Five years from Marseilles

There is always a need for fully entering "into" a new initiative, a time for advancing its concepts, a process of gradual understanding of its thrust and of the potential must be allowed to take place. And then, we discover that objectives and strategies are indeed becoming reality.

At the time of the Euro-Mediterranean Marseilles Conference on local Water Management, the first dedicated to a specific subject in the common framework opened by the Barcelona Declaration, there was a prudent approach to a new era of cooperation between the members of the European Community and 12 Partner Countries around the whole Mediterranean basin. At Marseilles the cornerstones of joint programmes were laid down. A common need for improving local water management practices was recognized and sharing of information on water was identified as the first area for working together. EMWIS was launched. A year later, at Naples, the Project structure, plan of work and budget were approved.

Today, a remarkable array of the achievements of the Mediterranean, both EU members and Partners, have their website sites dedicated to collecting, organizing and disseminating useful information on the management of local water resources, on ways for improving skills and training of specialized staff, of managers and policy-makers. The common electronic network dedicated to water is a reality. It has determined the formulation of higher and more demanding information standards on water.

National focal points, about 20 of them, have been designated or established and their previous work of organizing and rationalizing such a vital sector has started. Gradually, interest has grown, joint activities have taken place. Thanks to the precious support provided by the European Commission and some EU members, the essential work of the Technical Unit has led to the creation of a web umbrella. The common fabric, that has hitherto East and West, North and South, in the Mediterranean. A common programme exists.

EMWIS not only exists, but also has stimulated further expectations and ambitious objectives have been formulated. In fact, it can be said that the response of Mediterranean Partners has been more convivial and more operational than that of the EU 15, with their varying degree of activity. All this sends a clear message to everybody, indicating strong and well-rooted commitment, which is the foundation of future plans. The renewed MEDA II programme can provide the essential basis for moving towards new goals. The 27 Ministers of Foreign Affairs, meeting at Marseilles in September 2000, have expressed their appreciation for the work carried out and the results achieved together by the countries participating in this endeavor.

At this stage it is therefore important to concentrate on the perspectives for the further development of EMWIS in support of Partner policies and plans for improving water management. Significant priorities include stronger coordination of NPIs through the formulation of comparable work programmes, increased dissemination of water information, the circle of EMWIS users, opening of additional web sites to complete the network and access both for national institutions and EuroMed partners.

At the Amman Steering Committee, the important decision of opening the System to private entities, in order to increase resources available, not only financial, and begin technical cooperation, was taken. As a result cooperation in a technical and scientific level with the main international bodies operating within and outside the Mediterranean basin is being explored. Contacts have been opened with the Global Water Partnership at the World Water Council, with a view to develop a constructive and reciprocal collaboration.

Recent opportunities to meet with Water Ministers in a number of countries have confirmed the awareness at the political level of the perspectives of EMWIS. As a further encouragement, we have welcomed the decision of the Algerian Government to present officially the National Focus Point to Mediterranean Partners and to the institutions responsible for water management in the country. We hope that this excellent initiative is followed also by other Mediterranean Partners.

Water NAZIREDI
President of the Steering Committee

The strengthening of EMWIS from the Declaration of the Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on local water

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION, THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION, FINLAND, ALBANIA, AUSTRIA, BELGIUM, CYPRUS, DENMARK, EGYPT, Spain, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Luxembourg, Malta, Morocco, the Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the Palestinian Authority, participants in the Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on Local Water Management in Turin, 18–19 October 1999, agreed to:

Emphasise the importance of EMWIS as a strategic tool for exchange of information and knowledge in the Euro-Mediterranean area and consolidate it within the mandate it has been given. Participation in EMWIS should be extended to the greatest possible number of Euro-Mediterranean partners and the national focal points should be assisted on an ongoing basis in their role, particularly through the provision of all necessary data in a coherent manner.

