

Making Water Governance Effective in the Mediterranean “The role of Parliamentarians”

Mediterranean Regional Dialogue of Parliamentarians, NGOs and other stakeholders on the protection of the Mediterranean environment and prospects for the sustainable development of the region

12-13 December 2002
Divani Caravel Hotel
Athens, Greece

SYNTHESIS REPORT

Preamble

This is not an exhaustive report of the eight general introductory addresses and remarks, nor is it a summary of the presentations by the MP's of ten different Mediterranean countries. Most of these texts are available upon request at the secretariat of the MIO-ECSDE.

It is also not including the stimulating thoughts from the panel discussions and the vivid, constructive contributions from a very active audience of parliamentarians, journalists and NGO representatives.

It is a "synthesis" in the true meaning of the word, i.e. focusing on the quintessence of the debates, conclusions and recommendations with a view of meeting the aims put forward by the organizers:

- (i) coming up with concrete proposals on the most appropriate mechanisms for the effective involvement of Parliamentarians and other stakeholders in efficient water governance*
- (ii) identifying other priority areas apart from water, where similar dialogues should take place*
- (iii) facilitating the formation of a Caucus/Network of Parliamentarians to assist in promoting priority issues for the protection of the environment and sustainable development in the Mediterranean.*

1. Setting the Background Scene

- The very fact that Parliamentarians from a dozen of national parliaments from the Mediterranean Region were participating at the Athens workshop is, in itself, a significant and strong signal.
- In spite of the variety in presentations and the differences in style and contents, there was obvious common ground for tackling the issue of water governance as a priority.
- The need for regular, organised and effective regional dialogue through a network of networks was strongly stressed by all participants.
- Beyond the national, political, ethnical, cultural, linguistic and religious differences between the countries represented at the workshop there was a very strong Mediterranean consciousness, a kind of common "identity" of "*Mare Nostrum*". It was felt that the EU is currently moving more eastwards than to the south. Therefore in the Mediterranean region, while promoting and strengthening its cooperation to the North and the EU in particular (in view also of the Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area foreseen for 2010), ties should be strengthened between the countries around the sea which unites them.
- Although there were many questions on the practicalities of the proposed "Circle" and some divergences in views on how to proceed, there was no doubt about the consensus to set up such a forum.
- All participants recognized the fundamental role of NGO's. Networking with them was also put as a "*conditio sine qua non*" for materializing the proposed "Circle of Parliamentarians". To a large extent the NGO's are already involved through MIO-ECSDE. Furthermore in the issue of water, GWP-Med brings together all existing major Mediterranean networks of various stakeholders.
Several Parliamentarians requested MIO-ECSDE Secretariat to facilitate the new "Circle".
- Several participants still questioned, at the end of the day, the precise objectives, in spite of repeated clarification on the aim of the proposals outlined by chairman Michael Scoullas:
 - creating effective synergies between Parliamentarians and other stakeholders in the water issue of the Mediterranean region;

- defending and promoting the values and principles of democracy and the goals of sustainable development by fostering the interaction between elected representatives of the people and the organized “civil society”;
 - involving EU Mediterranean Member States to play a more active role in the region and henceforth contributing to peace, a prerequisite for sustainable development;
 - becoming a model for other regions in the world.
- There was definitely a demand for better information sources and data to MP’s. Also for more and better communication between MP’s, NGO’s and media, access national borders.
 - The “Circle” should not be an additional organization, but an open, flexible and very light structure. A couple of participants suggested to creating a formal association. Others did not specify. Most felt that it is too early to decide. A stepwise, pragmatic approach was adopted as the best way forward.
 - While water governance clearly appeared to be THE priority issue to be used as a “vehicle” for further action, there was a willingness to expand the scope to other issues related to sustainable development at a later stage.

2. The Four Key Questions.

Participants had been asked to discuss four key questions. The gist of their answers, taken globally, is presented hereunder.

1. Do you believe that water issues are of major importance for the Mediterranean region? Which are the themes/fields that you would see more important?

YES. Water issues are of major importance for the Mediterranean region and water governance is THE priority issue. Access to water is a fundamental right for all human beings. Water is a source of and reason for conflicts and war. Water is a major political issue.

Other related issues (i.e. waste, pesticides, soil depletion...) were mentioned, but none was quoted as being more important.

2. a. Do you believe that environmental issues receive enough attention in the Parliaments of Mediterranean countries? Is water high enough on the national agendas?

