

Ministerial Declaration
of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) Water Ministers on the UFM Water Agenda
(03 April 2017)

The Ministers of the Union for the Mediterranean members in charge of Water and other Heads of Delegation, meeting in Malta on the 27th of April 2017 under the Union for the Mediterranean Co-Presidency of H.E. Hazim El-Naser, Minister for Water and Irrigation, for the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and of H.E Karmenu Vella, Commissioner in charge of Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, for the European Union, in the presence of H.E. Fathallah Sijilmassi, Secretary General of the Union for the Mediterranean, call for a Union for the Mediterranean Water Agenda to enhance regional cooperation towards sustainable and integrated water management in the UfM region.

Recalling the outcomes of:

- The Earth Summit (Rio de Janeiro, 1992);
- The World Summits for Sustainable Development (Johannesburg, 2002);
- The Rio+20 Summit (Johannesburg, 2012);
- The UN Summit on Sustainable Development (New York, 2015) as well as the 2030 Agenda-Sustainable Development Goals;
- The Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on Water (Algiers, 1990);
- The Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on Water (Rome, 1992);
- The Euro-Mediterranean Summit (Barcelona, 1995);
- The Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on Local Water Management (Turin, 1999);
- The Conferences of the Parties to the Barcelona Convention;
- The Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on Environment (Cairo, 2006) as well as the launching of the Horizon 2020 Initiative to De-Pollute the Mediterranean;
- The Joint Declaration of the Summit for the Mediterranean establishing the UfM (Paris, July 2008); and the Marseille Declaration (November 2008);
- The UfM Ministerial Conferences on Water;
- The UfM Ministerial Conferences on Environment and Climate Change, and on Blue Economy, as well as the UfM/EuroMed Ministerial Conferences on Employment and Labour; Trade; Women; Urban Development; Transport; Energy; Industrial Cooperation; Digital Economy; and Regional Cooperation and Planning;
- The UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/64/292 on Water as a Basic Human Right (28 July, 2010), and A/RES/70/169 on The Human Rights to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation (17 December, 2015);
- The Declaration and Mediterranean Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development and its follow up.

Conscious that:

- Access to safe drinking water and sanitation is a fundamental human right, key to sustainable social and economic development and has a crucial role in human health.
- Being a limited natural resource, water requires policies and regulations to ensure availability, quality and sustainable management.
- The sustainable access to, provision and use of water, and related sanitation arrangements, are key challenges toward sound socio-economic development and environmental protection in the Mediterranean.
- The impact of climate change exacerbates pressures on existing water resources, in particular in the Mediterranean region.
- Securing availability, quality and coordinated and sustainable integrated management of water resources requires mobilization of appropriate and sustainable investments and financing.

Acknowledging that:

- The Mediterranean region has unique geographical, ecological, geopolitical and cultural features.
- In a rapidly changing world, the region is challenged by natural and man-made conditions including water scarcity, demographic change, unemployment, poverty, changing consumption patterns, urbanization, rising water and food demands, growing energy needs, environmental degradation, climate change, water-related natural disasters and gender disparities. These challenges have significant implications for water availability and quality, for the provision of ecosystems services, affecting as well the living conditions of current and future generations and affecting migratory flows.
- The Mediterranean region faces varying water-related stresses and challenges and is among the world's most water-scarce, particularly in its southern and eastern countries, though there are also a growing number of areas in the northern countries that are also increasingly vulnerable.
- Extreme climatic events like floods are on the increase, while droughts have become more frequent and persistent, often leading to severe land degradation and desertification.
- Regional socio-economic trends and environmental impacts are interlinked with water inadequacy, which can contribute to social and political instability.
- In the Mediterranean region, water, energy, food and agriculture and ecosystems issues are inextricably linked and regional cooperation should reflect a sustainable use of water resources.
- The mounting impact of extreme natural events and human-made activities on water resources further require appropriate approaches, including through effective governance, Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) approaches, approximation of policies,

research, innovation and technology transfer and infrastructure development taking into account the nature-based solutions offered by natural ecosystems.

Reaffirming:

- Our commitment to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which provides, through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a framework for action towards sustainability, including on water and inter-linked sectors.
- That the Marrakesh partnership for global climate action provides a concrete framework and powerful willingness for global commitment of governments and non-governmental actors to accelerate and intensify urgent actions and improve access to finance to face the adverse impacts of climate change on water taking into account the international agenda of water and climate.

Aware that:

- The Paris Agreement (2015) provides a framework for developing Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) taking into consideration water as one of the sectors in which climate change adaptation and mitigation measures are essential and must be taken in a timely manner.
- The major role that the agenda 2030, the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement now occupy in the global agenda shape a broad development vision with a coherent approach to addressing the interconnections and cross-cutting elements across the Sustainable Development Goals.

Aware as well of:

- The Series of UNFCCC COPs, including COP 21 (Paris, 2015) with the Paris Agreement and the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), and COP 22 (Marrakesh, 2016) with the outcomes of the water action day organized under the auspices of the UN;
- The importance of supporting comprehensive plans and projects in UfM countries which are suffering from water scarcity, which in some cases is exacerbated, inter alia, by refugee and migrant influxes as well as other emerging factors, in order to meet basic water needs, such as large water infrastructure projects of national and regional interest.

Noting:

- The United Nations Secretary-Generals' Advisory Board on Water & Sanitation (UNSGAB) Recommendations (18 Nov 2015)

Reaffirming also:

- That regional cooperation adds distinctive value and complements the national efforts, by, whenever appropriate, facilitating and supporting experience sharing; promotion of common approaches after adaptation to local needs; joint pilot projects; valorization of existing, including traditional, knowledge; innovative practices including through knowledge and technology transfer; and enhances the investment opportunities and access to sustainable financing.

