

EVENT REPORT

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Water as warrantor for stability – The water-security-nexus in the Middle East

In the difficult field of stabilizing the Middle East and achieving progress in the peace negotiations, the Multinational Policy Development Dialogue of the Konrad-Adenauer Stiftung, organized an expert lunch discussion in the European Parliament on the water-security-nexus within the Middle East.



The discussion was hosted by Mr. **Michael Gahler**, Chair of the Delegation with the Pan-African-Parliament and Member of the Committee on Foreign Affairs in the European Parliament, who gave a warm welcome speech and lined out the debate's goals. It shall specifically point out the necessity of common projects that create interdependencies between the different actors, which in turn will lead to mutual understanding. The "water-energy-nexus" project by the Konrad-Adenauer Stiftung and EcoPeace Middle East has adopted this approach and thus is not only promoting peace through its initiative but also is of personal benefit to the involved parties.

The "water-energy-nexus" project was presented through a short clip by Mr. **Marc Frings**, Head of the Konrad-

Adenauer-Stiftung office in Ramallah; it aims at creating modern, cost effective environmental friendly energy and drink water services for all. Regarding the context of the MENA region, where energy demand is supposed to increase by 6-7% by 2020 and the demand for water is supposed to become five times as high as it is today by 2050, the region's instability and the reciprocal influence of the two fields are a major challenge that needs to be addressed. Although the initiative can only cover a small portion of the overall demand, its output can serve as a best practice example and thus inspire other actors to similar initiatives.

With this introduction in mind, Mr. **Raul Fuentes Milani**, Head of Division Middle East II, addressed the panelists of the debate pointing out three questions: Which possibilities exists to make water a factor of cooperation between Israel and Palestine? How can the sustainability of the water infrastructure as well as its price be achieved? And finally, what are the possibilities to improve the critical situation the Gaza Strip is facing and which is supposedly to become even worse?



Referring to the question on how water can become a factor of cooperation between Palestine and Israel, **His Excellency Shaddad Al Attili**, lead Palestinian Negotiator for water and former Minister of Water and Head of the Palestinian Water Authority, gave an in depth speech of his vast experience in the respected field. Regarding the inequality within the distribution of the water reserves in the Middle East, Mr. Al Attili pointed out, that the Palestine territories and 16 other Arab countries are under absolute water scarcity (less than 500 m³ per person per year) for years, moreover, Palestinians suffer, due to water conflict and inequitable allocation of resources, from denial of access to resources in the West Bank while the Gaza Strip quality of water does not fit for human use. In this context, one of the reasons for the scarcity and pollution of groundwater and the sea lies within the lack of energy to supply existing water and wastewater plants and it is a major obstacle towards financing the planned regional desalination plants.

Furthermore, the theoretically available water supplies would be sufficient to meet the needs of the region's demand, but political conflict prevents an equal distribution. Additionally, food security is linked to water security; in the Arab region, the water demand gap is currently at the level of 17 billion cubic meter and is expected to dramatically jump up to 156 by 2030 with a severe consequence on the food security gap in the Arab region to jump from 37 billion USD to more than 71 billion USD by 2030.

One of the key elements to address the water food energy nexus in the Middle East is the engagement in regional renewable energy. In order to run existing and / or planned desalination and wastewater treatment plants at operational cost and affordable prices, already existing international funds should be used on a fruitful basis and closely monitored. This would also reduce the abuse of international aid funds. In addition to the water scarcity, the region is facing another major challenge: the lack of functioning wastewater treatment plants within the Palestinian territories (in particular the Gaza Strip) has led to a 97% pollution of the groundwater aquifer and the Mediterranean sea pollution with an impact on fisheries and Israeli desalination at Ashkelon. In Gaza Strip 90 million m³ of sewage per day, are being discharged into the Mediterranean Sea or seep away into the ground aquifer. An existing wastewater plant in the Northern Gaza region is unable to function due to lack of 3 megawatt of energy.

Thus, the Palestinian demands for increased water and energy supplies for the immediate and future demand as well as international aid funds of desalination and wastewater treatment plants are of highest urgency. Furthermore, already the consequences of climate change induced weather changes and conditions increase the severe situation of the Palestine territories and in particular that of the Gaza Strip.





