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EUROMEDITERRANEAN
WATER FORUM

LANUVOLA • ROME
29.09-02.10.2026



Union for the Mediterranean
Union pour la Méditerranée
الاتحاد من أجل المتوسط

A Tale of water

Working together to achieve water security in the Mediterranean by 2050



Water-seekers and the prophecy of the “End of Water”

Four to go. Four years remain until the 2030 deadline by which the entire international community committed to achieving the 17 integral and holistic Sustainable Development Goals. Unfortunately, we will fail to achieve most of them. This is not a reason to give up, but rather to increase our determination and efforts.

According to the 2024 [Summary Brief by UN-Water](#) the world is not on track to achieve SDG6 (clean water and sanitation for all) by 2030. Progress is insufficient across all eight targets, and in some cases, is even reversing. Current rates of progress for essential services must increase up to sixfold to meet the 2030 goals.

Although successes and progress have been recorded in several areas – such as access to water and sanitation services and improvements in water use efficiency - this is not enough. Today 2.2 billion people lack safely managed drinking water and 3.4 billion lack safe sanitation. Sixty percent of countries are unlikely to reach the target of full Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM). River flows have significantly decreased in 402 river basins worldwide, while lakes and other water bodies are shrinking or disappearing in 364 basins. At the same time, many of the world's largest lakes continue to experience high to extreme levels of turbidity and eutrophication.

We must reaffirm our commitment, extend our time horizon forward but never surrender. We must not give in to narratives of apocalypse and inevitable disaster. Instead, we must be united, use our intelligence, and arm our spirit rather than our weapons.

EMWF is fully aware of the environmental crisis, the impact of climate change, and the excessive footprint of unsustainable resources exploitation. Nevertheless, the constant narrative of the “end of water” is a risky strategy. At best, it is ignored; at worst it leads to resignation and inaction.

For this reason, the EMWF will be the Forum of the future, grounded in hope and trust.

The future can falter when we give in to fear. Wise politics and good policies, renewed awareness, innovative financial instruments, a new pact between communities and water, technologies now at our disposal – data, nature based solutions and artificial intelligence – combined with Trust in human creativity, will lead us toward a new culture of water.

We will become “water-seekers”, modern diviners. We will find water, use it to produce food and energy, recycle it, safeguard the hydrological equation, quench everyone’s thirst and sign a new pact.

“Hope provides meaning and orientation. Fear, by contrast, stops us in our tracks.”

- Byung-Chul Han, The spirit of Hope

Why a Euro-Mediterranean Water Forum

We live in a region that is among the most vulnerable to climate change.

Over 180 million people in the region already live in water scarcity, while another 60 million are experiencing water stress. In 2023, water scarcity affected 28% of the EU territory and shows no signs of abating by 2030 ([European Environment Agency](#)). At the same time, extreme events such as prolonged droughts are becoming the new normal ([Joint Research Centre](#)).

In the past five years, Europe has faced catastrophic floods of exceptional intensity, causing economic damage exceeding €50 billion in 2021 alone and resulting in casualties across several regions. These events are now increasingly affecting the southern Mediterranean region, where since 2021 more than 120 disasters have caused an average of \$1 billion in damage per year (Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, Syria, Gaza). According to the [World Bank](#), floods in this region cause four times more casualties than in Europe, due to more vulnerable infrastructure.

The Mediterranean risks becoming the “advanced laboratory” of a world in which water is no longer just a resource, but a factor of economic, food, and geopolitical instability. The experience, knowledge, and resources of Euro-Mediterranean communities and peoples must play a stronger role in the international debate, starting with the upcoming **UN Water Conference** end 2026.

However, dedicating a forum to the Euro-Mediterranean region carries another message. In a world marked by conflicts and divisions, we want to create a space for dialogue and cooperation. We reaffirm the idea of the Mediterranean as a sea that connects rather than divides, we insist stubbornly in safeguarding this “mosaic of cultures and peoples” where Europe, Africa and Asia meet and collaborate. EMWF is, above all, a message of peace and cooperation.

