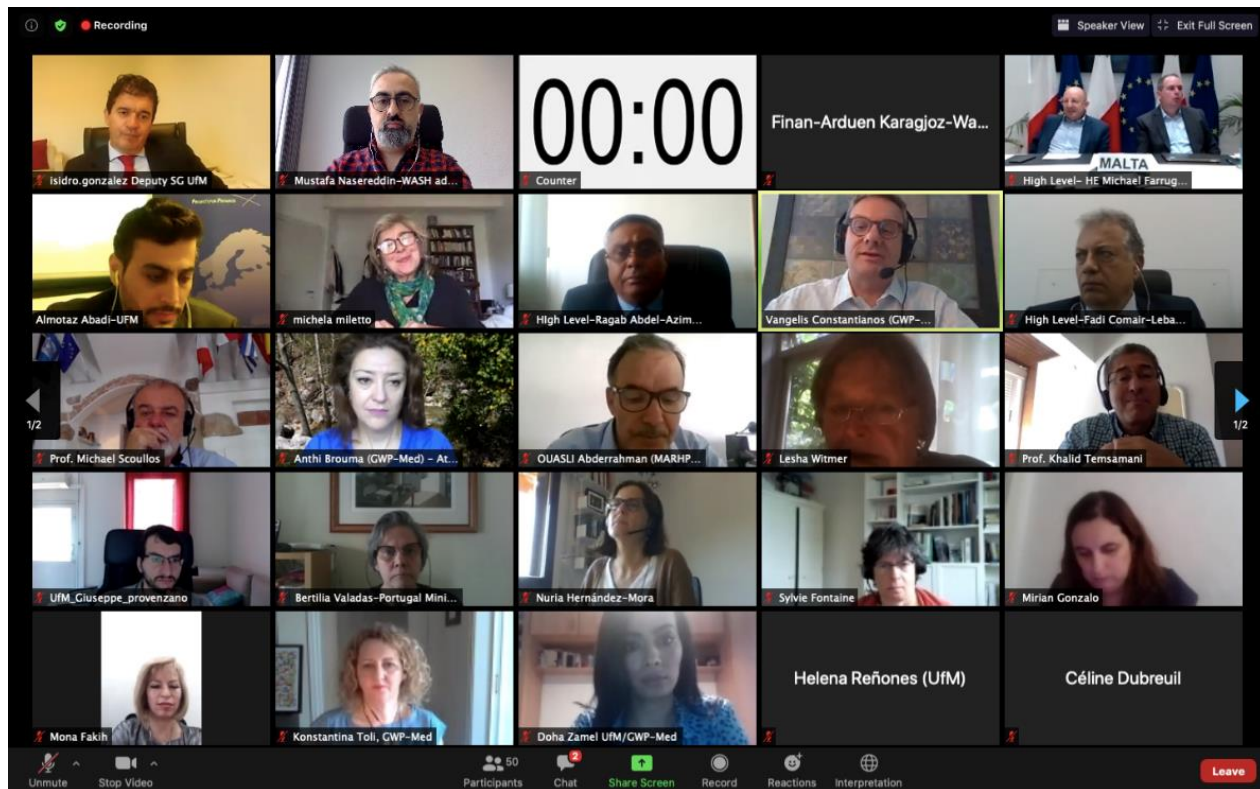


UfM Water Agenda
Informal UfM Water Expert Group Meeting

Consultation Meeting
with UfM Member States, international institutions, regional organisations and civil society
on
**the UfM Water Agenda and Financial Strategy in view of SDG6 and the Green Deal: Policy Actions,
Economic Responses, and Ways Forward in the post-COVID 19 context**

On-line Meeting
9-10 June 2020

REPORT



INTRODUCTION | Purpose of the meeting

In the past months, humanity has been facing an unprecedented situation as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. There is no aspect in the political economies around the globe that has not been affected by the virus outbreak. Moreover, this crisis has amplified disparities within and across countries and has exposed the ease with which international targets towards sustainable development and climate resilience can be side-tracked due to emergency re-prioritisation. The Mediterranean is no exception, with countries across its shores looking for responses that not only address the COVID-19 crisis, but also tackle long-standing challenges in the region, including ensuring the availability and sustainable management of water and access to water supply and sanitation services for their populations.

The COVID-19 crisis proves, as clear as ever, the inextricable link of health with access to safe water and hygiene, with the WASH agenda being among the centrepiece for responses. The crisis also proves the risks of water-related inequalities, particularly for the more vulnerable populations. Implementing water efficiency options, as well as intensifying efforts to improve the good chemical, quantitative and ecological health of all waters, can increase water availability for all uses and contribute in enhancing environmental health, promoting development options and strengthening the resilience of societies. Improved water governance and sustainable financing instruments to create an enabling environment, contribute to the same direction and should not be undermined in post COVID-19 recovery plans.

On the ‘day after’ of the crisis, when relief and development investments are mobilised, governments, businesses and development partners need to maintain the focus on meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and not jeopardise the progress made over the last decades. Post COVID-19 investments should increase and facilitate efforts towards meeting SDGs, for instance by making sector-specific financial support measures conditional to SDGs contributions. This is very relevant for the Mediterranean countries and, within the SDGs agenda, for actions related to Water, Climate Change, Energy, Agriculture, Environment, Gender, Partnerships, etc. Within the UfM Water Agenda, the Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystems Nexus (WEFE) and the Water-Employment-Migration (WEM) agendas, can contribute to further promote sustainability solutions, including a focus on Gender and Youth.

Aiming to assist with this demanding endeavour, the Water, Environment and Blue Economy Division of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), organised an online consultation with its Member States and partner institutions and organisations, with a twofold objective to:

- a) take stock of the situation, the implications for the region and responses to COVID-19, also relating to the implementation of its UfM Water Policy Framework for Actions 2030¹, and
- b) discuss and agree on regional priority actions that can complement individual country efforts, supported by and eventually aligning with the European Green Deal as a roadmap for sustainable and resilient post-COVID recovery².

