Position paper
on the occasion of the Mediterranean Session
to be held at the
5th World Water Forum
Istanbul, 16-22 March 2009

Freshwater Issues in the Mediterranean - Mediterranean Regional Process

In December 2008, in Jordan, at the Civil Society meeting held on the day before the Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on Water (December 22nd), Mediterranean regional NGOs had the opportunity to voice their views and concerns on freshwater issues in the Mediterranean as well as on the process of development of the Mediterranean Strategy for Water, which was officially launched at the Ministerial Conference.

To follow up on these recent events, the Comité de Suivi (CdS), representing hundreds of environmental NGOs in the Mediterranean, would like herewith to reiterate some key points of the Civil Society Statement that was adopted in Jordan on the 21st of December 2008:

1. Greater policy coherence with regard to water is needed in the region. This could be achieved through the mainstreaming of all current and up-coming water-related initiatives such as the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), Horizon 2020, the Mediterranean Water Strategy and projects under the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), the EU Water Initiative – Mediterranean Component, etc. and other relevant processes and policies (i.e. Euro-Med Free Trade Agreement);

2. Civil society participation, involvement and empowerment in the whole spectrum of regional and national water management processes is essential. Participation of civil society representatives in the Water Experts Group in charge of developing the Mediterranean Strategy for Water is of particular importance, as is the establishment and maintenance of a robust tripartite dialogue between civil society, governments and the regional and international financial institutions (e.g. EIB, WB);

3. Governments of the region must promote sustainable use and demand side management based on IWRM and IRBM principles and by employing a mix of regulatory, financial and policy measures that reflect the degree of water scarcity in the region;

4. A new “water culture” in the Mediterranean needs to be encouraged, notably through education for sustainable development, capacity building and awareness raising activities;

5. The Mediterranean Strategy for Water should make clear reference to the “ecosystem approach”, in line with several regional and international efforts (CBD, UNEP-MAP, MSSD, EU policies, etc.) and recognize the role of ecosystem services;

6. Regional cooperation with regard to transboundary water resources should be enhanced through the application of international law and mechanisms such as the UN Watercourses Convention. Transparency and accountability in water management overall could also be facilitated in this way.

Furthermore, while acknowledging that further infrastructure may well be needed in order to support provision of water for basic needs and socio-economic development, the CdS on the occasion of the Mediterranean Session at the 5th WWF, calls upon the governments of the Euro-Mediterranean countries to:

1. base the projects developed under the UfM on the Mediterranean Strategy for Water;

2. enhance good governance and transparency in the selection process – including definition of criteria, evaluation processes, etc. – of the water-related projects to be funded/promoted under the UfM and its Secretariat in Barcelona;

3. only select those infrastructure projects that are really needed, for which no alternative solutions exist and are cost-efficient (notably by conducting options assessments, SEAs, etc.), while using internationally recognized sustainability standards (i.e. EIAs, certification schemes) and encouraging “soft” or “natural/green” infrastructure projects (e.g. constructed/rehabilitated wetlands for pollution mitigation, flood plain restoration);

4. ensure civil society participation in the decision-making processes related to the above-mentioned projects - especially of the stakeholders directly affected by their implementation and benefit-sharing - in line with the requirements of related international and regional initiatives (i.e. Aarhus Convention, EU policies, Equator Principles).