

# EVENT REPORT

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## European Parliament Discussion: Water Energy Nexus for the Middle East



On Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> November 2017 the Multinational Development Policy Dialogue and the Palestinian Territories Office of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung together with the regional NGO EcoPeace Middle East hosted a discussion in the European Parliament in Brussels, titled **“A Water-Energy-Nexus for the Middle East and the historic experience of the European Coal and Steel Community”**. This event was held in order to present the final findings of a three-year-long study by the KAS and EcoPeace on the proposed water energy nexus (WEN) in Jordan, Israel and Palestine. It was hosted by Elmar Brok, MEP of the European People’s Party (EPP), who delivered the keynote speech. The event took place in the framework of a larger programme organised by KAS-EcoPeace in which a high-level delegation of ministerial, water and energy authority experts from Israel, Jordan and Palestine were invited to Brussels and Berlin for a series of meetings over one week, concerning the WEN proposal. The

delegation included also **Oded Eran**, the former ambassador of Israel to the EU and NATO, who is strongly supporting the WEN project. On the panel of the European Parliament discussion sat **Gidon Bromberg**, Israeli director of EcoPeace, **Rebhy El Sheikh**, Deputy Minister of the Palestinian Water Authority, **Joseph Draznin**, executive director of the Israeli Ministry for Regional Cooperation, **Basim Saleh**, managing partner at Greentech (Jordan), and **Oded Fixler**, deputy director general of the Israeli Water Authority. The event was moderated by **Marc Frings**, director of the KAS Office Palestinian Territories.



The Water-Energy-Nexus is an exciting new concept which is designed to benefit the people of the region, despite any political dead-lock between the involved countries. The project follows the assumption that an economically sustainable, environmental, geopolitically beneficial solution to the region’s energy and water needs is possible, even in times of

no peace talks. MEP Brok summed these observations up in his keynote address and explained that the WEN is modelled on the Steel and Coal agreement brokered by Schuman and Monet in post-war Europe. This agreement between 6 countries, including France and Germany, led to an economic community that became the basis of the EC/EU. Water and energy are two vital commodities for the Levant which are important enough to play a similar role in bringing together the conflicting parties. Furthermore, Mr Brok outlined that the WEN idea is exacerbated by the issue of climate change and that it is essential to act now rather than later. If the European interest in this is real there must exist not only a political but a financial backing, Brok stated.



The panel discussion began with a presentation outlining the comparative advantages of the WEN countries and highlighting the potential benefits to each of them in turn. Jordan is blessed with a large landmass distinguished by high solar radiation. The result can be a production of PV energy for 20% of the region's demand at a cost of \$0.05-\$0.07/kWh. This is highly competitive even with regards to fossil fuels, but requires a large landmass which is a critical issue for Israel and Palestine. At the same time, Israel has a strong technological advantage in the field of desalina-

tion and is projected to be able to supply water to the coastal areas at a cost of \$0.65/m<sup>3</sup> and to Jordan urban centres for \$0.93-\$1.18/m<sup>3</sup>. This is roughly half the current cost of delivering water to the region. By trading energy produced in Jordan with Israel's desalinated water, Israel could advance its international leadership in this area and achieve renewable energy goals whilst preserving land. Similarly, Jordan could become a major exporter of energy whilst achieving water security in a cost-efficient manner. Palestine meanwhile, is a further crucial source of desalination through Gaza's sea access.

According to international standards, countries with less than 500 m<sup>3</sup> / capita / year of water suffer from chronic water scarcity.<sup>1</sup> None of the involved countries comes close to this number even with its desalination and reclaimed sewerage and thus, using the Gazan coast is imperative for future water needs in the region. This will benefit Israel as a regional approach stabilises the future of the Middle East and furthermore, reduces the chance of a cholera or typhoid outbreak and other adverse effects due to a lack of fresh water in Gaza. The Ashkelon desalination plant - one of the largest in Israel - has already felt these effects in 2016 when it was shut down several times due to waste water contamination flowing north from Gaza.<sup>2</sup> Palestine will benefit from the WEN proposal as it decreases the dependency on Israel, obtaining instead multilateral interdependencies with Jordan and Israel for water and energy needs. Palestine and Israel will both diversify their energy



sources, whilst Jordan receives water and energy security.