¹ At the mandate of the Ministerial Declaration on Water (Malta, April 2017), the UfM Water Expert Group (WEG) elaborated a Water Agenda and an associated Financial Strategy (FS). The Water Agenda, titled Water Policy framework for Actions 2030 containing four priority thematic areas [Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystem Nexus (WEFE); Water-Employment-Migration (WEM); Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), and Water and Climate Change Adaptation (CCA)], was endorsed by the Senior Officials in December 2017 and its implementation has been ongoing since then. The full texts of the Water Agenda and its Financial Strategy are available at: https://ufmsecretariat.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/UfM-Water-Policy-Framework-for-Actions_baja-calidad.pdf
https://ufmsecretariat.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/UfM-Financial-Strategy-for-Water_for-web-paginas.pdf

² https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en and <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy-environment/news/green-recovery-alliance-launched-in-european-parliament/> and <https://euobserver.com/environment/148059>



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With regards to the second objective, the online consultation fostered synergies of the UfM Water Agenda with ongoing work at the European Commission, through the identification of areas for collaboration and potential complementarity of work.

The online consultation, though informal, utilised the modality and structure of the UfM Water Expert Group (WEG) meetings in order to provide a common reference framework and a platform for exchanges among the UfM Member States. The meeting took place over two days (starting in the afternoon of June 9, and concluding before lunch on June 10) and was hosted by the UfM Secretariat with support from the Global Water Partnership – Mediterranean (GWP-Med). Separate channels for simultaneous interpretation in English, French and Arabic were available to the participants.

ITEMS DISCUSSED | Brief account of the discussions per session

The online consultation workshop was very rich, both in attendance and in contributions. Overall, it involved more than 100 participants, coming from 21 different countries and representing more than 30 institutions and regional stakeholder organisations. Moreover, it involved more than 50 different speakers, sharing reflections and information on where we are, and also provided ideas and suggestions on the path ahead. Although it had a crowded set of sessions, the large number of speakers ensured diversity, multiplicity and a representation of different views and experiences. And the large number of participants was a clear indication of the commitment to work together, in partnership and within the framework of the Union for the Mediterranean.

DAY 1 – 9 JUNE 2020

The first segment of the workshop included a welcoming part, followed by a setting the stage section and then by a dedicated part on the four thematic priorities of the UfM Water Agenda.

Welcoming Remarks (14:00-14:30)

The opening segment included targeted interventions by the UfM Co-Presidencies and the strategic and financial partners of the meeting.

The session was opened by *H.E. Eng. Ali Subah*, Secretary General, Ministry of Water and Irrigation of Jordan, who reminded that priorities have changed due to the COVID-19, but the main strategies and projects remain. He urged to revisit them in order to better respond to this newfound situation.

In a recorded message, *Mr. Daniel Calleja*, Director-General of DG Environment of the European Commission, shared that the European Green Deal (EGD) is a priority of the new Commission – it gives a framework for action and a degree of certainty for the next five years. The Commission’s President has repeatedly stated that recovery actions need to be EGD compliant. The water issues dealt with by the UfM expert group coincide with a number of priority elements of the Green Deal such as zero pollution, circular economy (water re-use) and others. The Commission has said that it needs to work with its partners outside the EU if it hopes to achieve the objectives of the EGD and specifically highlighted the countries of the Mediterranean (Neighbourhood) as key partners. Mr Calleja reaffirmed the importance the EC attributes to the UfM, the WEG and the work that is being done. Water cooperation in the Mediterranean is, and will remain, a Commission priority

Ms. Henrike Trautmann, from DG Near of the European Commission, highlighted the importance of this meeting as a technological frontrunner of meetings that will take place in a fully virtual manner; and of course because of the importance of the subject. Mr. Trautmann mentioned the recent scientific assessment of climate and environmental changes impacts in the Mediterranean Basin (Medecc report) that has provided scientific evidence of the impact of climate change in the region, with water availability being one of the first and most felt consequences. Although we do not have yet a complete assessment of the consequences of the COVID crisis, the Commission is determined to stick to its long-term objective of a greener and more sustainable economy and society through the Green Deal. Even more so, after the COVID-19 crisis. As the Commission President Ursula von der Leven stated ten days ago, «Green Deal will be our motor for the recovery» and the EU action should be guided by the principles of “doing no harm” or “build back better” to

foster a green transition wherever possible. She stated that the EC would like to see both the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement used as the blueprint for a better recovery.

Mr. Peter Lundberg, from the MENA Regional Office of Sida, at the Embassy of Sweden in Jordan, stressed that in order to defeat the pandemic countries have to work together, which leads to mutual understanding and common solutions to common challenges. At the same time, development agencies need to promote regional integration - Sida is aiming for this through its MENA Strategy and announced upcoming support for further technical and policy activities. He also complimented the UfM work and the partnership with GWP-Med to maintain dialogue on all fronts in the region, contributing to socio economic development in the Mediterranean region, while harnessing on the role of women and youth.

Dr. Monika Weber-Fahr, the CEO of the Global Water Partnership (GWP), affirmed that we should become bolder and more decisive on our collective efforts for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and face the challenges with vision and wisdom. Water security is at the core of SDGs, of COVID preparedness, and of their interlinkages: we are called to face these today with vision and wisdom. Embraced by us all, the UfM Water Agenda and Financial Strategy can foster that, offering an agreed regional plan for action.

The opening segment was concluded with the intervention of the UfM Secretary General, H.E. Mr. Nasser Kamel, who highlighted that this crisis provides us an opportunity to build better. We have to strive together for a sustainable development. We need to deliver tangible results for our citizens and our environment. He also stressed the critical role of water governance; although it is improving, it needs to be further attuned to the challenges and requires more financing, especially from the investment side.

Setting the scene (14:30-14:50)

The session was chaired by *Mr. Isidro González Afonso*, Deputy Secretary General, UfMS-Water. Mr. González Afonso started by sharing that all sectors are affected by the impacts of COVID-19 and that we need to put water issues in high priority position on the discussion agenda. He reaffirmed that the aim of this meeting was to see how we can continue implementing the UfM Water Agenda's objectives and priority actions alongside the SDG framework and SDG6 in particular. He also highlighted that this meeting will give the chance to discuss and come up with ideas on how other countries faced COVID-19 and learn from each other.

The first contribution of the session was made by *Mr. Almotaz Abadi*, Managing Director of UfMS-Water, who elaborated on the current state and next steps in the implementation of the UfM Water Agenda and Financial Strategy, also in view of the COVID-19 crisis. Mr Abadi started by sharing that COVID-19 pandemic is prompting challenges for the water supply and sanitation sector globally and especially in some areas of the Euro-Mediterranean region, already under stress due to water scarcity and climate change. The first highlight concerned the emergency response phase, given that the COVID-19 crisis is putting further pressure on water supply. Since the lockdown, Jordan and Turkey have been affected by water shortages, whilst other countries have re-routed irrigation water to household supply. Mr. Abadi emphasised that access to water is crucial in fighting this pandemic.

