



INITIATIVES FROM ISTANBUL

BLUE PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST HIGH LEVEL FORUM

Co-Hosted by
Strategic Foresight Group
and
MEF University, Istanbul

In Cooperation with
Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
and
Political Directorate, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Switzerland

September 19-20, 2014
Istanbul, Turkey



CONFERENCE REPORT

About 90 policy makers, Members of Parliament, serving and former Ministers, media leaders, academics and water experts from across the Middle East came together for the first annual High Level Forum on Blue Peace in the Middle East at Istanbul on 19-20 September 2014. The forum was co-hosted by the Strategic Foresight Group and MEF University of Istanbul, Turkey in cooperation with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and the Political Directorate of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.

The participants proposed concrete initiatives at bi-lateral as well as regional levels to promote cooperation and sustainable management of water resources in the region. The Forum began with special presentations on the experience of the Senegal River Basin Authority in collaborative water management and work in progress of Orontes River Basin Atlas for post conflict water management in Syria and its neighbouring countries.

OPENING SESSION

Prof Dr Muhammed Sahin, Rector of MEF University welcomed the participants to Istanbul. He introduced the co-hosting institution, MEF University, which is implementing new and innovative educational standards such as the concept of the ‘flipped’ classroom. He commended the Blue Peace community on discussing such vital issues and working together to find innovative methods of cooperation for future water security.

The key note address was delivered by Mr. Abdul-Sattar Majid Qadir, Minister of Agriculture and Water Resources, Kurdistan Regional Government, Iraq. In his address he stressed that collective management of water resources is extremely necessary. This could be achieved through cooperation, sustainable use of existing resources and also by supplementing resources with other means such as rain water, spring water and use of new and advanced technology.



Climate change and global warming are affecting existing water resources and a mutual commitment to cooperate and save water is extremely important. Added to this is the additional stress due to the influx of large numbers of refugees in Iraq and other countries in the region. In times like this and in the future, he urged that water should not be used as a pressure point in relations between countries, but should rather be seen as an instrument of developing dialogue and peace.

The Minister declared support for the Blue Peace Process and called for senior policy makers in all countries to be further involved in the process.

On this occasion, Mr Francois Muenger, Head of the Global Water Initiatives in the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation was felicitated and thanked for his commitment to the Blue Peace process. In his response Mr Muenger appealed to High Level Forum to pursue the objective of having water as a dedicated goal in the discourse on post 2015 SDGs.

The Opening Session was chaired by Dr Bakhtiar Amin, former Human Rights Minister from Iraq.

LESSONS FROM SENEGAL RIVER BASIN ORGANISATION (OMVS)

Mr Madine Ba, Secretary General of the OMVS presented experiences of collaborative management of the Senegal River with a view to inspire appropriate lessons for the Middle East. He attributed the successful experience in cooperation to an approach comprising of principles, methods and results.

Principles

- Water as a regional common
- Joint management of water courses
- Joint management of infrastructure
- Consensus in decision making
- Common financial fund.

Methods

- Strong and transparent legal framework for the management of water courses and infrastructure
- Decisions taken by OMVS and not by national governments on the basis of proposals sent by governments to OMVS
- Allocation of water resources on sectoral basis and not on national basis.

Results

- A benefit sharing approach on the basis of return on investments (rejection of water sharing approach discussed in other parts of the world)
- Realisation of development goals in common interest, particular in transport and hydro-electricity, both leading to trade, industry and economic development
- Realisation of peace with OMVS acting as the sole dialogue mechanism between countries at times when other forms of communication breakdown, contributing to trust and better understanding, further leading to comprehensive peace.



Lessons

Mr Madine Ba emphasised on the following lessons learnt from the OMVS experience. He said

- Water does not belong to any one country; it should be treated as a regional common.
- Political will at the highest level is the most essential factor for collaborative management of water resources and periodical meetings between Heads of State and their representatives are essential
- It is essential to have a mental framework which values common benefits over individual and national ego
- Financial support received from Islamic Development Bank in the early period and the World Bank and the Government of China in later phases was valuable
- It is absolutely essential to have a sound institutional mechanism such as OMVS rather than ad hoc arrangements for regional cooperation in sustainable management of water resources.

“Currently in the Middle East we have shared threats, rather than shared benefits”.

