

Common Aims for the Mediterranean Nations

Dr. Rafiq Husseini, the Deputy Secretary General of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) [<http://www.ufmsecretariat.org/en/dr-rafiq-husseini/>], was interviewed on Aug. 26, at the World Water Week conference, in Stockholm, Sweden, by EIR's Arabic-language editor Hussein Askary.

EIR: First of all, what is the Union for the Mediterranean?

Rafiq Husseini: The Union for the Mediterranean was an idea that was built on a political process, called the Barcelona Process, which started after the Oslo Agreement between the Palestinians and the Israelis, and other Arabs, of course. But everybody thought that this was a process that cannot succeed without an economic or



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cooperative development and dimension. And therefore, in 2010, a Secretariat for the Union for the Mediterranean was also created, to look specifically at regional cooperation, and regional cooperative projects, that could bring people together from the economic and prosperity point of view, rather than just sticking with the political dialogue that was basically going nowhere at the time.

So therefore, this is what the Union for the Mediterranean does: It works in several sectors, of which environment and water is one, but there's also energy, transport, education, civil affairs, and business development. And the idea is to come up with projects, either national projects with regional impact, or regional projects which, even as regional projects, will create coopera-

tion between different countries, and are based on the idea of finding what is common between them, and what will bring them prosperity, together, rather than individually.

In environment and water, we have always said that there are, of course, conflicts, political conflicts between countries, but there are also regional enemies, and these regional enemies are pollution, water scarcity, global warming—these are the common enemies that the region should be looking at, and cooperating to defeat. Because if we don't defeat these regional enemies, then there will be no civilization left around the Mediterranean.

EIR: Are there are specific projects you have been studying, or implementing?

Husseini: The first, we have several projects in the pipeline, but we have also a couple of labeled projects, which are endorsed by the 43 countries, the first of which is the Gaza desalination project (see below), which is a very big project, in comparison to other projects, almost a \$450 million project. And the idea was that 43 countries accepted this project as a national project, but with regional impact. Because for 1.6 million Palestinians who live in Gaza, and have no water, the supply of water for them is humanitarian, is developmental, and also political. So this was one of the projects.

The second project we have also labeled, is to study the governance of water in several countries, and to put guidelines for public-private participation. And this project will start with six countries around the region of the Mediterranean, to bring in common guidelines, common ways of how to deal with the private sector in the issue of the governance of water. Because this is an issue that is very important, and nobody is taking much notice of governance; although you can stop the leakage of water, and you can do a lot to improve the physical infrastructures, if you don't improve governance and management of water, then you don't go anywhere.

EIR: Yes. These projects and the Union for the Mediterranean—is there any formal backing from the European Union, or the European Parliament, or is it a totally independent organ?

Husseini: No, it is an inter-governmental agency of 43 countries, of which 27 are in the European Union, and the rest are the countries around the Mediterranean. So basically, our role in the Secretariat is to bring in a project that we think is good for the region,

label it, endorse it by the 43 countries, and then help the promoters, whether it's one country or several countries, in finding the necessary resources and funding for it, whether it's from the EU [European Union], EC [European Commission], or Arab donors, even. So we help them look for money to implement them.

EIR: His Excellency, the Minister for Water from the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Shaddad Attili, yesterday, presented a very dramatic report on the water situation in Gaza. And basically, according also to the UN reports, the Gaza Strip would be unlivable by 2020, which is really a humanitarian crisis. It is a real tragedy, that this is happening right in the Mediterranean, where actually the capability to resolve this problem with a water desalination project is quite manageable, and can be implemented as quickly as possible.

What do you expect the European Union to do, in the face of this real humanitarian and civilizational crisis? Because, as Dr. Attili said yesterday, we cannot wait for the political solutions to come, because people need to drink now, and that's a really strong argument.

Husseini: Yes, of course. I mean, water is life. You can't really say, "Okay, we'll wait. We'll not drink water today, or tomorrow, and wait for a political solution." So people have to drink clean, fresh water. And as he said, it is today a basic human right.¹ So, this is very important.

Of course, it's happening in an area where there's a lot of water around, but freshwater is becoming very scarce, and therefore, Gaza has to find a solution; otherwise Gaza will not be livable in 2020.

Of course, there are other issues: The UN report that you referred to has outlined other issues. But of course, water, in our opinion, is essential, because you can sometimes live without electricity, you can live without some other issues that are very important, or infrastructure, but without water, you cannot survive.

And I think we actually have been able to interest a lot of countries. Of course, the Arab countries have been interested for other reasons, both political as well as developmental. But the European Union is also interested, and we had, yesterday, with us, the European Investment Bank, which is one arm of the European Union.

1. On July 28, 2010, through Resolution 64/292, the UN General Assembly explicitly recognized the human right to water and sanitation, as essential to the realization of all human rights.

The EC is coming onboard. Countries like Sweden, France, other countries, have already committed themselves, so I think we're making the point clear. And the UN, of course, with their report of the day before yesterday, has helped tremendously in pinpointing the problems and the seriousness of the issue.

EIR: It was actually on the Swedish news last evening, that it's being taken seriously. That's very important.

There was this idea that I discussed with you yesterday, of having a Marshall Plan for the Mediterranean, in light of the deep economic crisis, also in the Southern European countries, in Greece, Portugal, Spain; but also we have had the social revolts in Tunis, Egypt, and most of North Africa, due partly to the deep economic crisis in these countries. And we had presented ideas for connecting Southern Europe with the North Africa-Eastern Mediterranean region, with infrastructure projects: Railways, tunnels, bridges, but also implementing large-scale water desalination, energy, and power.² What is your view of these—these

2. See, "There Is Life After the Euro! An Economic Miracle for Southern Europe and the Mediterranean," *EIR*, June 8, 2012.

are mega-projects; these are not small things, but a question of the future of the whole Mediterranean. What do you think about it?

Husseini: Well, although what you're saying is, of course, mega and futuristic, this is what the UfM is all about. It's about bringing the northern Mediterranean and the southern Mediterranean region into a state of prosperity, and togetherness, and cooperation, that they can ensure that both the peoples in the North and the South live together in harmony, security, and peace.

So, what you are saying is actually what the UfM divisions—which are the divisions of energy, transport, environment and water, business development—are actually doing, but they are doing it on a much smaller scale, and without the idea of this Marshall Plan. So, from one point of view, I support this idea—it's a nice idea. But, as I say, it needs also work, to happen, and, in the meanwhile, what we can do, is just fit in some building blocks to the idea. So we're doing what you're asking for, bottom up. And what you're suggesting is something like a top-down approach. But in the end, the two should meet in the middle somewhere.

Released on Thanksgiving 2011, the LPAC-TV documentary "NAWAPA 1964" is the true story of the fight for the North American Water and Power Alliance. Spanning the 1960s and early '70s, it is told through the words of Utah Senator Frank Moss. The 56-minute video, using extensive original film footage and documents, presents the astonishing mobilization for NAWAPA, which came near to being realized, until the assassination of President Kennedy, the Vietnam War, and the 1968 Jacobin reaction, killed it ... until now.

PUEBLO, COLORADO
AUGUST 16, 1962

<http://larouchepac.com/nawapa1964>