The second highlight focused on the recovery phase (post COVID-19), because water is a key component of the productive systems, from agriculture, energy production and industrial production to transport and tourism. Today, 3 out of 4 jobs are water dependent. To respond to the situation, the UfM is evaluating the impact of COVID-19 on the water sector and will support the implementation of the recovery strategy by providing a platform for policy dialogue and up-scaling of exemplary projects. Finally, Mr. Abadi presented

briefly the UfM Water Agenda, thematic priorities, policy framework and financial strategy as forming a living document, where he advocated for support from all countries for implementation at national levels. The presentation concluded with a presentation of the workplan and upcoming milestones in the Water Agenda, in 2020 and beyond.

The following contribution was made by *Dr. Anthi Brouma*, Team Leader, UfM TA/GWP-Med, presenting a literature review on Water and COVID-19 responses in the Mediterranean. She opened her presentation noting that even prior to the pandemic, we knew that we are not on track for meeting SDG6. She then shed light on COVID-19 impacts on the water sector, with recent studies by WHO about the virus presence in water and wastewater. Furthermore, it has increased water demand by an additional 9-12 litres per person per day to apply health and sanitary prevention measure due to COVID-19. This has increased the pressure on water supply and sanitation service provision. Dr. Brouma also presented some recommendations for protection and prevention from COVID-19 infection.

The UfM Secretariat is engaged with its partners to develop a clear nexus between water and public health and provide a roadmap to ensure that the WASH sector is at the forefront in fighting COVID-19. As part of the European Commission's emergency response action, 2.8 billion euros have been provided to support research, health and water systems. This financial assistance shall also reach MENA countries, Western Balkans and Turkey to ensure continuity of health services, trainings and surveillance. In addition, engaging the local population by raising awareness about WASH practice is necessary to limit the spread of the virus. This can take place through a sustainable response to COVID-19, by building on the solidarity factor witnessed since the beginning of the pandemic and especially during lockdown. The sustainable approach need not only to focus on WASH, but also focus on the green economy. Cooperation between public and private sector is also required, along contingency funding plans and long-term investments. Dr. Brouma concluded her presentation by stressing that a successful recovery phase will largely depend on rebuilding a sustainable and equitable society.

The last contribution of this session was made by *Mr. Andrew Murphy*, Senior Expert, DG Environment-European Commission, who elaborated on the European Green Deal (EGD). Mr. Murphy explained that the EGD is one of the six priorities of the new European Commission for 2019-2024, which places the environment as an important issue at the outset and throughout the Commission's term. Furthermore, the EGD will be the centre for the recovery from COVID-19, and therefore it will need to be a green recovery. The EGD is a growth strategy, thus linking the economy with the environment, making sure that environmental concerns are at the centre of the economic recovery. In a nutshell, the objectives of the EGD include:

- Becoming climate neutral by 2050
- Protecting human life, animals and plants by cutting pollution
- Helping companies become world leaders in clean products and technologies
- Helping ensure a just and inclusive transition, leaving no one behind.

Mr. Murphy also presented the elements of the EGD and asserted that water is an underlying theme that is linked to all these elements, thus being cross-cutting. While keeping circular economy as the objective for many sectors, a new Circular Economy Action Plan was adopted in March 2020 to help modernising the EU's economy. The focus sectors include: textiles, construction, electronics and plastics. The new Circular Economy Action Plan will include a sustainable product policy that will prioritise reducing and reusing materials before recycling them.

With regards to preserving and restoring ecosystems and biodiversity, the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, adopted in May 2020, is under preparation for the forthcoming Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in October 2020. It will be followed up by concrete measures in 2021 to address the main drivers of biodiversity loss. A new EU Forest Strategy will be issued in 2020 with new measures to support deforestation-free value chains from 2020.

To achieve the goals set by the European Green Deal, the Plan will mobilise at least €1 trillion in sustainable investments over the next decade. Part of the plan, the Just Transition Mechanism, will be targeted to a fair and just green transition. The Commission has said that it needs to work with its partners outside the EU if it hopes to achieve the objectives of the EGD. Europe cannot implement the EGD alone but need cooperation from key partners, specifically mentioning neighbouring countries like countries of the Mediterranean, which can work together to achieve the goals of the EGD. He concluded that EGD being the centre for recovery from COVID-19 and partnership is necessary from all countries.

The UfM Water Agenda's four thematic priorities (15:00-16:30)

During dedicated interventions and discussion, the session provided brief updates on the work of the four thematic priorities of the UfM Water Agenda, consolidated the work of the WEFE and WEM Task Forces with emphasis on the elements of a Framework Programme and informed about partners' activities in the region that may enable further synergies and collaboration. More specifically:

Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystem (WEFE) Nexus

The introductory intervention was delivered by the WEFE Nexus team leader, *Eng. Mona Fakh*, Water Director, Lebanon, who pointed that in many Mediterranean countries the Nexus sectors continue working in silos with limited considerations of their interlinkages and mutual impacts. Energy and agriculture tend to get more attention than water and the environmental within national and development priorities. She also stressed how the UfM Nexus agenda should assist these countries seeking an optimum balance amongst sectorial objectives whilst strengthening water position in the national development agenda and financing, taking into account human rights, youth, gender, jobs and migration.

Eng. Fakh emphasised that governance, partnerships and investments are key ingredients for progress. Efforts should focus on increasing understanding and knowledge of the Nexus benefits by:

- Agreeing through dialogue on the common ways forward;
- Taking collective actions towards achieving results;
- Mobilising financing based on what was agreed on the UfM financial strategy.

Eng. Fakh stressed that the COVID-19 crisis has put on hold many activities. Societies and economies will suffer further from its impacts. However this will be a stimulus for the UfM, partners and member states to find solutions, focus on practical and tangible solutions.

A brief presentation of the WEFE Framework Programme was delivered by the theme's technical facilitator *Mr. Dimitris Faloutsos*, Deputy Regional Coordinator, GWP-Med. He stressed the role of the WEFE Nexus in enhancing sustainable use of natural resources to achieve the SDG in the UfM region with a brief update of the of the UfM WEFE Nexus progress since the WEG 10. Mr. Faloutsos demonstrated how the UfM WEFE Nexus Programme will be developed under two action lines taking into account the operational merging of the Nexus and the WEM agendas within the UfM framework programme:

- Action line 1 (Small and medium scale): WEFE Nexus in coastal, urban and rural areas.
- Action line 2 (Large scale): Facilitate Nexus Wastewater treatment plant (water reuse, bio-energy production, fertilisers production, etc.) possibly with private investment mobilisation.