Aysegul Kibaroglu, Professor at MEF University, Turkey

ORONTES ATLAS

Mr Christophe Bosch of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation presented work in progress to prepare an Atlas of the Orontes River Basin covering three countries- Lebanon, Syria and Turkey. The Atlas will present scientific and socio-economic data in detail for post conflict water management in Syria and the neighbouring countries. The project, facilitated by World Meteorological Organization is a collaboration between institutions and individual experts in the three countries, blending satellite imagery with feedback from the ground.



CONVERTING TIGRIS CONSENSUS INTO ACTION

The High Level Forum commended the Tigris Consensus Statement between Iraq and Turkey finalised in an innovative Track one and a half exercise of Strategic Foresight Group and the Government of Switzerland in Geneva on 3 June 2014. The Tigris Consensus Statement proposes a way forward to build trust between the two countries, to begin implementing agreements for data exchange, and to promote cooperation in a gradual manner.

The following ideas were proposed at the High Level Forum in Istanbul to move from the Statement to substantive action:

- The two countries should identify one stream gauging station on each side in the border area of the Tigris River to begin the process of data exchange.
- The exchange of data should be simultaneous and should lead to calibration of data and measurements and harmonisation of standards.
- The exchange of data should be about quantity as well as quality of water courses.

Thus, if the two governments take immediate steps to identify only one stream gauging station on each side, they can immediately commence the process of cooperation in data exchange. Once trust is built, they can expand cooperation to other areas of mutual interest and concern.

“Blue Peace platform is essential for cooperation in our region.”
Walid Shiltagh, Senior Ambassador, Iraq

PRINCIPLES OF COOPERATION

The High Level Forum discussed seven Principles of Cooperation.

1. **Water resources should be accepted as a common and shared responsibility.** There was a discussion on the merit and feasibility of treating water resources as a regional common drawing inspiration from the Senegal River Basin. However,

participants felt that the Middle East was not yet ready to take such a leap. In the immediate future, it should be possible at least to accept the Principle of Common and Shared Responsibility, though not of common ownership.

2. **Confidence Building Measures such as data and technology exchange and the development of common methodology should be supported.** This principle is derived from a reality that you can only manage what you know, and therefore there has to be common understanding about what you know. Exchange of data is often a feasible first step on the long path of cooperation. Despite the difficulties in the Middle East, the Tigris Consensus Statement shows that there is a wide support for the principle of data and technology exchange.
3. **Benefit sharing approach should be promoted through cooperation to achieve water, food and energy security.** Water is critical for life because it is the most essential ingredient for human needs such as food and energy. Instead of focusing on quantitative allocation of water resources, it is a lot more productive to focus on how to share benefits derived from water in different economic segments, particularly food and energy.



4. **Riparian countries and communities should cooperate to manage climate risk.** The threat of climate change is real but the degree of global warming and its impact in the Middle East is debatable. Different scenarios about projected increase in temperature are projected by different scientific institutions. Despite such uncertainty about projections, there is a need to plan for response to climate risk in a collaborative manner.
5. **Each country should manage water resources efficiently.** Trans-boundary cooperation will only be feasible if there is efficient utilisation of water resources within countries. In the absence of efficiency, risk associated with water will be exported across boundaries. Efficient utilisation also involves reducing dependence on high water intensive crops such as bananas and honouring cooperative agreements about extracting ground water. It is therefore essential to have a consensus on efficient utilisation by each country.
6. **Water should not be used as an instrument of war and water resources should be protected from terrorist activities and violent actions.** There are indications of new risks to water resources such as occupation of strategic assets by illegitimate violent actors and terrorist groups. There are also risks of destruction of dams and other infrastructure, poisoning of water, flooding of downstream population and cutting off

supplies when such illegitimate actors take control of strategic hydro-assets or areas around them. The High Level Forum in Istanbul particularly discussed concerns arising from the spread of the Islamic State (DAESH) to parts of Iraq and Syria, and their control of Mosul and Haditha Dams in the past and Falluja Dam at present.



7. **Sustainable water management should particularly address the situation of vulnerable communities.** Communities are made vulnerable due to natural factors such as drought and man-made factors including inefficient management. The participants particularly expressed concern about the current drought situation in Lebanon. Initially, such communities are vulnerable to water availability, then to active access to water and then to access to good quality water. This often results in migration. Conversely, refugees and internally displaced persons add a heavy burden to the water supply systems. In order to break such a vicious cycle, it is important to give due attention to water vulnerable communities in the planning process.

The above mentioned seven principles will underpin the work of the Blue Peace Community and processes to establish Cooperation Council for the sustainable management of water resources in the Middle East.

