations, civil society and donor representatives will also attend.

V. Practical information

The Roundtable will start at 10 a.m. on Monday, 26 November 2012 and end at 5.00 p.m. on Tuesday, 27 November 2012. It will be held in the Chamber of Deputies in Rome.

The working language will be English and French; simultaneous interpretation will be provided.

In order to register, nominated participants should send their letter of nomination and registration form to <cammile.marcelo@unece.org> by 10 October 2012.

GWP-Mediterranean will handle the logistical arrangements and the financial support for the participants in the Roundtable.

Further information and relevant material will be made available in due course at:
http://www.unece.org/env/water/southmed_roundtable.html