Environmental issues, including water, are present on the agenda of all Parliaments in the Mediterranean countries. However, the role of Parliamentarians is in general rather marginal. It can be very effective when initiating and controlling water management, but it is almost never decisive. There is a gap between Parliaments' positions and government actions. Despite very recent progress in this field water is not yet high enough on the political agendas of most countries in the world, in spite of alarming facts and figures (climate changes: droughts, floods; impact of human intervention: river diversion, road asphalt and concrete preventing absorption of rainwater in soil, extensive pumping for agriculture, pollution, etc.; fears for armed conflicts about control of water resources...)

b. Are the budgets devoted to sustainable development and, in particular, to water issues enough to reach targets? If not, what should be done to secure adequate support and continuity in funding?

The overall indirect response based on few interventions was negative, "not enough". However this question was not addressed as such. Quite obviously it should be considered and discussed in depth by the proposed "Circle of Parliamentarians".

3. Do you believe that (a) a "Circle" of concerned Parliamentarians and politicians (national and from the European Parliament) and (b) a "circle" of concerned journalists will assist in progressing the regional agenda on sustainable development, with emphasis on water issues? If yes, what should be their status and minimum operational provisions?

(a) YES, there definitely should be such a "Circle of concerned Parliamentarians". Basically the members of this "Circle" should be elected people from Mediterranean countries, either member of national parliaments and of the European Parliament. Other politicians should not be excluded, especially if they are former MP's.

The Circle should be purely Mediterranean (not E.U. or Euro-Med, not North-African or Arab...)

(b) Exchange of information, education and cross-fertilisation with the media is a must. Therefore a network or "circle" of journalists from the Mediterranean region, specifically interested in water issues would be most helpful. Status and operational provisions should be further discussed and developed, with the support of MIO-ECSDE and GWP-Med

4. *In parallel with water, what other priority sustainable development subjects could be tackled by such "Circles" of Parliamentarians and Journalists (e.g. waste, soil erosion)?*

The "Circles" should indeed tackle other subjects related to sustainable development, of which water governance is only one aspect. Some subjects were evoked but none identified as priorities at this stage. It was felt that an action programme needs to be drafted.

3. Summing Up: Some Major Conclusions by the Chair

- GWP and MIO-ECSDE want to organize the Mediterranean regional dialogue through a network of networks, supported by a Circle of concerned Parliamentarians and one of journalists.
- Water governance is taken as a start. It's a test case. We can expand later on other issues.
- This is not an additional organization. It will be a very light and humble structure, starting on a realistic basis. Not an institution, but a forum for exchange of views through more regular dialogue, having as main characteristics: Mediterranean, open, concerned about democratic decision-making processes and obviously water and sustainable development.
- We are not asking everyone to be there, but seek to be representative. It is not the role of civil society to impose but to propose action. We must help MP's and parliamentary groups and individual MP's to get in contact with NGOs and other stakeholders on these issues as well as access to the reliable information on water. The Circle is not a substitute to existing organizations, such as GLOBE (Global Legislators for a Better Environment). Exchanges and collaboration will be sought.

4. The Way Forward.

1. The Mediterranean Workshop of Parliamentarians is giving a mandate to GWP-Med and MIO-ECSDE
 - to ensure to follow-up of their meeting on 12 and 13 December 2002 in Athens,

- to set up effective communication channels and exchange information with all concerned and interested parties and people.
2. A “Core group” of MP’s who attended the Workshop¹ is being set up with the following assignment:
- To draft a first “Commitment” including better definition of the objectives, to be signed by all Parliamentarians of the Workshop who are considered the Founding members of the Circle together with all those who wish to sign it.
 - expanding the network among other MP’s from Mediterranean countries (National Parliaments and EU Parliament);
 - working out options for the structure, the action programme and the working practicalities of the “Circle of Concerned Mediterranean Parliamentarians”.
3. Within the near future another workshop will be organised as a plenary meeting of all interested MP’s:
- to hear the reports from the Core group and from the secretariat (GWP and MIO-ECSDE),
 - to evaluate and discuss the submitted options,
 - to take decisions on the form and structure of the “Circle”, its objectives, its action programme and its working methods.

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Report by Mark Dubrulle, President, European Society for Environment & Development (ESED)

¹ Prof. Dr.Hoda Rezkanna (Egypt), Mrs. Gonul Saray (Turkey) and Mr. Juan Carlos Ruiz López (Spain)