Water security in the region by 2050 and the EMWF thematic architecture

Building on the Water Security Index developed by the United Nations University - Institute for Water, Environment and Health ([Global water security assessment 2023](#)), achieving water security in the Euro-Mediterranean region by 2050 requires actions across 5 key pillars: water scarcity, water quality, water value, water governance and the social dimension of water.

Improving water availability, access, sanitation and efficiency in water use, while safeguarding water quality, the biodiversity it sustains, and human safety, is essential to achieve this goal.

The Euro-Mediterranean Water Forum will address the “water trilemma”, propose forward-looking solutions, and shape new approaches.

The Water Trilemma: too much, too little, too polluted

EMWF sessions on “**Water Scarcity (T1)**, **Extreme Events (T7)** and **One Water One health (T8)** will frame the discussion around the “water trilemma”. They will focus, on the one hand, on the risks of desertification, drought and soils degradation, and on the other hand on the prevention and management of water-related disasters linked to water excess.

Climate change forecasts and impacts, stronger protection of the hydrological cycle as one of the global common goods, the role of sustainable agriculture, the future of water reuse and desalination but also strategies for managing extreme events will be all addressed through these sessions, panels, discussions and data-driven analysis.

Water quality will be at the center of our work. While more than 85% of water bodies are classified as “excellent,” this reassuring picture hides a much more complex reality. These classifications are based on limited microbiological indicators and do not reflect widespread chemical contamination. When we look beyond this narrow lens, the situation becomes alarming: only 39.5% of European surface water bodies are in good ecological status, and just 26.8% in good chemical status. This means that the majority of rivers, lakes, and coastal waters are contaminated by pesticides, heavy metals, and industrial substances.

Even more concerning is the emergence of so-called “forever chemicals” (PFAS), detected in over 98% of European rivers and present in 94% of tested drinking water, often at concentrations exceeding future regulatory limits. Current technologies are largely unable to remove them effectively. This reveals a critical gap: while official statistics suggest progress, water systems often achieve visual purification but fail to eliminate persistent and invisible chemical pollution.

Food is made of water and energy is made with water. The quantity and the quality of the blue element have a direct and cross-cutting impact on agrifood systems, ecosystems, and energy production and distribution.

The WEF Nexus (T5) will help us better understand these interconnections and support the design of a comprehensive and holistic water cycle approach, taking into account the water trilemma and the new “water balance” framework.

The solution lies in creating more future: visionary innovation, stronger governance, greater inclusion, deeper cooperation

When we hear about “water bankruptcy”, we must not fall into despair or inaction. On the contrary, we should respond as new entrepreneurs eager to invest more and more effectively on the future.

Our communities have the intelligence, the tools, the will to succeed.

We already have powerful tools at our disposal: a **New Tech Blue Hope (T10)** -driven by digital water systems, AI, data, space technologies, nature based solutions - is spreading worldwide and we must accelerate this transformation wave. The water sector is older than the energy one but remains more fragmented and less advanced, yet it holds enormous untapped potential.

We are also witnessing the emergence of new and modern forms of local **water governance**, built around cities, basin authorities and communities, alongside the need for strong national leadership to drive the large-scale investments required (**T9**).

We have **the New European Vision (T3)** and new commitments for a more resilient, sustainable and efficient model of water management, ensuring both equitable water access and stronger transboundary cooperation (**T11**).

We have **innovative financial instruments (T4)**: debt swap mechanisms, water credits and blue carbon credits. Development assistance can become more efficient and less volatile, while insurance companies and financial markets can play a key role in derisking investments and protect communities from water-related disasters.

Two emerging approaches

Finally, EMWF aims to highlight two emerging approaches that are gaining momentum in the global water discussion.

The first is moving beyond the **“Source2sea” (T6)** approach and fully integrates marine ecosystems, the blue economy and coastal systems into water governance and debate. This is a peculiar aspect for the Euro-Mediterranean region where microplastics, found in marine environments have been detected even on mountain peaks, transported by the hydrological cycle. In a semi-closed sea like the Mediterranean, the seas play such a critical role in the hydrological cycle that water can no longer be discussed and managed in isolated silos.