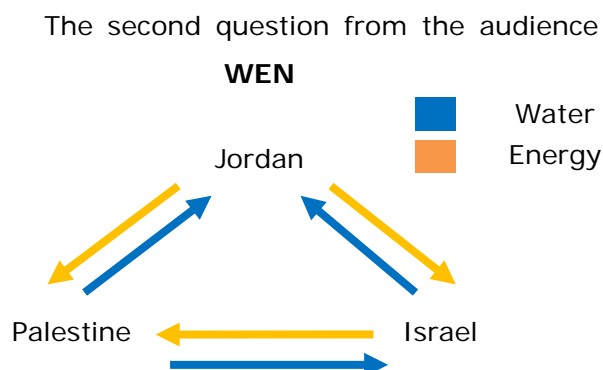
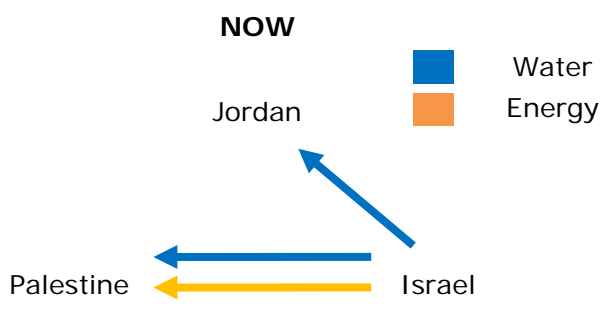


Fig. 1: Partner countries' dependencies before and after WEN proposal

The floor was then opened up for questions. The first question hit upon the issue of Palestinian dependency and asked whether Palestinian dependency on Israel for energy needs will simply be replaced by dependency on Jordanian energy sources. It was explained that, while Palestine would diversify its energy sources to include Israel and Jordan, this dependency should be replaced by a mutual interdependency, in which Palestine provides the much-needed resource of water in return for its own energy needs (see Figure 1). In fact, a further source of electricity for Palestine will serve to bolster its waste management, public services and water sector. While promoting regional stability in Jordan and Palestine, Israel improves its international standing and integration with the Arab neighbors. In this way, the WEN proposal is known as a win-win-win situation for the region.



asked why, in relation to the various failed agreements between these countries, the WEN project should be expected to work now? The panel responded with two points. Firstly, fresh water is in scarce supply in the Middle East. The region's water needs are increasing and pressures will continue to mount due to rapid population growth. By 2030, the region will need an additional 574 Mm<sup>3</sup> of water annually to meet the needs of its predicted population of then 30 million. For comparison, this is approximately equal to the total yearly output of all of Israel's current desalination plants. This is a tremendous task which must be tackled now. As destabilisation in the region will have adverse effects on neighbour countries, the actors must promote multilateral cooperation for their people.

Secondly, this proposal is now feasible. Green technology has never been as competitive and cheap as it is today and the current model of importing fossil fuels is a serious drain on foreign currency reserves and an environmental threat. The Levant now has the opportunity to seize the high potential for renewable energy, much as Europe is currently doing, and should not let this chance pass.

The third question from the audience related to the standing of the 2005 "Red

Sea-Dead Sea” agreement and how it ties in with the current WEN proposal. The Red-Dead project has been criticised for its feasibility in the past. WEN has learned from these criticisms and utilises lessons from the Red-Dead; however, it should not be taken in conjunction with it. Although the water and energy generated from WEN could be used to support Red-Dead, it is an unrelated project.

The event concluded by reiterating that the water energy nexus is a project for the people. It seeks to develop the comparative advantages within each country in order to trade water and energy and benefit the region as a whole. The pre-feasibility study conducted by the KAS and EcoPeace concludes that there is a strong economic, environmental and geopolitical basis to produce and trade fresh water and renewable energy between these three countries. The next step is to obtain EU funding and support.



1. Falkenmark, M. and Lindh, G. (1976). *Water for a starving world*. Westview Press: Boulder, CO, USA.

2. Cooke, K. (2016). *Gaza is sick of sewage and time is running out to contain it*. Middle East Eye. Available: <http://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/gazas-sewage-knows-no-borders-and-time-running-out-contain-it-1381373625>  
Accessed: 01.12.2017