These introductory presentations were followed by short reflections from strategic partners such as DG Joint Research Centre, European Commission. *Dr. Bernd Manfred Gawlik* of JCR reviewed the work being done under the Gateway to the Mediterranean (previously Called Atlas), a joint effort between the EC, UfM and GWP-Med that consists of collecting and creating a compendium on WEFE Nexus practices across the Mediterranean. The Gateway to the Mediterranean will be an innovative tool using interaction and technology in order to facilitate the sharing of knowledge in the region and beyond.

Ms. Sara Datturi, Environmental Affairs Officer of UNECE, underlined that promoting integrated and intersectoral approach to the water management in the Mediterranean region is a common priority under the UfM Water Policy Framework for Actions 2030 and also for 2019-2021 programme of work of the UN Water Convention. She highlighted as well that the activities promoting the WEFE Nexus approach under the UfM Water Agenda are in synergy and complementarity with the activities implemented within the UN Water Convention.

PRIMA representative *Mr. Giovanni Stanghellini* gave a brief overview of the PRIMA initiative and its main objectives, mentioning that PRIMA is currently giving a boarder uptake on financing projects with the Nexus approach across the Mediterranean. *Mr. Stanghellini* highlighted the importance of research and innovations as key drivers to achieve SDGs, as well as the role of partnership, including the private sector, in order to obtain tangible results on the ground.

Dr. Nisreen Lahham, Advisor, GIZ, shared the same vision on the role of the private sector through the Nexus dialogue program co-funded by GIZ and the EU and implemented by GIZ, hence the prominence of finding innovative financing models for the WEFE Nexus projects. GIZ is looking for a collaboration with UfM and GWP-Med to co-organize regional policy dialogues on access to finance for WEFE Nexus projects, in order to present the outcome of the study on financing strategies and instruments as well as the projects on the action plan that could attract the private sector and have concrete outcomes.

Water-Employment-Migration (WEM)

The introductory intervention was delivered by the WEM Nexus theme co-lead *Mr. Enrico Granara*, Euro Med Coordinator, Ministry of Foreign Affairs & International Cooperation, Italy, who shared, in a post COVID19 context, the efforts conducted by Italy on consulting with the EU partners at a political level in order to make sure that the new EGD is in tune with the Mediterranean region as a whole and reminding them that without the Mediterranean dimensions the EGD is doomed to fail. He pointed out that the only way forward in the post COVID-19 context is the integration of policies and economic responses throughout the Mediterranean region.

Another introductory intervention was provided by the Turkish WEM theme co-lead *Ms. Tuğba Evrim Maden*, Turkish Water Institute (SUEN), Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. *Ms. Tuğba* emphasised the fact that WEM Nexus is associated with the SDGs especially in the Mediterranean area as there are many determinant factors such as the semi-arid climate, water scarcity, migration and refugees, fragile economy due to political instability, youth and gender issues. She pointed out the relevance of water management and sanitation

during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. The distribution of the pandemic was monitored through blood tests but also through wastewater monitoring, which may allow for the identification of the districts with COVID-19 cases.

Following the introductory remarks, a brief presentation was made on the WEM Framework Programme by the theme's technical facilitator *Mr. Vangelis Constantianos*, Executive Secretary, GWP-Med. The presentation consists of depicting the status of the UfM WEM theme and its progress since the WEG 10 with the major focus on merging operationally the Nexus and the WEM agendas within the UfM framework programme.

Dr. Blanca Moreno-Dodson, Manager, Center for Mediterranean Integration (CMI), reflected that water scarcity, intensified by climate change, is triggering youth unemployment in the region and subsequently migration, not only from rural to urban areas but also in some areas across the Mediterranean. The solutions being sought by CMI in the water sector in order to tackle these issues could also include job creation opportunities by using new technologies and involving the youth. In this context, CMI has launched the Water Internship Programme targeting young water professionals, which has been implemented by the key water partner CEWAS. CMI is envisaging a broader uptake in terms of the Nexus and the linkages with water insecurity, which is critical for the stability of the region, particularly in countries that are experiencing water scarcity and are in need to become resilient to climate change and crisis such as pandemics.

Ms. Michela Miletto, Coordinator, UNESCO WWAP, underscored the focus of the WWAP on two specific aspects:

- Gender mainstreaming of the WEM pillars.
- Contribute to strengthening capacities of the countries to conduct a target assessment that serve as a background for planning, interventions and investments.

During the last WEM meeting in Istanbul, WWAP proposed the set for a WEM pilot assessment with two volunteering countries; Lebanon and Palestine. An assessment task force was created, consisting of the two volunteering countries, the WEM task force co-chair from Turkey and the NGO Women for Water Partnership. The task force is discussing the structure of the WEM assessment that WWAP secretariat proposed. The ultimate goal of this exercise is to provide a database in order to build actions that increase water related employability and entrepreneurship in the countries while promoting gender equality and youth objectives. The assessment consists of a socio-economic and technical diagnosis to create an information baseline of the current situation of the interconnection between the availability of water and sanitation and the lack of employment or its creation with people displacement in these two countries. The diagnosis will identify challenges and opportunities in terms of water related jobs and education. The assessment will be designed to adopt the SDGs and target approach which is the most effective framework to achieve the agenda 2030 and will be in line with the EGD.

Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

The session's introduction remarks were delivered by the country theme leaders. *Mr. Manuel Sapiano*, CEO, The Energy & Water Agency, Malta, asserted that WASH is tied with SDG6 and their relevance has been highlighted over the last months in the fight of COVID-19 battle. The centrality of WASH in the Mediterranean water sector sheds light on two important aspects looking at the post-COVID scenario: a) how to continue to

increase access to service delivery in view of challenges such as urbanisation and creation of demand hotspots, and b) we need to look at new technologies and generate finance for bankable projects.

At the same time, WASH is also linked with the WEF Nexus thematic priority and financing strategy of the UfM. Therefore, we need to look at solutions for the Mediterranean, fostering green economy and leading to gender empowerment. For the coming Mediterranean Water Forum, which will take place in Malta in November 2020, access to sustainable solutions will be the key feature of the Forum. The Energy and Water Agency in Malta can provide effective solutions and contents to WASH challenges in a comprehensive environment. This context can lead to sustainable solutions under the current context and the UfM Water Agenda.