“We need a Water Grid in the Middle East.”
Bassem Shabb, Member of Parliament, Lebanon

MEDIA RESPONSIBILITY

In an era dominated by information technology and communications, the media can play a vital role in spreading awareness and creating demand for collaborative and sustainable management of water resources. The High Level Forum particularly discussed the following ideas, which can be implemented by the media:

- Code of Conduct by the media in its coverage of water and the relationship of water with peace and development.
- A watchdog role with active participation in building awareness about qualitative as well as quantitative aspects of water management in the domestic context and in the regional environment.
- Joint articles by experts and media persons.
- Expansion of media space given to water cooperation issues.

- Documentaries and television programmes, possibly including a documentary on the Tigris River.
- Local and regional networks of like-minded media persons.

CONCLUSION: COMMUNITY AND COOPERATION COUNCIL

The High Level Forum for Blue Peace in the Middle East held in Istanbul in September 2014 demonstrated that the Blue Peace Community of Practise is growing in the Middle East. Beginning with a handful of experts committed to the issue in 2010, the Blue Peace Community has now expanded to include almost 200 policy makers, serving and former cabinet ministers, senior government officials, Members of Parliament, media leaders, scientists and experts. The sheer presence of the decision makers and the opinion makers in Istanbul in a large number is a testament to the growing commitment to the importance of water as an instrument of regional cooperation and comprehensive peace.

The growth of the Blue Peace Community is particularly valuable at a time when the region is engaged in multiple conflicts. The strife has resulted in breakdown of communications between stakeholders. The Blue Peace Community has emerged as one of the rare mechanisms of communication between countries in a period of crisis. It has created a dialogue platform and soft infrastructure for peace, when a window of opportunity opens in the region.

The Blue Peace Community would also underpin the establishment of a Cooperation Council when political realities make such progress possible. As the example of OMVS in the Senegal River Basin demonstrates, political will and a functioning institutional mechanism are essential to foster trans-boundary cooperation. The Blue Peace Process in the Middle East is driven by the belief that such a vision is both desirable and possible.



BLUE PEACE FOR THE MIDDLE EAST

HIGH LEVEL FORUM

Programme

*September 19, 2014
Friday
Crowne Plaza Hotel*

16.00

Special Session: Tigris River Consensus and Protection of the Euphrates-Tigris Basin – How do we move ahead?

Chair: Dr Sundeep Waslekar, President, Strategic Foresight Group

- Dr. Walid Hamed Shiltagh, Head of Regional Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Iraq
- Dr Saban Disli, Member of Parliament, Turkey
- Mr Jamil Nimri, Member of Parliament, Jordan
- Mr Safa Rasul, Deputy National Security Advisor, Iraq
- Prof Dr Mustafa Kibaroglu, Chair, Dept. of Political Science and International Relations, MEF University, Turkey

18.00 *Coffee Break*

19.00

INAUGURAL SESSION

Chair: Dr Bakhtiar Amin, former Human Rights Minister, Iraq

- Welcome by Prof Dr Muhammed Sahin, Rector, MEF University, Turkey
- Welcome by Ms Ilmas Futehally, Vice President, Strategic Foresight Group

Felicitations of Mr Francois Muenger, Head, Global Water Initiatives, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation

- Statement by Mr François Münger, Head, Global Programme Water Initiatives, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, Switzerland

Key Note Address by HE Abdul-Sattar Qadir, Minister of Agriculture and Water Resources, KRG, Iraq

- Address by Dr Bakhtiar Amin, former Human Rights Minister, Iraq

20.00 *Formal Dinner*
 Venue: Crowne Plaza Hotel

September 20, 2014
Saturday
MEF University

09.00 **Session 2 – Framework of Cooperation**
 Chair: Dr Yasar Yakis, former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Turkey

**Special Presentation by Dr Ba Madine, Secretary General, OMVS
on Experiences of the Senegal River Basin Cooperation**

**Presentation on SDC Orontes Project by Mr Christophe Bösch,
Lead Water Specialist, Global Programme Water Initiatives, Swiss
Agency for Development and Cooperation**

Panel Session

- Prof Dr Ahmet Saatci, President, Turkish Water Institute, Turkey
- Dr Shorsh Haji, Head of Parliamentary Group of Change, and former Member of Parliament, Iraq
- Mr George Soulage, Editor-in-Chief, Al-Joumhouria, Lebanon
- Ms Reem Sharaf, Senior Columnist, Al Rai Newspaper, Jordan
- Dr Anwar Omar Qadir, General Director of Planning, Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources, KRG, Iraq

