2026 UN WATER CONFERENCE · IN-PERSON SIDE EVENT · CONCEPT NOTE

Water, Climate and Finance: from the Euro-Mediterranean Water Forum (Sept-Oct 2026) and the Rome Initiative to the UN Water Conference Abu Dhabi (Dec 2026)

Format	In-person side event – Blue Zone
Date & time	Wednesday 9 December 2026, 8:30 a.m. (local time)
Venue	Room 15, 2026 UN Water Conference, Abu Dhabi (United Arab Emirates)
Lead organisation	Mediterranean Water Institute (IME)
Co-organisers	One Water Committee Italy (OWC Italy) · Union for the Mediterranean (UfM)
Interactive Dialogue	F – Investments for water: financing, technology and innovation, and capacity-building
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1. Background

The Euro-Mediterranean region is one of the world's climate change hotspots. It is warming around 20% faster than the global average, and more than 180 million people already live in conditions of water scarcity. Recurrent droughts and increasingly severe floods, groundwater depletion, salinization and pollution are placing growing pressure on water security, food systems, public health and regional stability.

Against this backdrop, the first **Euro mediterranean Water Forum** was held in Rome, at La Nuvola, from 29 September to 2 October 2026, under the theme "Working together to achieve water security in the Mediterranean by 2030". Co-organized by the Mediterranean Water Institute (IME), the One Water Committee Italy and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), the Forum brought together participants from over 70 countries (from *Europe, the Balkans, the Maghreb and the Mashreq)* during 4 days.

The Forum welcomed more than 30 high-level institutional representatives (including Ministers, European Commissioners, United Nations Special Envoys, Ambassadors and Government Delegates) as well as over 700 speakers. Across all Forum activities and the Expo area, total participation exceeded 8,000 attendees.

The Forum also brought together representatives from more than 200 companies, utilities and financial institutions, including over 50 CEOs and managing directors, together with more than 100 sponsors, partners and exhibitors from across the water, infrastructure, energy, technology and finance sectors.

On the eve of the Forum, on 28 September 2026, the **2nd UfM Ministerial Meeting on Water** adopted the UfM Ministerial Declaration on Water in the Mediterranean, endorsed by the 43 UfM Member States. The Declaration sets a shared ambition for 2030 around five priorities – water governance, the Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystems (WEFE) Nexus, water finance and investment, digitalization, and water and climate resilience – and launches the **Rome Initiative on Water**. Ministers committed to submitting the Declaration as a contribution to the 2026 UN Water Conference, and the Rome Initiative is explicitly presented as a Mediterranean contribution to the Conference.

2. Rationale

While Euro-Mediterranean countries have adopted ambitious water policies and strategies, persistent gaps remain in technical capacities, project preparation, investment planning and access to finance. The challenge is not the absence of financial instruments, but their alignment with project preparation capacity, regulatory frameworks and national priorities.

The **Rome Initiative on Water** responds to this challenge by providing a flexible regional cooperation framework to (a) develop the technical capacities needed for comprehensive water management and investment planning, and (b) facilitate the design, financing and management of sustainable water projects.

The Forum also produced a toolbox of innovative solutions that can be replicated in other regions: water credits and blue finance instruments, debt-for-water swap proposals (Debt4Water), the voluntary commitments of the private sector within the CEO Water Commitment Pledge, and the priorities highlighted in the Forum's closing session – scaling up treated wastewater reuse, early warning systems for droughts and floods, better knowledge of water resources and loss reduction, desalination powered by renewable energy, and hydro diplomacy. As the President of the IME recalled in his closing speech, water scarcity is not inevitable: it is first and foremost a governance challenge.

The side event will bring these outcomes to Abu Dhabi, positioning the Euro-Mediterranean region as a living laboratory for water security and connecting regional political commitments with the global water agenda.

3. Objectives of the side event

- Present the key messages, recommendations and commitments of the Euro-Mediterranean Water Forum (Rome 2026) and the 2nd UfM Ministerial Declaration on Water as a regional contribution to the 2026 UN Water Conference.
- Showcase the Rome Initiative on Water as a practical mechanism to strengthen capacities, prepare bankable projects and accelerate SDG 6 implementation.
- Present innovative financial tools and voluntary commitments emerging from Rome (water credits, Debt4Water, CEO Water Commitment Pledge) and discuss their replicability in other regions.
- Build a political and technical bridge between the Euro-Mediterranean agenda and the six Interactive Dialogues of the Conference.
- Foster dialogue among policymakers, financial institutions, development partners, the private sector, science and civil society on shared priorities: water security, blue finance, climate resilience, hydro diplomacy and innovation.