The second introductory remark was delivered by *Dr. Tahani Sileet*, Head of Central Department for External Cooperation, Nile Water Sector, Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation in Egypt. She initially acknowledged the UfM's effort to arrange the meeting under these circumstances. She underscored that water should be in the heart of any recovery plan set after COVID-19 pandemic. The UfM Water Agenda needs to move forward and make more decisive steps, ensuring readiness to all future circumstances. Egypt has faced the COVID-19 epidemic with curfew and suspension of all activities that involve large number of participants, disinfection campaigns, and providing disinfectants by private sector companies. All senior officials and engineers are working around the clock. Continuous monitoring of drought and other extreme events is taking place in canal networks and water harvesting tanks to make sure that WASH services are delivered effectively. The following tasks have been implemented: isolation from any potential contamination; ensure community supplies achieve minimum residual chlorine to make sure it arrives safely to end users; keep storage tanks clean, maintain safety protection precautions. Dr. Tahani concluded by encouraging support from UfM countries and partners to learn from success stories in the region to fight COVID-19. She extended the Invitation to Cairo Water Week 2020, scheduled to take place on 18-22 October.

The introductory remarks were followed by a brief presentation of updates by the theme's technical facilitators. *Dr. Mustafa Nasereddin*, WASH Advisor, UfM TA/GWP-Med, who presented the objectives, aims, and expected outputs of WASH thematic priority and the process timeline and milestones. *Mr. Hachmi Kennou*, Executive Director, Mediterranean Water Institute (IME) followed next and presented the workplan for the WASH task force with main activities planned for 2nd half of 2020.

The summary of WASH thematic priority next steps:

- Capitalise on the results of the first UfM Annual Conference on Water Investment and Financing (ACWIF) and feed in support for the 2nd ACWIF (virtual vs. physical meeting)
- Follow up on PPP support for WASH initiatives in UfM WEG member countries including the UfM program on national dialogue on sustainable water financing
- Emergency and recovery WASH response programs following to COVID-19 crisis (Brainstorming sessions in collaboration with IME)
- 4th Mediterranean water forum update (IME)/9th World Water Forum
- Revisit WASH task force work plan and update for years 2020-2021

Water and Climate Change Adaptation (WCCA)

At the beginning of the session, *Ms. Siham Laraichi*, WCCA team leader from the Moroccan Ministry of Water, stressed that this priority area is extremely important although it is often placed last when presenting the UfM Water Strategy's priorities, despite Morocco and the whole MENA region facing extreme droughts and water scarcity. She explained that Morocco has benefited from last June's Green Climate Fund (GCF) technical Workshop. Participants' capacities were well developed towards better understanding of Climate Finance procedures and requirement for successful GCF's proposal preparation. She also suggested that the UfM Water Policy Framework for Action along with WCCA TF, map existing member states' National Water Policy frameworks and roadmaps in order to insure synergies with the UfM Water Agenda and the New EGD. In this regard Mr. Laraichi stressed that Morocco has developed a National Water Plan 2020-2025 that includes aspects particularly relevant to the WCCA theme.

The second intervention was from *Ms. Aurelie Guilemont*, Ministry of Ecology, France. Ms. Guilemont took the floor reminding that climate crisis is directly linked to water and climate change has a deep impact on the water cycle along with many other socio-economic threats. Water is part of the solution within the 2030 UN Agenda. She stressed the need to develop nature-based solutions and increase climate capacities at the local level. She explained that France has adopted a new International Strategy for Water and Sanitation. This Strategy allows maintaining the involvement of all. France encourages UfM Member States to deliver on the Climate Paris Agreement, such as desalination and global alliance for water and for adaptation to climate change.

Prof. Khalid Tamsamani, WCCA Advisor, UfM TA/GWP-Med, commenced his presentation by stressing the importance of following-up on last year's GCF meeting, calling to establish a regional partnership as «UfM Partnership for Water Climate Finance and Investments». He stressed the need to establish a UfM Water & Climate Day that could be included as part of the Global UNFCCC Climate Action Agenda. At the same time, Prof. Tamsamani provided the following recommendations:

- Support UfM's member states in their efforts to mainstream ambitious water climate adaptation projects in their Nationally Determined Contribution plans (NDCs) and ensure synergies of WCCA with NDCs, National Adaptation Policies, SDGs and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR).
- Urge Member States to implement National Monitoring and Evaluation Systems for Water Climate Adaptation Interventions (Set of outcomes and processes Indicators).
- Prepare Member States for the 2023 Global Stocktake (P.A. Art. 14) within the framework of the Global Goal on Adaptation (P.A. Art 7)
- Continue Promoting expertise, knowledge and peer to peer exchange among UfM member States related to water Adaptation to CC. WCCA should be in the radar of the foreseen EGD (2020-2021) Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change.

Ms. Anjali Lohani, Program Specialist for Climate and Water Resource Management, GWP, reflected on Prof. Tamsamani's statement the GCF still remains a very strategic source for providing climate finance for resilience of the water sector. On the last replenishment leading to the COP25 in Madrid, the GCF received over 9 Billion USD for the 2020-2024 funding period. Of course, the ambition of the GCF is much greater, to provide over 100 Billion USD/year. GCF still remains a very strategic source. There are windows available for the actual project development, and the bigger window of 100 Million USD for investment implementation. But despite all of the available opportunities, there are various barriers and shortcomings at the country level. To help overcome them, GCF has provided a 1million USD/country/year window to strengthen the institutional capacities and to enable identification of projects, concept note preparation, etc. at country level. Unfortunately, GCF is reporting

that countries are under-utilising these resources. At this stage, UfM and other partners such as GWP question whether Ministries are not sufficiently aware of these opportunities. Or perhaps the counties are not sufficiently connected to the GCF's National Focal point.

New opportunities such as the multiyear readiness funding window was made available by the GCF with possibility of putting a 3 million USD/3 years proposal including a multi country readiness possibility that could take a basin level approach or a WEFE Nexus approach. To overcome these barriers, and under the UfM Water Agenda, the UfM and GWP-Med have joined forces and organised the Brussels GCF Workshop in June 2019 with the support of Sweden where 12 countries and 45 participants discussed 22 project ideas, as a first step in developing GCF concept notes and perhaps full proposals. As a follow-up of that workshop the GWP Global Climate team has been helping a few countries from around the region to access climate finance: Montenegro and Libya to access the 1 Million/country/ year window and also conducting a feasibility study, and Mauritania to develop a concept note for the GCF project preparation facility. Ms. Lohani concluded by mentioning that GWP has just signed a GCF grand agreement for the Zambia National Adaptation Policy Project. So, we are now in the implementation process to support countries' demand for climate financing.