Stressing:

- The importance of a number of International and regional institutions and policy frameworks which may provide relevant platforms for collaboration in sustainable water management in the UfM region.

Welcoming:

- The engagement by a large number of donors and international financing institutions that provide substantial support for materializing the water agenda of the Mediterranean countries and for promoting regional cooperation on water-related issues.
- The contribution of a range of regional, sub-regional and national water-related stakeholders and other partnerships, as appropriate, from the UfM region towards sustainable water management.

Recognizing:

- The sub regional initiatives, including the Water strategy in the Western Mediterranean of the 5+5 Dialogue, as well as the launch of its associated Action Plan, which provides an example of sub-regional cooperation among countries of the Western Mediterranean in addressing common challenges in the water sector.
- The contribution that the Arab Ministerial Council on Water has made to the water strategy for the Arab countries.

Strategic Guidance for a Water Agenda of the Union for the Mediterranean

We, the Ministers, aim to support the Water Agenda of the Union for the Mediterranean leading to a consensual regional water policy framework that offers a means for substantial and measurable positive impacts towards achieving sustainable livelihood; convinced as well that this Agenda will mainstream efforts towards meeting the Sustainable Development Goals and Targets, in particular SDG 6 on Water, and may contribute to prosperity, stability and peace in the region.

We reaffirm our willingness to undertake the necessary efforts so that the UfM Water Agenda can assist in promoting sustainable economic and social development and have significant employment benefits; help in tackling climate change impacts and increasing climate and disaster-resilience; in meeting environmental and water quality objectives; in tackling migration challenges, amongst and inside countries and in ensuring access to safe drinking water as a fundamental human right, particularly for the most vulnerable, as we continue to promote gender mainstreaming, focus on youth, transparency and improved accountability in the water sector.

The UfM Water Agenda will be accompanied by a financial strategy designed to support its implementation and prepared by UfM members, in consultation with financial actors and the private sector as well as relevant regional stakeholders.

We aim as well to engage in new operational and innovative partnerships, including with the private sector, in order to promote the implementation of this UfM Water Agenda.

The UfM Water Agenda will provide a suite of recommendations, proposals and initiatives helping UfM members to achieve the coordinated and sustainable application of Integrated Water Resources Management approaches in a comprehensive manner, and with the participation of stakeholders.

Good water governance including water demand and supply planning, access to safe drinking water and sanitation, pollution prevention and de-pollution, protection and sustainable use of surface and groundwater resources, conventional and non-conventional resources, transboundary cooperation, sustainable financing, investments and operational partnerships with the private sector, reliable data and information, research and innovation and technology transfer, education and awareness as well as capacity building, at appropriate levels are key tools for achieving our regional objective.

We anticipate that the UfM Water Agenda and its work programme will be elaborated by the Water Expert Group (WEG) through the procedures agreed in this declaration and on the basis of prior work undertaken by the WEG in 2015 and 2016 and in preparation of this ministerial declaration.

We anticipate that the UfM Water Agenda process will substantially enable the implementation of a range of key regional policies including:

- Enabling the development of the circular economy and of green growth
- Meeting the obligations of Parties to the Barcelona Convention and other Multilateral Environmental Agreements to which UfM members are the Parties, as well as the objectives of the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development

The implementation would require the contribution of regional institutions and stakeholders of the UfM region and their involvement where appropriate.

The mechanism to operationalize the strategic guidance for a Water Agenda of the Union for the Mediterranean

We call the Water Expert Group (WEG)¹, in consultation with regional institutions, donors and non-governmental actors of the UfM region to elaborate and implement the UfM Water Agenda. The UfM Water Agenda to be approved by the UfM Senior Officials consist of a set of proposals and recommendations, accompanied by a timeline and expected deliverables together with the financial strategy to address resource and finance needs.

We mandate the UfM Water Expert Group (WEG) to undertake this work, under the guidance of the Senior Officials, through the implementation of the UfM Water Agenda, WEG will exchange information and provide technical recommendations, proposals and initiatives on water-related plans, programmes and projects in accordance with regional interest, aligned with countries' water policy priorities.

The WEG should undertake this work through a medium/long term WEG Work Programme and biannual work plans, starting from 2018-2019. The work programme will include the Financial Strategy mentioned above. These documents should be completed by end 2017.

Ministers agree as well that adequate political and technical input from relevant Ministries should be ensured by having the UfM Water Expert Group (WEG) comprised of high level representatives. The

¹ The Water Expert Group (WEG) was created by the 2008 Water Ministerial Conference (Dead Sea, Jordan)

WEG should in principle have at least two meetings per year and be provided with sufficient resources for its functioning.

The Water Expert Group (WEG) of the UfM will work according to the rules and procedures of the UfM working mechanisms. Facilitation of the UfM Water Agenda process shall be the responsibility of the UfM Co-Presidency and it will be technically coordinated and supported by the UfM Secretariat. Coordinated contributions by thematic partners, regional institutions, stakeholder organisations, and the donor community are highly encouraged and invited.

Finally, we, Ministers,

Recognise the work done by GWP-Med and the SWIM/H2020 EU regional project for the technical expertise provided to the Water Expert Group in view of the preparation of this Ministerial Meeting.

Agree to reconvene, in principle, in two years to review progress on the development of the UfM Water Agenda.

Express our deep gratitude to the Government of Malta for its warm hospitality and to the UfM Secretariat for helping to convene this meeting.