

# WATER SECURITY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Jerusalem, 24 October 2019

report  
from the Dialogue Workshop



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Dialogue Workshop “Water Security in the Middle East” was held on October 24th, 2019 in the Ambassador Hotel in Jerusalem as part of the EuroMeSCo ENI Project, co-funded by the European Union and the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed). It was organized by the Israel Palestine Center for Regional Initiatives (IPCRI), the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies (AIES) and the IEMed.

A total of 25 participants, including EuroMeSCo researchers directly involved in the project as well as other experts and scholars attended the workshop. This dialogue workshop aimed at discussing the initial research results ahead of the publication of a Joint Policy Study, and engaging the participants in analyzing



and sharing their perspectives on current state of water, water diplomacy and the nexus between water and energy. In addition, this workshop discussed and analyzed relevant conceptual frameworks such as securitization and desecuritization which have important policy ramifications.

With the objective to ensure the active participation of local researchers and practitioners and to relate the discussion with key insights from the field, the workshop started with two guest lectures. The first presentation was delivered by Dr. Jawad Shoquir, a Palestinian Water Expert that discussed the Kidron/Wadi Nasr waste water Project with a focus on successes and challenges in working on water in a difficult political environment. In the second presentation, Dr. David Katz (Haifa University) discussed Israeli approach towards water scarcity. These two presentations were instrumental in presenting the general framework and were points of reference throughout the day.

The workshop unfolded with the presentation of the main findings from the authors that will draft the chapters of the Joint Policy Study. Dr. Christiane Fröhlich (GIGA- German Institute of Global and Area Studies) started, highlighting what was at stake with the water securitization and desecuritization concepts. In the second session, Tobias von Lossow (Clingendael – Netherlands Institute of International Relations) presented the chapter on the current state of water in the Middle East, which was written in partnership with Mahmoud Shatat (Oxford Policy Management). This chapter presents the general situation in terms of water scarcity, mismanagement and water-related conflicts in the region. The chapter also focused on Gaza as a potential model for the future in different areas in the region. Dr. Ali Oguz Dirioz (TOBB University of Economics and Technology) introduced the third session, focusing on water diplomacy and the conditions upon which water securitization can bring different stakeholders across lines of conflict to work together. This session was followed by a session delivered by Dr. Giulia Giordano (Ecopeace Middle East) that presented her work with Dr. Desiree Quagliarotti (Institute for Studies on the Mediterranean CNR-ISMED) on the

nexus between water and energy. This nexus was assessed as crucial in understanding the future interdependence of the different states in the region in ensuring a sustainable management of water. In the last session, Shira Kronich (AIES - Arava Institute for Environmental Studies) and Liel Maghen (IPCRI - Israel Palestine Center for Regional Initiatives) presented a policy brief, making a plea for desecuritizing water issues in the Middle East.

## DETAILS OF THE SESSIONS

### **Kidron Wadi Nasr – Success and Challenges**

Jawad Shoquir presented the deterioration of the Kidron Valley as a case study. He explained how the conflict undermines any ability to develop wastewater treatment centres along the valley and how the springs have been polluted with sewage and wastewater, leading to the deterioration of the streams. In this regard, the presence of settlements among local Palestinian population brought constant conflicts concerning the groundwater, the streams and the wastewater. The presentation emphasized the importance of working with local communities as an opportunity for more sustainable management of the sources. The feedbacks from the researchers and practitioners focused on the different approaches to the work with local communities and highlighted some initiatives that international donors had taken with their counterparts in Palestinian and Israeli official ministries.

### **Water Security in Israel, Current Approach and Challenges**

David Katz presented the current approach of Israel towards water. In order to deal with increasing water scarcity, Israel developed mechanisms of water management, treatment of waste water and desalination schemes. However, there are communities along water sources



that are not connected to the grid, water intensive farming still needs to be improved and desalination needs to be developed with due care for the impact it may have when done intensively in shores. The feedbacks focused on the policy level and how different government offices push for different policies on the same topics. It was clear that a more comprehensive policy on water should be developed and Israel should include all communities living under its control.