DAY 2 – 10 JUNE 2020

The second part of the workshop took place on June 10, between 09:30-12:35 CET. The day commenced with a recap of the key discussion items of Day 1, provided by Dr. Anthi Brouma, Team Leader, UfM TA/GWP-Med, and continued with a session dedicated to the UfM Financial Strategy for Water. Discussion on the post-Covid 19 era formed the core of the penultimate session, while the final segment of the workshop including a high-level panel reflecting on the way forward and bringing the workshop to a close.

Sustainable Water Financing & Investments in the Mediterranean in the post-COVID era (09:40-10:45)

The objectives of the session were:

- To provide brief updates and discuss planned activities in the implementation of the UfM Financial Strategy for Water
- To discuss activities by financial partners that aim to encourage water financing and investments in the region

Mr. Almotaz Abadi, Managing Director of UfM-Water, delivered a food-for-thought presentation on the topic "How can the UfM Financial Strategy for Water be of relevance for tackling the economic consequences of the COVID-19 crisis?". The UfM Financial Strategy for Water was mandated by UfM ministers in 2017 and endorsed by the UfM Senior Officials' Meeting in December 2018. Its aim is to enhance the financial sustainability of the Mediterranean water sector, so that national and international sector objectives can be achieved. It represents a framework for individual UfM member states to develop their own financial strategies, it consists of a menu of 10 objectives and 48 actions, organised around 3 pillars, and it provides a basis for dialogue with technical and financial partners. While the responsibility for its implementation relies on UfM member states, the UfM Secretariat organises supporting activities.

The COVID-19 crisis is a health crisis followed by an economic crisis. The impacts of the health crisis on the Mediterranean water sector include a likely increase in demand for WASH services and a likely increase in the cost of providing these services. The impacts of the economic crisis will include a likely increase in households' inability to pay for WASH services, a likely decrease of public budgets to subsidise O&M, and a

possible reduction of public budgets for development cooperation in partner countries. The COVID-19 crisis could provide some opportunities for the water sector: higher profile, reductions in costs of technological and organisational innovations, access to investment budgets associated to domestic recovery packages and responses packages of International financial institutions (IFIs), and access to cheaper commercial finance. But this would require the water sector to develop capacities and be reformed.

The UfM Financial Strategy for Water is even more relevant in the COVID-19 context. Accelerated implementation will allow UfM member states to take advantage of the new opportunities. The Financial Strategy process and supporting activities can help coordinate and scale up support by all relevant partners. At the same time UfM activities will need to evolve: refocusing existing activities (programme of national workshop on water financing, annual conference on water investment and financing) on responses to the financial challenges brought out/reinforced by COVID-19, and developing new activities (such as Technical Assistance activities to support the integration of water in national recovery packages).

Mr Arduan Karagozi, Director of Water Resources Management Agency (Albania), highlighted the importance of the UfM work on water financing and described how Albania continues its efforts in these areas.

Mr Roberto Martin-Hurtado, Advisor on Water Economics, UfM TA/GWP-Med, provided an overview of activities organised by the UfM Secretariat to support the implementation of the UfM Financial Strategy for Water and suggested ways forward, including the revitalization of the UfM Task Force on Water Financing, which would meet online once on a quarterly basis.

The *Programme of National Workshops on Water Financing* kicked-off in March 2019 with the Jordan workshop, and continued in October 2019 with the Albania workshop. The workshop reports are available, as well as a document that draws lessons learned from the two initial experiences and suggests ways forward for the further development of the programme, in particular increased flexibility in the design and expected products from the individual workshops.

The first *Annual Conference on Water Investment and Financing* took place on 5th December 2020 in Rome (Italy) in the framework of the Mediterranean Dialogues, with a special focus on public private partnerships. A Conference report is available, as well as a document laying out the approach for the second edition. The second edition will take place over two days, and will feature: a regional peer learning forum focused on the COVID-19 impacts and responses, the launch of the UfM roundtable on finance and water, topical sessions (water sector reforms; water use efficiency and asset management; and internally generated revenues or climate finance), and a high-level session.

The session concluded with a round of interventions from representatives from selected technical partners. *Mr. Andre Oosterman* (European Investment Bank), *Mr. Ayman Ayad* (EU Delegation to Egypt), *Ms. Inmaculada Paniagua* (Spanish Cooperation Agency-AECID), *Mr. Kishan Khoday* (UNDP), *Mr. Frederic Dupont de Dinechin* (World Bank), and *Mr. Xavier Leflaive* (OECD) tackled challenges, responses, and the possible role of the UfM.

The COVID-19 crisis is already impacting the financial sustainability of the water sector. The COVID-19 crisis has caused an increase in expenses in the water sector (e.g. chemicals, monitoring of wastewater streams). The COVID-19 crisis has caused, or will cause, a reduction in revenues from water users, from domestic public budgets, and from development cooperation budgets (as health becomes a priority sector). This generates a number of challenges in the short term (insufficient working capital), medium term (reduced capital

investments) and long term (derailment of tariff reform roadmaps). A further consequence is the reluctance of the private sector to finance the water sector.

There is a renewed need for national financial strategies. The COVID-19 crisis will generate opportunities for investments in resilient infrastructure if the profile of water issues is raised, which is happening with WASH but less with water resources management. Money is available but the challenge is how to channel it: harnessing domestic commercial finance, increasing the effectiveness of spending programmes, and increasing the efficiency of asset operation.

Partners have already started to develop responses to support UfM member states. Financial partners are updating their strategies and increasing flexibility (allowing loans to cover O&M costs, relaxing loan limits, extending deadlines for completion of investment projects). Several partners are in the process of completing or planning to launch relevant analytical work to support UfM member states deal with the financial impacts of the COVID-19 crisis in the Mediterranean water sector.

There are benefits to adopting a regional approach, engaging relevant partners. The UfM could play a role in: (a) tracking new support measures introduced by different development partners, (b) helping to identify synergies for support programmes and facilities, (c) facilitating cross-learning and capacity development, and (d) identifying financial needs (categorising and quantifying financial gaps).

Looking ahead in the post-COVID 19 era for water and the environment in the Mediterranean (11:00-12:00)

One of the main objectives of this consultation was to discuss and agree on regional priority actions that can complement individual country efforts, supported by and eventually align with the EGD as a roadmap for sustainable and resilient post-COVID recovery. In this regard, the session was held with the aim of sharing ideas and planned activities on water and environment with a post-COVID-19 outlook. This session contributed to fostering synergies of the UfM Water Agenda with ongoing work at the European Commission such as the new EGD, through the identification of areas for collaboration and potential complementarity of work.

