T3 · The New European Water Vision

1. BACKGROUND

Over the past five decades, the European Union has progressively developed one of the world's most comprehensive water policy frameworks. From the first generation of water quality legislation in the 1970s, through the adoption of emission control directives during the 1990s, to the Water Framework Directive (WFD, 2000/60/EC), European water policy has evolved towards integrated river basin management founded on the protection of ecological status, sustainable resource management and public participation. Today, however, Europe faces an unprecedented convergence of pressures arising from climate change, population growth, economic development, pollution and intensifying competition among water users. Water security is rapidly emerging as a prerequisite for economic resilience, industrial competitiveness, food production, energy security and territorial cohesion. These concerns are directly reflected in two landmark strategic documents: the 2024 Letta Report, which integrates water security into the EU's core economic strategy, and the Draghi Report "The Future of European Competitiveness", which urges targeted revisions to European water regulations to streamline permitting and accelerate critical infrastructure projects.

The European Water Resilience Strategy — adopted by the European Commission in 2025 — provides a comprehensive policy framework built around restoring the water cycle, developing a water-smart economy and ensuring secure access to clean and affordable water. Its objectives are reinforced by the EU Nature Restoration Regulation, which establishes legally binding targets for restoring rivers, wetlands, floodplains and groundwater-dependent ecosystems. Together, these initiatives recognise that healthy ecosystems are fundamental to improving water quality, enhancing groundwater recharge and increasing resilience to floods and droughts.

The European Commission is concurrently pursuing a targeted revision of the Water Framework Directive to boost circularity and streamline access to critical raw materials, while maintaining environmental safeguards, under the RESourceEU Action Plan. This evolving regulatory architecture coincides with the European Commission's Pact for the Mediterranean, which creates a strategic opportunity to strengthen cooperation between EU and non-EU Mediterranean countries on water security, climate adaptation, investment and innovation.

The Mediterranean region has accumulated decades of experience in desalination, water reuse, demand management, groundwater protection and integrated water resources management — making it a valuable knowledge partner for implementing Europe's future water agenda rather than merely a beneficiary of it. The 6th Euro-Mediterranean Water Forum, organised at a moment of exceptional political and regulatory density, is the natural platform for this dialogue to take operational shape.

2. KEY CHALLENGES AND OBJECTIVES

T3 brings together European institutions, national governments, regulators, water utilities and Mediterranean partners to examine how the emerging European Water Vision translates into concrete priorities for the broader Euro-Mediterranean region, and what role Mediterranean experience and expertise can play in shaping its implementation.

Challenge 1 · Balancing Ecosystem Restoration, Water Security and Economic Competitiveness
The European Water Resilience Strategy and the Nature Restoration Regulation set ambitious ecological objectives that must be pursued alongside, not at the expense of, the equally pressing needs of industrial production, agriculture, energy generation and urban water supply. The challenge is designing a policy architecture that treats these objectives as complementary rather than competing, particularly in water-stressed contexts where trade-offs are most acute. The Mediterranean shore of the EU — from the Iberian Peninsula to Greece and Cyprus — already faces conditions that northern member states will increasingly encounter. Their experience offers practical lessons for policy design that the broader European framework has yet to fully incorporate.

Challenge 2 · Translating Political Commitments into Investment and Innovation
The regulatory ambition of the new European Water Vision requires a corresponding acceleration of investment in water infrastructure modernisation, digitalisation, nature-based solutions, water reuse and non-conventional resources. The gap between policy commitment and funded delivery is substantial: EU member states face legacy infrastructure deficits, while southern Mediterranean countries require even larger investments to modernise and expand networks under growing demographic pressure. Closing this gap requires not only financial instruments but also streamlined permitting frameworks, stronger utility governance and accelerated transfer of proven technologies across the basin. Several Mediterranean countries — Morocco's large-scale desalination and reuse programme, Jordan's regulatory frameworks, Tunisia's water demand management experience — have developed approaches directly relevant to European challenges, pointing to the value of genuinely reciprocal knowledge exchange.

Challenge 3 · Strengthening Euro-Mediterranean Cooperation on Water Governance
The Pact for the Mediterranean provides a political architecture for aligning European and Mediterranean water agendas, but its operational translation into concrete cooperation mechanisms, shared standards and joint investment frameworks remains work in progress. River basin authorities, national regulators, water utilities and research institutions across both shores have much to gain from structured collaboration, yet existing mechanisms remain fragmented and underresourced.

3. GUIDING QUESTIONS

The following questions are designed to draw on the complementary experience and perspective of each panelist, building a shared and constructive picture of the path ahead for Euro-Mediterranean water governance.

- How should the new European Water Vision balance ecosystem restoration, water security and economic competitiveness — and what does that balance look like in practice for Mediterranean member states already operating under conditions of structural water stress?
- The Mediterranean region has accumulated decades of experience in desalination, water reuse, demand management and integrated resource management. What specific lessons from this experience should inform the revision of the Water Framework Directive and the implementation of the European Water Resilience Strategy?
- The Pact for the Mediterranean creates a political framework for stronger Euro-Mediterranean water cooperation, but operational mechanisms remain to be designed. What forms of cooperation — in regulation, investment, technology and knowledge exchange — would deliver the most tangible results, and what would it take to make them happen before 2030?
- Water digitalisation, nature-based solutions and non-conventional resources are central to Europe's emerging water agenda. How can technology transfer and innovation partnerships between EU and non-EU Mediterranean countries be structured to accelerate deployment on both shores, and what financial and regulatory conditions are needed to enable this at scale?

4. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

T3 is designed to produce a structured policy contribution that feeds into the Forum's broader outputs and the follow-up processes connected to the UN 2026 Water Conference and the 11th World Water Forum in Riyadh 2027.

Outcome 1 · Priority Areas for Euro-Mediterranean Water Cooperation
T3 will identify and articulate priority areas for cooperation between European and Mediterranean water authorities, drawing on the panellists' complementary institutional perspectives. These priorities — in regulation, investment, technology transfer and governance — will be transmitted to the Union for Mediterrenean as a substantive contribution to the implementation of the Pact for the Mediterranean's water commitments and will feed into the Forum's final declaration.

Outcome 2 · Assessment of the Emerging European Regulatory Framework
T3 will produce a structured discussion of the implications of the European Water Resilience Strategy, the Nature Restoration Regulation and the Pact for the Mediterranean for water management across the Euro-Mediterranean region, identifying both challenges and opportunities for member states, non-EU partners and key sectoral actors.

Outcome 3 · Showcase of Mediterranean Experience
T3 will provide a platform for highlighting Mediterranean expertise in water scarcity management, desalination, water reuse and non-conventional water resources, positioning the region as a knowledge partner in the implementation of Europe's evolving water agenda rather than merely a beneficiary of it.

Outcome 4 · Strengthened Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue
T3 will strengthen structured dialogue between policy makers, regulators, water utilities, industry and research organisations across the Euro-Mediterranean region, building relationships and shared understanding that extend beyond the Forum itself.

Outcome 5 · Recommendations for Europe's Evolving Water Agenda
T3 will develop a set of concrete recommendations addressed to European institutions, national governments, regulators, utilities and research organisations, supporting the implementation of the European Water Resilience Strategy, the Nature Restoration Regulation and the revised Water Framework Directive in ways that are calibrated to Mediterranean realities.