### **De Securitization of Water as a Key for Water Diplomacy**

Christiane Fröhlich's presentation focused on the general conceptual framework underpinning the Joint Policy Study. According to her, securitization is the process that brings water into a closed, centralized and security realm involving the military and security agencies, thus taking it away from the civil society and public domain. This process is concerning as it politicizes water policies and makes them subject to hidden agendas. In turn, desecuritization is the process through which water is moving back into the civil society arena through open and participatory approaches, ensuring thereby accountability and monitoring as well as non-politicized agendas. The feedbacks from the participants pointed to the limitations of this conceptual framework. Local experts argued that securitization could lead to more efficient water policies and the other way round and recommended to challenge the merits of desecuritization.

### **The Current State of Water in the Middle East**

Tobias Von Lossow presented the findings of the chapter he writes with Mahmoud Shattat. This chapter offers an overview regarding water scarcity and water management in the region. It also goes through different political conflicts and the water dimension relating to these conflicts. Based on Dr. Shattat's expertise and the profile of other researchers from the group, Gaza was selected as a case study. Despite the unique characteristics of Gaza, it was argued that Gaza illustrates the situation whereby humanitarian basic needs are securitized and whereby conflicts overshadow other considerations and impedes the development of projects and policies related to water.

However, in Gaza and in other countries of the region torn by conflicts, state and non-state actors need to find solutions to work collaboratively on infrastructure related to water security and accessibility. It was clear from this analysis that water is becoming a crucial issue that has severe impacts on local communities across nations and borders. The participants asked for more details about the different conflicts, argued that Gaza had its own and unique characteristics and suggested to include more detailed references to approaches developed by different regimes.

### **Water Related Cooperation and Diplomacy**

Ali Oguz Diriöz focused on water diplomacy and the conditions upon which water securitization can bring different stakeholders across lines of conflict to work together. Dr. Dirioz presented two cases of collaborations as case studies: the first relating to the cooperation between Israel and Turkey and the second relating to international cooperation on the Red-Dead Canal. This triggered questions about the success and failure of both examples. Solutions to improve water accessibility are needed and transboundary projects are often key in this regard. However, the politicization and the national security approach often undermine the implementation of such endeavours. Dr. Dirioz's recommendations focused on the importance of bottom-up solutions. An example of the work on the community level was presented through the work of ECOPEACE and specifically its project "Good Water Neighbours". The case of the Red – Dead Canal and the role of the EU and the UN in promoting it were discussed. Participants also stressed the role of the private sector in promoting partnerships. Echoing discussions from previous sessions, some participants argued that securitization is what mobilized the parties to take action in some cases.

### **Desalination and the Nexus of Water, Energy and Security**

Giulia Giordano presented the initial findings of the chapter she writes together with Desirée Quagliarotti, focusing on the nexus between water and energy, especially in the context of desalination that is seen in the region as a key solution for water scarcity. It was argued that desalination processes may foster interdependence between different states in the region but as they are heavily

centralized and their environmental impact is still uncertain, these projects need to be developed with caution. Furthermore, as desalination tends to be often portrayed as the “solution to all water problems”, it overshadows the importance of improving water management and introducing new regulations. In their feedbacks, participants pointed to the insufficient number of studies on the impact of desalination in the Mediterranean as a whole. It was recommended to look more closely at other countries in the broader region and their dependence on desalination, as in Qatar, and how this impacted their approach towards regional affairs, security and water management. Throughout the discussion, the access to funding was also raised as well as the necessity of countries to be subsidized and supported in order to be able to build and maintain new water infrastructure.



### **Policy Brief “Locally Based Water Security”**

In the last session, Shira Kronich and Liel Maghen shared some recommendations for both local and regional actors. Assuming that water securitization at the national level can cause water to be politicized and local communities to suffer discrimination, it was proposed by the speakers to explore avenues to desecuritize water, decentralize its management and even denationalize its management. This can be promoted through participatory

approaches to management on the local level, water education and promoting environmental awareness. This will enable water diplomacy on the ground level and effective people to people partnerships on shared water interests. Along the same lines, it was offered that the EU could incentivize and subsidize such processes through educating local actors on regional mechanisms for decision making. The EU could also request the participation of different parties in forums on water and subsidize organizations that promote a regional agenda and develop transboundary work with local communities. Some participants challenged the feasibility of excluding the national component in decision making. It was highlighted that this multi-dimensional concept can be complex or visionary and thus should be transformed into concrete steps and clear action items.





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