A rich panel of speakers made relevant and constructive interventions leading to the identification of areas of win-win collaboration in the difficult post COVID-19 time. Below is a summary of the main messages conveyed.

Mr. Stefano Dotto, Head of Sector, Climate Change, Energy, Environment, Transport, DG NEAR, European Commission, tackled the topic related to supporting the European Union's neighbouring partners. The main messages from Mr. Dotto's presentation included:

- EU is preparing for a very ambitious recovery plan, but the final amount is not yet known
- Most of the funding will be for humanitarian action along with helping countries achieve their NDC's targets
- The areas of Climate action are a priority for the EU plan
- EU will foster "Cross Fertilisation" projects
- Fundamentals of Water issues are still being addressed by the EU. There will be no change in the strategy (Green economy and strengthening efficient use of water in urban areas are one of the topics to be supported. Seven water related projects are under contract mode in areas including Agriculture and IWRM).

Dr. Nuria Hernandez-Mora, Technical Assistance to DG Environment, European Commission, addressed the European Green Deal and the potential synergies with the UfM Water Agenda. In her presentation, Dr. Hernandez-Mora stressed that the EGD is a growth strategy developed to address the challenges of Climate Change and environmental degradation and has been placed at the centre of the strategy to overcome COVID-19 economic pandemic. It has three overarching goals: make Europe a climate neutral continent by 2050, decouple economic growth from resource use, and make sure that the necessary transition is a just one and no person and no place is left behind. The EGD acknowledges that these challenges are interconnected and therefore it needs to work across all policy areas: technologies, industry, agriculture and food sectors, transportation, energy, urban areas and working with international partners to challenges that are global.

Dr. Hernández-Mora highlighted possible synergies between the EGD and the UfM Water Agenda. Both policy documents acknowledge that actions and goals in both agendas are synergetic across all policy sectors. While water is a transversal issue on the EGD, Dr. Hernández-Mora focused her presentation on three policy areas that may be of particular interest to the UfM thematic priorities:

- The circular economy action plan that seeks to promote water reuse and efficiency, with an integrated approach that takes into account water demand management, water use efficiency, and energy, costs, and environmental implications. She mentioned the approval in 2019 of the EU regulation on water reuse.
- The biodiversity strategy that highlights the need to protect and restore natural ecosystems, something particularly necessary to guarantee access to clean water.
- Greening the EU's agricultural policy and the Food to Farm Strategy, that recognizes the need to reduce food production's impact on soil water and air pollution.

She finished her presentation by raising the following questions for participants:

- What aspects of the GD are of the more interest to UfM members?
- Which are areas of interest and synergies between EGD and Water Agenda? is there appetite for further work?
- Where are priorities to work and how can they be integrated in the thematic areas?

The UfM TA Team Leader, *Dr. Anthi Brouma* reminded participants about the importance of the SDGs and the need for countries to be actively involved in the implementation of related activities and, importantly, in the monitoring of progress made. She also stressed the added value of the regional approach. Thus, it would be useful having a dedicated online meeting on this issue across the Mediterranean, with more time and space for reflections on both the current status and the proposed lines of activity. The meeting can also capitalise and build on the ongoing work led by UNEP on monitoring target 6.5.1 (on IWRM), where the Global Water Partnership (GWP) is providing support globally to 60 countries for the reporting process to the target. Finally, Dr. Brouma referred to the value of tackling the progress made within the Monitoring and Reporting framework in conjunction with responses to COVID-19 in relation with the overall national SDG6 interventions.

Professor Michael Scoulllos, Team Leader, Water and Environment Support Regional Programme (WES), made a presentation on the response of WES in the post-COVID 19 era. At the beginning Prof. Scoulllos said that we should use this pandemic as a wake up-call to start putting measures for no regret actions. He reminded that WES capitalises on previous successful EU funded regional projects (Horizon2020 CB/MEP; SWIM SM; SWIM-

Horizon 2020 SM) and strives to create the enabling environment and increase the capacities of stakeholders in the Partner Countries through three inter-related dimensions:

- Capacity Building, by using a blended approach of National and Regional Trainings, Study tours, Peer-to Peer experience sharing, Webinars virtually addressing all the aforementioned issues;
- Technical Assistance at National and/or Regional Context;
- Enhancement of enabling conditions.

Some of the key messages in Prof. Scoullos' presentation include:

- The need to exchange successful practices, sharing experiences, identifying new and innovative methodologies and developing regional and sub-regional networks;
- Effective communication and dialogue on issues of mutual interest,
- Exchange best practices, explore opportunities to potentially replicate/up-scale specific projects;
- Promote environmental governance
- Networking, women's empowerment, Youth Consultation meetings of Civil Society, MPs and Local Authorities

Mr. Alain Meyssonier, President, Mediterranean Water Institute (IME), referred to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on drinking water and sanitation and the day after. During his intervention, Mr. Meyssonier recalled the series of three on-line meeting organised by IME in partnership with the UfM during April 2020 and mentioned some effects of COVID-19 on water resources. In this regard, he suggested to continue exploring the possibility to create a non-conventional water observatory within the Mediterranean Region. He also stressed the fact that this pandemic is giving us a great opportunity to re-examine our National and Regional Water policies.

Mr. Meyssonier concluded with the following key messages:

- Water and wastewater infrastructures have been identified as essential services during this crisis;
- There is a need for new mechanisms to manage non-conventional waters;
- There is a need to share good practices between operators and policy makers;
- A Water/Energy/Earth/Food alliance should be strengthened by UfM and IME.

The brief facilitated discussion that followed stressed the large number of potential synergies between the SDGs and the EGD. To a question by Michela Miletto, Coordinator, UNESCO WWAP, on whether social and human right aspects have been taken into account in the EGD, it was clarified that they have been indeed considered, including in process of projects' elaboration. The importance of involving women and farmers' groups during the development of projects and not only in the consultation phase, was raised by Lesha Witmer, Advocacy Leader, Women for Water Partnership, who also asked for ideas and thoughts on a research they are working on with FAO on the participation of women in water scarcity projects that will be completed at the end of June. Finally, Mr Enrico Molinaro, Secretary General (RIDE-APS)/Head of the Italian Network Anna Lindh (ALF), stressed the importance of transboundary water issued and the effect of COVID-19 and the value of considering the NEXUS approach for dealing with the pandemic, encouraged support to the ECOMED project launched at UNESCO last year and the involvement in the upcoming Conference on Digital Water (December 2020) which will discuss, among other topics, a platform for data exchange among countries.