13.00 *Lunch*

14.00 **Session 3 –Vulnerable Populations and Suggestions on Inclusion –
Discussions based on new SFG report**
 ***Chair: Dr Maysoon Zoubi, former Secretary General, Ministry of
Water Resources, Jordan***

- Dr Azzam Alwash, CEO at Nature Iraq, and Advisor to Government of Iraq, Iraq
- Eng Zeina Majdalani, Economic Expert, Office of the Prime Minister, Lebanon
- Ms Maria Saldarriaga, Assistant Professor, Natural Science Department, American University of Iraq, Sulaimani, Iraq
- Ms Hana Namrouqa, Senior Columnist, Jordan Times, Jordan

16.00 *Coffee Break*

**Session 4 – Closing Session and Future Actions in Specific Sectors
Perspectives from – Media, Parliamentarians, Academic
Community and Government Officials**

Chair: Dr Bassem Shabb, Member of Parliament, Lebanon

- Prof Dr Aysegul Kibaroglu, Dept. of Political Science and International Relations, MEF University, Turkey
- Mr Fuad Abdul Hussein, Director General, Ministry of Water Resources, Iraq
- Mr Salim Batayneh, Member of Parliament, Jordan
- Mr Kerim Balci, Editor, Turkish Review, Turkey
- Dr Haytham Mouzahem, Programme Writer, Al-mayadeen TV, Lebanon
- Dr Sarbagh Salih, President, Kurdistan Botanical Foundation, Iraq

Concluding remarks by

- Ms Ambika Vishwanath, Senior Programme Manager, Strategic Foresight Group
- Mr Mario Carera, Senior Political Advisor, Human Security Division, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Switzerland



LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

GUEST OF HONOUR

- ◆ HE Abdul-Sattar Majid Qadir, Minister of Agriculture and Water Resources, KRG, Iraq

BLUE PEACE CORE GROUP

- ◆ Dr Yasar Yakis, former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Turkey
- ◆ Dr Bakhtiar Amin, former Human Rights Minister, Iraq
- ◆ Dr Bassem Shabb, Member of Parliament, Lebanon
- ◆ Dr Saban Disli, Member of Parliament, Turkey
- ◆ Dr Maysoun Zoubi, former Secretary General, Ministry of Water Resources, Jordan

POLICY MAKERS AND EXPERTS

- ◆ Dr Ba Madine, Secretart General, OMVS, Senegal
- ◆ Mr Safa Alsheikh, Deputy National Security Advisor, Iraq
- ◆ Mr Egemen Bagis, Member of Parliament, Turkey
- ◆ Mr Salim Batayneh, Member of Parliament, Jordan
- ◆ Mr Jamil Nimri, Member of Parliament, Jordan
- ◆ Ms Safia Al Suhail, Head of European Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Iraq
- ◆ Dr. Walid Hamed Shiltagh, Head of Regional Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Iraq
- ◆ Prof Dr Ahmet Saatci, President, Turkish Water Institute, Turkey
- ◆ Mr Fuad Abdul Hussein, Director General, Ministry of Water Resources, Iraq
- ◆ Dr Anwar Omar Qadir, General Director of Planning, Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources, KRG, Iraq
- ◆ Mr Mohammed Ameen Faris, General Director of Water Resources, Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources, KRG, Iraq
- ◆ Mr Abdurrahman Uluirmak, Deputy General Director, General Directorate for Water Management, Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs, Turkey
- ◆ Dr Azzam Alwash, CEO at Nature Iraq, and Advisor to Government of Iraq
- ◆ Mr Mustafa Celik, Head of Department for Transboundary Waters, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Turkey
- ◆ Dr Sarbagh Salih, President, Kurdistan Botanical Foundation, Iraq
- ◆ Dr Shorsh Haji, Head of Parliamentary Group of Change, and former Member of Parliament, Iraq
- ◆ Mr Hasan Swadi Abo-Tabik, Consul General of Iraq, Istanbul, Turkey
- ◆ Dr Hemin Latif, Vice President for University Advancement, American University of Iraq, Sulaimani, Iraq
- ◆ Eng Zeina Majdalani, Economic Expert, Office of the Prime Minister, Lebanon
- ◆ Dr Maha Alziydi, Technical Expert, Ministry of Water Resources, Iraq
- ◆ Mr Moaid Mahmoud Al-Tmemy, Chief Senior Engineer, Head of Operation and Planning, National Centre for Water Resources Management, Iraq
- ◆ Dr Walid Saleh, Head, MENA Regional Programme, The United Nations University, Institute for Water, Environment, & Heath (UNU-INWEH), UAE
- ◆ Dr Ibrahim Gurer, Faculty of Engineering, Gazi University, Turkey