4. Alignment with the 2026 UN Water Conference

The side event contributes directly to the Conference's mandate to accelerate the implementation of SDG 6. Its primary focus is **Interactive Dialogue F – Investments for water**, while drawing on the Forum's 11 thematic areas to inform all six Interactive Dialogues. Several of the Conference's Interactive Dialogues are chaired by Euro-Mediterranean countries – including Egypt, Finland, France and Spain – whose representatives took part in the Forum.

Interactive Dialogue	Forum themes	Contribution from the Euro-Mediterranean Water Forum
A – Water for people	T1, T7, T8	Access to water and sanitation, resilience to extreme events, public health and water quality (One Health, One Water).
B – Water for prosperity	T2, T5, T10	Value of water for the economy, WEFE Nexus, water-use efficiency and reuse, digital innovation.
C – Water for Planet	T1, T6, T7	Non-conventional water resources, the "beyond Source-to-Sea" approach, climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction.
D – Water for cooperation	T3, T9, T11	Multi-level governance, hydro diplomacy and transboundary cooperation, scientific cooperation, European water resilience framework.
E – Water in multilateral processes	T3, T11	UfM Ministerial Declaration on Water as a regional contribution to SDG 6 and the post-2030 agenda.
F – Investments for water (primary focus)	T4, T2, T10	Rome Initiative on Water, blue finance and water credits, Debt4Water, CEO Water Commitment Pledge, project preparation and capacity building.

Forum themes: T1 Water scarcity and non-conventional water resources · T2 Water footprint in business and the value of water · T3 The new European water vision · T4 Blue finance and blue investments for water · T5 WEFE Nexus · T6 Beyond the Source-to-Sea approach · T7 Extreme events and climate change · T8 One Health, One Water · T9 Water governance · T10 Digital and AI water innovation · T11 Hydrodiplomacy

5. Proposed format

Duration: 75 minutes.

Format: high-level, action-oriented roundtable

- **20 mn: Opening session -** Key messages from Rome to Abu Dhabi: Recommendations of the Euro-Mediterranean Water Forum, Rome Initiative and the UfM Ministerial Declaration on Water by Institut Méditerranéen de l'Eau (IME), the One Water Committee Italy and the Union for the Mediterranean.
- **45 mn: High Level Roundtable linked with the Interactive Dialogues** of UN Water Conference (Water for Prosperity, Water for Planet and Investments for Water).
- **10 mn: Closing session** – proposed commitments, next steps and follow-up, towards the next Mediterranean Water Forum and through the UfM Regional Platform on Water.

6. Indicative speakers *(to be confirmed)*

- Organizers: Alain Meyssonnier, President, Mediterranean Water Institute (IME); Emilio Ciarlo, Director General, or Filippo Soccodato, Secretary General, One Water Committee Italy; Frédéric de Dinechin, Senior Policy Advisor for Water, Union for the Mediterranean (UfM).
- Ministerial-level representatives of UfM Member States, including countries chairing the Conference's Interactive Dialogues: H.E Prof. Dr. Hani Sewilam, Minister of Water Resources and Irrigation of Egypt; Hugo Moran Fernandez, Secretary of State of Environment, Ministry of Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge of Spain; Barbara Pompili, Ambassador delegated to Environment representing France in 2026 UN Water Conference.
- Representatives of the co-hosts of the 2026 UN Water Conference (United Arab Emirates and Senegal), subject to availability.
- Special Guest: H.E Retno Marsudi, UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy on Water.

7. Expected outcomes

- Increased global visibility for the recommendations and commitments of the Euro-Mediterranean Water Forum and the 2nd UfM Ministerial Declaration on Water.
- A shared understanding of the Rome Initiative on Water as a regional mechanism to accelerate SDG 6 through capacity building and investment facilitation.
- Concrete partnership opportunities between Euro-Mediterranean actors and international partners (donors, financial institutions, private sector, UN agencies), including project pipelines integrating innovative financial instruments.
- Enhanced visibility of the Mediterranean as a living laboratory of solutions for Water Security.

8. Follow-up and legacy

Following the side event, the organizers will prepare a concise outcome note summarizing key messages, partnership opportunities and proposed follow-up actions, to be shared with delegations and, where appropriate, fed into the Conference's follow-up process. The event will ensure continuity between the Euro-Mediterranean Water Forum, the Rome Initiative on Water and the outcomes of the 2026 UN Water Conference, looking ahead to the 11th World Water Forum (Riyadh, 2027) and the Next UN Water Conference (Dushanbe, 2028).