Rodney STANDBRING
European Commission

(19-18 October 1999)
Technical assistance visits to the Focal Points

The Technical Unit made 12 technical visits to the NFPS from mid-February to the beginning of June 2001. The aim of these short-term assignments (2 to 3 days) was to assess the progress made, to define the specific needs of each Focal Point, to provide some technical assistance (Web site, thematic directory, contents structuring) and to initiate cooperation with the stakeholders of the water sector at the national level. One or two specialists carried out each assignment. A CD-ROM, with all the items needed to implement an EMWIS server, was handed to each NFPS during these visits.

The visits to the Algerian and Israeli Focal Points were made in February 2001. In March 2001, assignments were undertaken in Jordan (with the support of a specialist of the International Office for Water), in Greece, Lebanon and in Cyprus. In May, the Technical Unit’s representatives went to Tunisia (with the support of a specialist of the International Office for Water), Egypt, Malta, and to Turkey. Finally, Morocco and Syria were visited in June. Walter MAZZITTI, President of EMWIS Steering Committee participated in the Israeli and Syrian assignment to provide additional political support.

This visit to Israel was the opportunity to inform the new Water Commissioner, Mr. Shimon TAL, on EMWIS activities and to prepare the technical and organisational development of the EMWIS Israeli server. Relevant information resources have been identified for two EMWIS topics: the “who does what” and bibliographical databases. These resources could be available for the national EMWIS server. The possibility of organising, in the coming months, a regional meeting in Jordan for promoting EMWIS was also discussed with the Water Commissioner. The main stakeholders working in the water sector in Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority could take part in this awareness raising meeting.

In Syria, the EMWIS delegation met with the Director of the International Water Bureau and the team of the new Technical and Informational Directorate of the Ministry of Irrigation. This new Directorate will be in charge of all the technical issues related to the Syrian EMWIS focal point.

Generally speaking, these visits were highly beneficial. National site projects were defined, some of them have been published on the Internet and others are being validated at the national level. Meetings with the institutions of the water sector, when organized, mobilised many people at the national level (e.g. Tunisia, Jordan). Finally, technical assistance actions, suited to the identified needs, will be implemented in the coming months.

The fourth meeting of the EMWIS Steering Committee was held in Amman (Jordan) on 19 October 2000, under the chairmanship of Italy and vice-chairmanship of Jordan.

All the member countries and organisations of the Steering Committee were represented (Cyprus, France, Italy, Jordan, Malta, Morocco, Spain and European Commission), at the exception of the Palestinian Authority (justified absence) and Algeria (justified absence).

The meeting was opened by the Jordan Minister for Water and Irrigation. Mr. J. NASSERCI. The presence of a number of Jordanian politicians and the news and TV press. The Minister reminded the Jordan commitment to the EMWIS implementation programs with a particular emphasis on EMWIS.

After this welcome address, the Chairman, Mr. MAZZITTI, reminded EMWIS is the first real co-operation tool set up within the framework of the Barcelona process. He underlined the necessity for more promotional activities and a greater involvement of European Union countries. He also reviewed the main EMWIS activities carried out since the last meeting of the Steering Committee (Sussis Antipolis, December 1999) with a particular focus on the three seminars organized by the Technical Unit for the National Focal Points (NFP).

This was followed by a presentation of the future complementary funding. In addition, the Steering Committee positively adopted a resolution, on 10 October 2000, under the chairmanship of Italy and vice-chairmanship of Jordan. Mr. MAZZITTI’s proposal of complementary financial supports from both public and private sources. But, the use of these complementary financial supports will have to be studied case by case.

The EMWIS objective is to get 10 national servers operational by summer 2001. To achieve this objective, a particular effort will be put on the technical assistance, with a special attention to Lebanon and the Palestinian Authority. Mr. MAZZITTI will send a letter to the Water Directors with copy to the NFP coordinators of the Mediterranean Partner Countries to ask them for more information on the current status of development of their NFP and on their trends in terms of technical assistance.

Difficulties have been noticed in terms of the availability of sufficient quality Internet infrastructure in MCP countries to guarantee an effective communication between NFP servers located in the EU and NFP servers located in the MCP. It has been underlined that EMWIS should not be built on a ‘two-speed’ network and that all the NFP should have access to a similar quality of telecommunication network.

