

16 June 2010

The situation of the Jordan River with special regard to the Lower Jordan River area

The Jordan River is one of the most remarkable rivers of our planet. It is a cultural landscape of universal significance with great historic, symbolic, religious, environmental, agricultural, economic etc. importance for Arabs and Israelis, for Christians, Jews, Muslims and others.

Nevertheless, the Jordan River has been devastated by overexploitation, pollution and lack of regional management. An estimated 98 % of the river's fresh water resources have been diverted by Israel, Jordan and Syria with a resulting 50 % loss of biodiversity.

All that is presently left flowing in the Lower Jordan River is agricultural run-off, diverted saline waters and untreated sewage. While the building of new wastewater treatment centres aimed at removing serious pollutants is a major achievement, if this advancement is not coupled with the allocation of fresh water resources, the situation will only deteriorate. Therefore, without concrete action, long stretches of the Lower Jordan River will run dry by the end of 2011.

The rehabilitation of the Jordan River, and the Lower Jordan River area in particular, is of the greatest importance for Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian local communities sharing the same water challenges, and offers tremendous economic and trust-building benefits. An active cooperation between governments and the local communities concerned may be a major contribution to regional peace efforts.

Several international actors, including the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly, have addressed the situation of the Jordan River. The EU's support may also be decisive. Taking into account that the EU provides extensive funding to development projects in the Middle East, and is committed to the Middle East peace process, has the Commission identified the rehabilitation of the Jordan River, and the Lower Jordan River area in particular, as a peace and development priority in the region? How can the EU and its Member States further encourage and support, also in the framework of the EU-Mediterranean partnership, the development and implementation of a comprehensive management plan to rectify the devastation wrought on the Jordan River as well as strengthening the trust-building dimensions of these efforts?

8 September 2010

Answer given by Stefan Füle on behalf of the Commission

Mr President, honourable Members, I would like to thank you for this opportunity to discuss the critical situation of water in the Middle East.

The European Union considers water to be a serious concern in the region and I fully share the concerns of the honourable Members of this house, as this region is characterised by water scarcity, water stress and the deterioration of the quality of water, which are likely to be further aggravated by climate change effects.

We are aware of the impacts this can have on the people in the region, the environment and regional security. The European Union considers that water is a peace priority in the region and this regional challenge requires a regional solution.

As you are fully aware, the European Union has been involved in encouraging urgent steps towards a comprehensive peace deal between Israel and the Palestinians, where water is one of the 'final status issues' to be resolved, along with borders, refugees, Jerusalem and security.

The European Union recognises the specific situation of the lower Jordan River Basin and the need for more efficient water management including its tributaries. We are therefore engaged in a range of activities at national, sub-regional and regional level with all neighbouring parties. We are supportive of water reforms and policies that encourage the application of sustainable water management.

Through the European Neighbourhood Policy and other measures, the European Union is supporting confidence-building measures, promoting cross-border cooperation and bringing together water resource communities that have shared water concerns.

European Union activities target capacity-building of different water authorities and users, the collection and sharing of data, the availability of treated waste water, water conservation measures, including water networks, and efficient irrigation systems.

European Union efforts address both the demand and supply side of the water sector and establish the conditions that will enable an integrated management of water resources in the future.

The European Union is not alone in its efforts. Member States and other donors are active and we closely coordinate our activities with them in order to ensure complementarity.