The second is the evolving concept of the **Value of Water (T2)**, seen as a fundamental shift in how society, businesses, and governments perceive and manage water — moving away from viewing it as a cheap and infinite resource toward recognizing its full, multidimensional value as a scarce and strategic asset. Water’s true value extends far beyond its market price, it encompasses social, environmental, and economic benefits. As a result, water must be treated with the same financial, ecological, and strategic importance as energy or infrastructure - recognized as a fragile, life-sustaining, and economically critical resource.

Programme

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29.09			
			SPECIAL SESSIONS
9:30 13:00	OPENING CEREMONY		<p>THE CEO WATER SUMMIT</p> <p>FESTIVAL DELL'ACQUA in partnership with UTILITALIA</p>
SIDE EVENTS AND WORKSHOPS			
13:00 14:30	LUNCH BREAK		
14:30 18:00	<p>T1</p> <p>Water Scarcity and Non-Conventional Water Resources</p> <p>Desertification, Climate Change Impact, Reuse, Desalination</p>	<p>FESTIVAL DELL'ACQUA in partnership with UTILITALIA</p>	
	<p>T2</p> <p>Water Footprint in Business and the "Value of Water"</p> <p>Agrifood systems, Industry, Tourism, Lifestyle Industry</p>		

30.09			
			SPECIAL SESSIONS
9:30 13:00	<p>T3</p> <p>The New European Water Vision</p> <p>Water Resilience Strategy, Water Restoration Law, European Directives on Water Quality, Groundwater Protection</p>	<p>FESTIVAL DELL'ACQUA in partnership with UTILITALIA</p>	
	<p>T4</p> <p>Blue Finance and Blue Investments for Water</p> <p>Water Credits and Blue Bonds, Financial Instruments, Access to IFI and International Funds, Insurance Sector and Risks, Public & private partnership and Blended Finance</p>		
SIDE EVENTS AND WORKSHOPS			
13:00 14:30	LUNCH BREAK		
14:30 18:00	<p>T5</p> <p>Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystems Nexus</p> <p>Sobriety and Performance for all uses of water, Ecosystems management for Nature-based Solution, Energy4water and Water4energy</p>	<p>FESTIVAL DELL'ACQUA in partnership with UTILITALIA</p>	
	<p>T6</p> <p>Beyond Source2Sea Approach</p> <p>One Water Cycle, Coastal Economy, Safeguarding water quality in Islands & Coastal Areas, Coastal Aquifers, Underwater</p>		

01.10			
		SPECIAL SESSIONS	
9:30 13:00	T7	Extreme Events, and Climate Change: Prevention and Management	BLUE ECONOMY GLOBAL CALL by UNIDO BASIN DAY in partnership with INBO
		Early Warning4Med, Land Management, Floods and Droughts, Preparedness	
13:00 14:30	T8	One Health, One Water	WRAP-UP SESSIONS AND CLOSING CEREMONY
		Pollution, Ecosystems Safeguarding, Public Sewage Services as a resource service, PFAS and Micro-Plastics Impacts, Ecohydrology	
13:00 14:30		LUNCH BREAK	
14:30 18:00	T9	Water Governance: Cities, Basin Authorities and Stakeholders Commitment	WATER FOR ALL PEOPLE by UNESCO WWAP BASIN DAY in partnership with INBO
		Conflicts of Use and Water Balance, Allocation of Water by Sector; Community Engagement and Awareness; Water as a Local Resource	
T10	A New Tech Blue Hope - Digital and AI: Water Innovation	SIDE EVENTS AND WORKSHOPS	
	Water Monitoring and Data, Water Services Efficiency, New Technologies for Water, Citizen Science, Water Positive Data Centers and Industries		

02.10			
		SPECIAL SESSIONS	
9:30 13:00	T11	Hydrodiplomacy: Advancing the Right to Water for Peace and Stability	AQUIFER AND GROUNDWATER in partnership with UNESCO, IHP, GEF and UNEP
		Transboundary Water and Groundwater Cooperation, Weaponization of Water, Hydrological Cycle as a Common Good and Water in Post-crisis Contexts	
13:00 14:30		LUNCH BREAK	
14:30 18:00		Technical & cultural visits	
		SIDE EVENTS AND WORKSHOPS	