Mr. STANDRING, representing the European Commission (EC), is in favor of coordinating this network issue with the EC programme EURIDICE. But, he recognized that the implementation of this programme has been delayed. In order to maintain a strong collaboration, Mr. STANDRING will liaison with the EC EURIDICE representative. On this matter, he has been agreed that the priority should be given to the development of the national servers while the improvement of the quality of the network will be carried out in parallel.

The Water Net project – involving Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian Authority – and the creation of the related Water Research Center (WRC) in Amman have been presented. Based on this example, it seemed to be necessary to study potential agreements for information exchanges between EMWIS and the main other initiatives dealing with water in the Euro-Mediterranean area, e.g. WSG, MEDMAT of the Global Water Partnership, Fien Bleu, etc. The President of the EMWIS Steering Committee will contact these organizations to inform them about this decision. With the agreement of the EMWIS Steering Committee Vice-President, Mr. EL NASRI, an agreement will be signed between EMWIS and WATER NET.

According to the European Commission representative, European Commission will play a major role in the implementation of the Action Plan defined in the Tunis conference (October 1999) at three levels: 1. Information provision on the themes of the Action Plan (e.g. export contacts, documents); 2. Supporting the Forum of Water Directors for a better coordination of activities and the identification of priorities; 3. Supporting the European Commission’s call for proposals through the possible creation of a call for projects, partner search, projects monitoring and publication of project results.

The next meeting of the Steering Committee is planned to summer 2001. Finally, the Steering Committee thanked the Jordan Ministry of Water and Irrigation for hosting this meeting.

The Steering Committee extends its thanks to the Government of Cyprus for hosting the 5th session of the Committee.
Activity of the Technical Unit and NFPs

Preamble

The declaration of the Tercic Ministerial Conference on Local Water Management (October 1999) emphasized the importance of EMWIS (Euro-Mediterranean Information System) on water management as an essential tool for implementing the Action Plan for the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, especially on the priority task of exchanging information and knowledge.

EMWIS was initiated during the Marseilles Euro-Mediterranean Conference on Local Water Management (November 1995). Its objective is to serve as the common denominator for all the countries to work in a common framework and to provide a working environment for the technical cooperation and to coordinate the efforts and resources of the different organizations involved in the field of water management.

Following the preliminary study of the technical, economic, and organisational processes, EMWIS implementation was approved in Naples (Italy) on 9 and 10 December 1997, during a conference called the Water Directors and the main operators of the 27 countries concerned by the Euro-Mediterranean agreements.

Progress report

EMWIS started its operational phase in July 1999 with the first resource management project for the countries that had designated their National Focal Points (NFPs). Today, 20 countries have designated their focal points.

The first meeting of the steering committee was held at the European Commission (Belgium) in October 1999. A senior-level meeting was held in Rome in November 2000. It was attended by the country focal points and was aimed at identifying the next steps to be taken in the development of the EMWIS system.

The first meeting of the EMWIS steering committee was held in Rome in November 2000. It was attended by the country focal points and was aimed at identifying the next steps to be taken in the development of the EMWIS system.

Seminars for National Focal Points

As soon as its installation was completed, the Technical Unit contacted the people in charge of the NFPs designated by the representatives of the Euro-Mediterranean arena for the first-person meetings. Three seminars were organized for the 20 existing NFPs since October 1999.

1. A seminar, gathering the coordinators of the NFPs, was held in Athens in late 1999. It was attended by the country focal points and was aimed at identifying the next steps to be taken in the development of the EMWIS system.

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The Technical Unit was established in 1999, with the aim of providing a technical support service to the EMWIS project. It is managed by a team of experts from different countries, coordinated by the Technical Unit's technical manager.

The Technical Unit (TU) carries out EMWIS development and coordination. It is financed by three organizations: EEA, CEC, and EasuS and is managed by the Technical Unit's technical manager.

The Technical Unit's website is http://www.emwis.org, and it provides an international technical support service to the EMWIS project. It is managed by a team of experts from different countries, coordinated by the Technical Unit's technical manager.
<table>
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