- ◆ Prof Dr A. Ünal Sorman, Professor, Middle East Technical University, Turkey
- ◆ Dr Tuğba Evrim Maden, Hydropolitics Researcher and Assistant Editor of Journal of Middle Eastern Analysis, ORSAM, Turkey
- ◆ Mr Diary Ali, Professor, University of Sulaimaniya, Iraq
- ◆ Dr Yadgar Kamal Ahmmad, Lecturer, School of Law, Koya University, Iraq
- ◆ Ms Maria Saldarriaga, Assistant Professor, Mathematics and Natural Science Department, American University of Iraq, Sulaimani, Iraq
- ◆ Mr Riad Al Khouri, Principal and Senior economist, DEA Inc, Jordan
- ◆ Ms Dina Khatay, Director of International Centre for Consultancy and Strategic Studies, Lebanon
- ◆ Dr Hadi Tabbara, Member, MenaPro, Lebanon
- ◆ Ms Kazhal Sami Omar, Director of Relations, Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources, KRG, Iraq

IRAQ MEDIA

- ◆ Dr Ghadah M Al-aammeli, Manager, Almada Group for Media, Culture & Arts
- ◆ Mr Adel Fakhir, Baghdad International News Agency
- ◆ Mr Duraid Abhraham, Al Zawraa newspaper
- ◆ Mr Ammar Tareq Moshin, Al Sumaria News
- ◆ Mr Twana Osman, Journalist, NRT Nalia Radio Television
- ◆ Mr Khaled Suleiman, Journalist, Kurdistan News Agency

JORDAN MEDIA

- ◆ Ms Reem Sharaf, Senior Columnist, Al Rai Newspaper
- ◆ Ms Bayan A. Y. Al Tall, former Director General, Jordan Radio & Television Corporation
- ◆ Mr Tariq al Hmedy, Journalist, Al Rai
- ◆ Ms Hana Namrouqa, Senior Columnist, Jordan Times
- ◆ Mr Zayed Al-dakeel, Journalist, Alghad

LEBANON MEDIA

- ◆ Dr Haytham Mouzahem, Programme Writer, Al-mayadeen TV
- ◆ Mr George Soulage, Editor-in-Chief, Al-Joumhouria
- ◆ Ms Mey Sayegh, International News Editor, Al-Joumhouria
- ◆ Ms Marwa Osman Khreiss, Political Show Host, Etejah English News Channel
- ◆ Mr Kevrok Almassian, Producer Al-Etejah TV
- ◆ Mr Khaled Abou Chacra, Future TV
- ◆ Ms Suzanne Baaklini, Journalist, L'Orient Le Jour
- ◆ Ms Hiam Tok, Journalist, Future Newspaper

TURKEY MEDIA

- ◆ Mr Kerim Balci, Editor, Turkish Review

- ◆ Ms Samantha North, Freelance Journalist, Daily Telegraph, New Statesman

REGIONAL MEDIA

- ◆ Mr Stuart Reigeluth, Editor, Revolve Magazine
- ◆ Mr Abdul Rahman M.Abotolib, Senior Correspondent, Yemen News Agency, (SABA)
- ◆ Mr Omar Alhayani, Writer, Al Jazeera.net
- ◆ Ms Randa Mousa, Journalist, Al Ahram Newspaper
- ◆ Mr Mohammad Ghalan, Science Journalist , Yemen News Agency (SABA)
- ◆ Mr Zeki Aldroubi, Writer, Nature Middle East Journal
- ◆ Mr Mohammed Awal, Journalist, Dar Al Wasat

GOVERNMENT OF SWITZERLAND

- ◆ Mr Manuel Lindegger Etter, Regional Head of Cooperation, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
- ◆ Mr François Münger, Head, Global Programme Water Initiatives, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
- ◆ Mr Mario Carera, Senior Advisor, Office of the Special Representative for the Middle East, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs
- ◆ Mr Johan Gély, Senior Water Policy Advisor, Global Programme Water Initiatives, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
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- ◆ Assistant Prof Dr Baris Caglar, Dept. of Political Science and International Relations
- ◆ Mrs Anjaritta Rantanen, Director, International Office