The session concluded with a statement on the need for regional cooperation and a regional response in order to deal with the serious impacts of COVID-19 on Water.

High-level segment (12:00-12:30)

The online consultation workshop was brought to an end with a high-level segment on the way forward. The session was moderated by *Mr. Isidro Gonzalez Afonso*, Deputy Secretary General, WEFE, UfMS, who stressed that the sessions have been dense but productive.

HE Fadi Comair, Chair, UNESCO IHP/ Director General, Hydraulic and Electrical Resources, Ministry of Energy and Water, Lebanon, stressed the value of the online workshop and the importance of this initiative for providing a valuable exchange platform among political and water leaders on the response to COVID-19 crisis and the role of WEFE Nexus in particular on national and transboundary waters. Dr. Comair reminded that most countries in the region already face major water security and water demand management challenges. The pandemic has made the situation even more critical, as social, health and economic pressures are strongly present in the countries. Under his capacity as Chair of UNESCO IHP, he stressed options for steps on Nexus security in the MENA region, fostering collective action and innovation. The MENA region particularly is in dire need of regional cooperation in order to deal with the cascading effects of COVID-19, affecting the WEFE Nexus implementation and considering that two thirds of the waters in the region come from outside of the region. This issue, in combination with the water quality problem, which is also affected by the pandemic, will affect the agreement between nations on transboundary water and the implementation of article 7 of the UN Convention. This is a major issue and finding solutions is a priority. He urged water leaders to take part in the drafting of Strategy No. 9 of UNESCO, targeting the 2021-2029 and in the next IHP Inter-government Council, in order to centre the discussions on those two major problems: transboundary issue and the effect of COVID on the pollution (generating significant harm on downstream countries) and the nexus by limiting the security of water, energy and food. Finally, Dr. Comair urged support for the EcoMed project, launched in UNESCO in 2015. It can assist with pollution monitoring on transboundary waters through control platforms and early warning systems. Dr. Comair closed his intervention with an invitation to the Conference on Digital Waters in December 2020 that will discuss ways to share database platforms and facilitate water cooperation among riparian countries. The COVID-19 was not only a negative, it allowed countries to develop adaption plans and brought water to the forefront more prominently, including through the search for financing options.

Dr. Ragab Abdel Azim, First Undersecretary, Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation, Egypt, stressed that reaching SDG 6.5.1 and 6.5.2 is now more important than ever. Embracing digital transformation and reducing the digital divide is also an important factor in improving water management under these challenging circumstances. In the global crisis, Egypt has taken steps to deal with the pandemic, including curfew and suspension of all activities, protection measures in all workplaces. The government accelerated the digital transformation by upgrading infrastructure and improve employee capacity to use digital technology. Online training and virtual meetings are part of the management process. There is a strong belief in information-based water management is as important as physical interventions and constructions. Two national programmes have been launched recently: the transformation to modern irrigation systems and rehabilitation of canal systems and water structures. They contribute to improve water distribution among water users in terms of quantity and quality. Besides the COVID-19 challengers, Egypt continues being threatened by challenges related to water security. Climate change is also of concern to national strategies. The GCF grant project is implemented to safeguard the coastal zone and delta. An integrated coastal zone study is one of the components of the GCF and will be a strategic goal for addressing climate change challenges. More challenges are expected considering the Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam and its impacts on Egypt's water availability. Dr. Abdel Azim concluded by affirming that the COVID-19 can be an opportunity to change the way we manage water. He urged to draw motivation and inspiration from our collective

experience; through solidarity, mutual support and shared effort we can unite and get through these challenges.

HE Michael Farrugia, Minister, Ministry for Energy and Water Management, Malta, praised the UfM for hosting this meeting in an important period for the water sector and which defines the recovery of the region from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. He thanked the people that have been working relentlessly to support the frontrunners in the fight against COVID-19, including the water and energy sectors. The UfM Water Agenda aims at the development of a regional water policy framework that can entice positive impact on the livelihoods of the people. He expressed pride in the process built on the Ministerial Declaration signed in Valetta in April 2017 and reiterated the Maltese Government's support to the UfM for the continued development of this water policy framework. The Water Agenda is an important tool, identifying the strengths of each country and seeking to improve preparedness and information and knowledge sharing. The Mediterranean region shares common challenges and it is only through collaboration that we can develop more effective shared solutions to address these multi-faceted challenges of societal, environmental and economic nature. This collaboration is also key to ensure that the water sector plays a key role in the development of the region's green economy and ensures the sustainable development of the region. Key linkages on Nexus, as identified in the Water Agenda, are important to place water as part of this comprehensive solution. Improving youth employment, reducing the need for migration, addressing the gender divide, contributing to climate change adaptation and mitigation, improving economic standing – regional cooperation is key if these solutions are to be effectively achieved. The Water Agenda has an important outward-looking component, providing the opportunity to present the Mediterranean region as a hub of water management solutions, sharing experience, knowledge and technologies, supporting other regions facing similar challenges. Education is also key aspect to ensure the long-term sustainability of the water agenda, especially in sensitising citizens on better managing water. HE concluded by announcing the Mediterranean Water Forum and expressed the hope that the travel channels will be open so that the meeting can take place physically in Malta.

HE Nasser Kamel, Secretary General, UfM Secretariat (UfMS), thanked the workshop participants and stressed that the workshop has showcased the commitment of governments, the donor community, regional organisations and all stakeholders of the water sector. The two days were important for discussing what needs to be done, the challenges ahead and the new variable of COVID-19 and its impact on WASH, quality and quantity of water. He highlighted the need for a regional approach to existing challenges, regional coordination, response and initiative and the support of the donor and development partners. The current crisis has proven the need to work together, make sure that water governance structure is up-to-date and functioning. It has also exposed challenges existing prior to the pandemic. He concluded by praising the high level of participation in the workshop, keeping to 80 or 90 participants at any time of the meeting, demonstrating both the interest and the commitment of all.

In terms of next steps, the joint meeting of the WEM and WEF Task Forces was announced to take place in July 2020. Also, a webinar on practical technical solutions on the Nexus will also take place before the end of July, while the consultation on the SDGs is planned for early autumn. More meetings and events, including the Mediterranean Water Forum, the Cairo Water Week, UNESCO IHP Conference on Digital Waters, the 2nd UfM ACWIF, mentioned during the workshop are expected to take place under the current circumstances.

The meeting concluded with a group photo.