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EMWIS Towards a common water information and knowledge hub in the Mediterranean

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The democratic impulse instilled by the Arab Spring in the Mediterranean region is accompanied by a strong need for access to information so that citizens can fully participate in the socioeconomic development of their country.

In the water sector, this "thirst" for information had already been identified by the civil society during the Ministerial Conference on Water at the Dead Sea in December 2008.

The Ministers had also included in their declaration the need for reliable and harmonized data on water resources and their uses, organized in information systems at the national level.

Indeed, the establishment of National Water Information Systems is a prerequisite to the development of sustainable policies for managing water resources.

The strengthening of information networks as part of a Mediterranean water knowledge hub was highlighted at the last meeting of the Water Expert Group of the Union for the Mediterranean on 18 May 2011 in Barcelona and resulted in a special workshop with key stakeholders of the region.

Thus a project was presented to the secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean in order to :

- * Facilitate the development of national water information systems, to improve data collection, management and dissemination.
- * Establish a framework for coordination between the international and regional initiatives collecting water data and statistics, to harmonize definitions and support countries in a coordinated manner.

This project is the "data and information" component of a larger program of gradual implementation of a Mediterranean water knowledge hub which will include, among other components : vocational training, prospective analysis, research and development (R & D), transfer of know-how and technologies…

In the longer term, it will be part of the extension to Mediterranean Partner Countries of the enlarged Shared Environmental Information System –SEIS introduced as part of the European Neighborhood Policy.

The national component focuses on 4 pilot countries which started creating a National Water Information System (Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon and Palestine).

These national systems rely on an interministerial approach using the standard of the United Nations System of Environmental and Economic Accounting for Water - SEEAW.

The approach is open to the integration of other countries and all the Mediterranean countries are concerned by the activities of regional dialogue and exchange of good practices.

For feeding thoughts on the implementation of a database on shared water resources, proposed by the Water Strategy of Arab countries, EMWIS and the Institute for Water, Environment and Health of the United Nations University (UNU-INWEH) signed a cooperation agreement.

Information as a vehicle for cooperation and peace

As part of preparations for the next Marseilles World Water Forum, EMWIS has been designated as Coordinator of Target 7 of the theme "Contribute to cooperation and peace", related to the implementation of transboundary Water Information Systems.

It is proposed to develop mechanisms to share and monitor information at the transboundary level : contribution to online inventories, establishment of water information systems, indicators and guidelines for monitoring programs,

etc.

Intercontinental Mediterranean process for the 6th World Water Forum

This process was initiated at a regional meeting held in Murcia (Spain) on 18-19 April 2011. A steering group, coordinated by the Mediterranean Water Institute of which EMWIS is part, was formed to highlight the specificities and challenges of the region's water, provide solutions and obtain commitments on their implementation.

The first Mediterranean Water Forum was held in Marrakech (Morocco) on 19-20 December 2011, as a milestone in the Mediterranean preparatory process.

The selected priority themes are :

- * non-conventional water resources,
- * water demand management,
- * water governance,
- * treatment of industrial and urban wastewater.

EMWIS and the REVOLVE journal have established a partnership to produce a special issue for the 6th World Water Forum, entitled "About water in the Mediterranean", and that will focus on creative, innovative and unusual solutions to solve regional problems.

The issue will also focus on initiatives targeting young people and projects that stimulate dialogue and exchange through and around the Mediterranean.

More information on EMWIS Website : www.emwis.net