

EU Rapid Reaction Mechanism – End of programme report

Lebanon/Israel Wazzani springs dispute

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The EU Rapid Reaction Mechanism

The Rapid Reaction Mechanism¹ (RRM) is designed to provide flexible and timely short-term assistance to contribute to the stabilisation of countries undergoing political crisis and to re-establish the conditions under which longer term EU assistance programmes can be effective. The mechanism is triggered in situations of crisis or impending crisis, situations posing a threat to law and order, the security and safety of individuals and situations threatening to escalate into armed conflict.

The RRM plays a key role in improving the EU's crisis management capacity. While it can only support operations for a maximum of 6 months, it provides a frontline response that leverages the resources in the EU's long-term assistance programmes.

In practical terms the Rapid Reaction Mechanism can be said to cover six major aspects of EU crisis intervention:

- assessment of possible Community responses to a crisis ;
- conflict prevention in countries and regions showing significant signs of instability;
- acute crisis management;
- post-conflict reconciliation;
- post-crisis reconstruction;
- fight against terrorism.

That RRM has supported actions in the following key areas of civilian crisis management as identified by the Feira European Council: *police, rule of law, civilian administration*.

The annual budget is in the order of €30 million.

¹ Council Regulation (EC) 381/2001 of 26 February 2001 creating a rapid reaction mechanism. OJ L57, 27.2.2001, p.5.



Summary

This report is submitted to the Council pursuant to article 9 of Council Regulation (EC) 381/2001 of 26 February 2001 establishing the Rapid Reaction Mechanism.

The Commission sent an expert team under the Rapid Reaction Mechanism (RRM) to Lebanon and Israel in October 2002 as part of a concerted international response to rising tensions between Israel and Lebanon over the construction of a pumping station at the Wazzani springs. The team was sent in response to an appeal by the Lebanon and the UN for assistance in resolving the dispute. It was tasked with providing an objective assessment of the technical data upon which a mediated settlement of the dispute could be built.

The Wazzani springs rise in Lebanon close to the Blue Line. Their waters feed the Hasbani river - a tributary of the Jordan, one of Israel's main water sources. Israel objected to the construction of the pumping station without prior consultation, while Hezbollah threatened retaliation to any Israeli attack on the plant.

The study team (to which the French authorities seconded an expert at the request of the Commission) delivered its report in July 2003 (as reported to Member States at the time). It provides a technical overview of the water resources of the whole Hasbani basin. The study also identifies the parameters affecting future development of the water resources in the basin. In the absence of an agreed framework for mediation of the dispute the report has not yet been released, though Israel, Lebanon, the US and the UN have been briefed on its key findings. The report has been delivered to the EU Special Representative on the Middle East Peace Process who is expected to raise the issue on his forthcoming tour to the region in January 2004.

Background

The water resources of the Hasbani basin became a source of mounting tension between Lebanon and Israel in August 2002 when Lebanon announced the construction of a new pumping station at the Wazzani springs. The springs feed the Hasbani river, which rises in the south of Lebanon and crosses the frontier ('Blue Line') to feed the Jordan and subsequently the Sea of Galilee, which is used as Israel's main reservoir.

The pumping station was completed in October 2002. Its purpose was to provide drinking water and irrigation to some sixty villages on the Lebanese side of the Blue line. An existing pumping station supplied a small population on the Israeli side of the line. October 2002 also marked the high point of tension between Israel and Lebanon, with a real risk of armed conflict over the station. The Israelis complained about the lack of prior consultation whereas the Lebanese contended that the project was consistent with the 1955 Johnston Plan on the water resources of the region².

² The Johnston Plan has never been ratified by the parties



The EU and US both sent envoys to the region in late 2002 in response to the rising tensions. The UN also indicated that it was prepared to offer its good offices to the parties and co-ordinated international offers of assistance. On 13 October, the Lebanese Prime Minister invited the EC to provide technical assistance to establish objective baseline information on the water resources of the disputed area. The EC Rapid Reaction Mechanism assessment team arrived in the region two days later, and prepared a preliminary appraisal of the situation as a first contribution within the framework UN co-ordinated response.

Objectives of the programme

The overall objective of the project was to contribute to the reduction of tension between Israel and Lebanon over the sharing of the water resources of the Wazzani springs and the Hasbani river.

The project's specific objective was to provide objective information on volumes of water being extracted from the springs and the Hasbani river and to offer a technical overview of the parameters affecting the usage of the water resources of the Hasbani basin.

Outputs

The study team provided the following outputs:

- a. a hydrological impact assessment of the Wazzani pumping station;
- b. an assessment of water needs for the area served by the Wazzani pumping station and a preliminary assessment of the technical options for meeting these needs.
- c. identification of the parameters affecting the use of water resources in the wider Hasbani basin, including their possible impact on downstream water users.

Management of the programmes and follow-up

The study was designed in close consultation with the office of the EU Special Representative and the UN Special Representative for South Lebanon, Stefan de Mistura. The secondment of a hydrologist from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs proved valuable in ensuring a coherent EU approach to the technical issues underlining the dispute.

The study was been conducted in close collaboration with the Lebanese authorities and in consultation with Israel (which, however, declined to provide any data). The exercise has been co-ordinated with the UN at high level in New York.



Monitoring, Reporting and Evaluation

The programme was monitored by the EC Delegations in Beirut and Tel Aviv. Regular briefings have been given to the EU Special Representative (EUSR) and his staff, the Political and Security Committee, the Council working group on the Middle East Peace Process and the Water Task Force (most recently at its meeting of 16 December 2003). The Commission has ensured regular communication with the US State Department and the UN both at field and headquarters level.

Financial Summary

Programme Ref	Financing Decision	Start Date of project	End Date of project	Project amount	OECD DAC Code
RRM 2002-03 Policy Advice and Mediation Facility	C(2002)1245	16/10/2002	16/04/2003	€86,500	14010 Water resources policy and administrative management

Assessment of Impact

The final report of the RRM team was accepted in June 2003 and a summary of its findings communicated to Member States. Regrettably the mediation process to which the study was intended to contribute has not yet materialised, with the Israelis insisting that the US act as guarantors of its interests in such a process, whereas Lebanon is seeking a UN framework. The UN is ready to provide its good offices to the parties to the dispute but is not prepared to mediate between intermediaries.

It was agreed in discussions with the EUSR and the Council that an early public release of the Wazzani study in the absence of a political process for the resolution of the dispute would undermine its value. However, the Commission has provided oral briefings on the main findings of the study to the Lebanese Prime Minister, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the UN and the US State Department.

The dispute remains unresolved. Nevertheless, it is clear that the concerted international response to the crisis on the Israel–Lebanon border sparked by the Wazzani pumping station was effective in reducing tension in the area and avoiding a military engagement. The Wazzani study contributed an important practical element to the international response, and was effective in strengthening the role of the EU in the dispute in a number of distinct ways:

- it provided concrete demonstration of the effective engagement of the international community in the dispute;
- it contributed to ensuring continued international scrutiny of the issue throughout the six months of the study period;
- it ensured the EU Prime Ministerial level access on the issue in Lebanon;



- it provided a non-political channel of contact with the Israeli side, which eventually led to an official Israeli demarche and non-paper on 2 February 2003;
- it provided an opportunity for reinforced co-operation with the United States, resulting in regular briefing sessions with State Department officials;

The issue remains on the agenda, though good Winter rains are expected to take the edge off the dispute for the time being (as was the case in Winter 2002/3). It is expected to be raised by EUSR Otte during his January visit to the region. The Commission has indicated that it will seek the advice of the EUSR and Member States before releasing the full study.

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