Representing the European Commission, **Dr. Christian Behrmann**, from the Directorate General for Neighborhood and Enlargement Negotiations, stressed the necessity of a two state solution. Nearly any form of regional or bilateral cooperation between the region's actors already is receiving European support. Thus the European Union is taking a leading role in the negotiations on water and energy agreements within the region. In this context Dr. Behrmann, also referred to the SWIM-Program by the European Union as a tool for increased cooperation and knowledge transfer. Additionally, Dr. Behrmann, pointed out that the European Commission, as well as any other European institution involved, are maximizing their efforts to work in a conflict sensitive way with all actors. The recently inaugurated desalination plant in the Gaza Strip was funded with 10 million euros by the European Union. Further plans for an additional desalination plant which will have the capacity to supply one million people and thus 50% of the inhabitants of the Gaza already exist and are being put in to the project phase. Last but not least, Dr. Behrmann demanded the growth of the civil society as well as the necessity of local actors in order to raise awareness towards the different programs initiated, amongst others, by the European Union.

Gideon Bromberg, Israeli director of EcoPeace Middle East, referred to three overall topics in his speech. These topics, had been partly discussed by the previous panelists, but Mr. Bromberg successfully pointed out various aspects that had not been debated until this moment. Regarding the increasingly dangerous situation of the groundwater pollution in the Gaza Strip, Mr. Bromberg stressed that by the end of the year the strip will have completely run out of potable water. Due to this pollution, the threat of epidemic outbreaks will rise as people will still stay within the Gaza Strip. It is thus of self-interest for Israel to supply the Gaza Strip with enough water and energy to minimize the threat of an outbreak of cholera or similar, especially since "epidemics don't stop at borders". The possible outbreak of cholera will furthermore lead to a humanitarian crisis possibly similar to the Ebola crisis in Africa in 2014. This would most probably also lead to another collective migration movement. As Mr. Bromberg pointed out: "there is no disengagement from the shared environment".



Secondly, the water scarcity within the region was addressed. This problem could be solved through technological possibilities. Nevertheless, a solution requires the willingness and engagement of all concerned parties. With this in mind, the central question thus becomes how technology can be used in order to change politics. Mr. Bromberg hereby questions the “all or nothing” approach that has been the common approach for the last years. As water and energy have been the only topics on which deals have been achieved in recent years, Mr. Bromberg noted, that similar to post World War II Europe and the deal between France and Germany on coal and steel, the Middle East should use its most valuable resources e.g. water and energy, and create an agreement where all parties receive a fair share of these resources. In this context, relationships of interdependence must be created. This would mark significant progress on the way to a sustainable stability in the region.

Last but not least, Mr. Bromberg engaged the possibilities for businesses in the fields of water and energy in the Middle East. Both sectors are highly profitable as the necessary technology already exists. The region hereby does not rely on the generosity of international donors but requires technological knowhow in order to become self-sufficient.

Thus the central questions are how the pollution of the groundwater of the Gaza Strip can be reduced, the existing technology be used to create ties between the region’s actors and the gridlocked overall situation be loosened through the subjects of water and energy.

At this point the floor was opened to the auditorium and various questions on water management as well as water and energy security arose. Hereby



the amount of water lost within the Palestinian pipe system was addressed as well as the closure of the Ashkelon desalination plant due to the polluted water of the Mediterranean Sea. The issue of the Ashkelon plant had already been brought up by Mr. Bromberg in his speech. Its temporary closure had been disclosed from the Israeli government to its public since approximately 15-20% relies on that particular plant and a total of nearly 70% of the Israeli water supply rely on the desalination plants.

Additionally, the question of water pricing was raised, i.e. how should a country and in particular the Gaza Strip pay for the water which is made available by Israel since there are basically no possibilities of labor or financial growth. Furthermore, the lack of water increases the unemployment situation even further as farmers are incapable of farming their land.

At this point a comment was made that showed the results of the lack of water within a region as a worst case scenario. The youth unemployment of the Jordan Valley is currently at a rate of 50% which leads to the fact that the valley has the world’s second highest rate of volunteers for ISIS. This leads us to the assumption that the lack of water will lead to a lack of jobs and possibilities which in turn denies the creation of a sustainable peace.

Concluding the discussion and the entire event, Mr. Frings made the final remarks drawing three overall conclusions.

Firstly, the multiple synergies that arise from the linkage between water and energy, lead to the necessity of initiatives such as the Water-Energy-Nexus by the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and EcoPeace Middle East. Water and Energy are not the only issues that need more interconnectivity; one can also add food security. The strong bond between Water and Energy and their reciprocal relationship require an approach that serves both fields.

Secondly, the regional design of the approach and the fair distribution of its outcome allow a mutual understanding between the different actors, and thus leads to sustainability within the region. A regional approach would also benefit from different policy concerns: Jordan's involvement provides incentives for Israel in terms of stability and economy; it would reduce Palestine's dependency from Israeli energy imports; and it would at the same time take pressure from Israel, as the most important energy provider for Gaza and the West Bank.

Thirdly, Mr. Frings finalized his speech, referring to the fact that only those problems that are currently solvable should be addressed at this moment. The all-or-nothing approach should be overcome, as it is not allowing for any progress.