

Foreword



Marcelino Iglesias Ricou

No one can deny the fact that today we are living in 'a global village', a space in which, despite all our cultural, religious or any other type of differences, the major problems affecting us are common to all. Without any doubt, water will have an immense strategic role to play in the development of cities in the 21st century. Some world analysts venture to suggest that it will be even more important than oil. It is an incontestable fact that the most important human settlements always appeared on the banks of a river. In Aragon, especially Zaragoza, the Romans realized over 2000 years ago that this space had the makings of a strategic economic centre of the highest order because of good water availability.

We live in a world that is experiencing climatic changes, causing major transformations in meteorological behaviour. Alongside extended droughts, there are episodes of torrential rainfalls and serious floods. All these phenomena affect, with ever-increasing intensity, all corners of the earth. Europe is no exception.

All this leads us to consider the rational use of water and its exploitation. Water is a precious and scarce commodity enjoyed by mankind, but we do not own it. We are, and sometimes we forget it, mere users of this natural resource that is essential for human survival, and we cannot spoil these resources for future generations. This is why we must make an effort to manage water resources in an intelligent and rational manner. Future urban, agricultural and industrial development will depend upon efficient water management. Any area from which water may disappear would be an area condemned to poverty and oblivion. This would be an area condemned to desertification and abandonment.

In Aragon, we are well aware of the importance of water for sustainable

development. A strange paradox occurs in our Autonomous Community. There are abundant water resources in our headwaters. The Pyrenees is an area in which water is just one of the elements making up the landscape. On the other hand, wide areas in the interior of Aragon suffer from drought endemically. There is also an extensive desert in Aragon. These water resources have been misused for centuries. Our aim is to remedy this situation, as indeed we must.

Aragon is a region in which water has become one of its main problems, which have intensified as a result of the recent conflict with the National Hydrological Plan of Spain, which amounts to a massive transfer of water from the River Ebro to the Mediterranean Coast.

We in Aragon believe that this Plan breaches not only Spanish legislation and Community Law with regard to this transfer, but also the simplest of all unwritten laws: common sense. It aims to resolve 21st century problems with 19th century formulae. And yet a good many parts of the world, in similar circumstances, have for years refrained from using transfers as a solution. New alternatives are available that are cheaper and kinder to the environment. In Aragon, we wish all parts of Spain to be prosperous, but with solutions that are viable and which do not turn Aragon into a desert and negatively impact on the environment.

Aragon's most serious problem is the Ebro transfer. In October 2001, the Government of Aragon lodged an appeal on the ground of the anti-constitutional nature of the Act of the Spanish Parliament that passed this measure, alleging, among other things, the contradiction between the regulation of the Ebro transfer and the principles of territorial planning and environmental protection contained in the 1978 Spanish Constitution. The Constitutional Court will, in time, deliver a judgement on this important issue.

In November 2001, the Government of Aragon lodged a complaint before the European Commission, claiming that several articles of the National Hydrological Plan Act were in breach of the Community Laws. Two further complaints are being prepared in terms of the most recent case law of the Court of Justice of the European Communities, relating to how this water transfer scheme is being planned, which is also in breach of major Community regulations.

We are receiving positive feed-backs regarding the Government of Aragon's complaint from various sections of the European Commission. The Government of Spain is being constantly asked for additional information, which should help the Commission to take a position that we are increasingly confident will be similar to Aragon's views.

In addition, we have had intensive and extensive political contacts with different divisions of the Community. For example, I had a constructive meeting with the President of the Commission, Romano Prodi, in March 2002, during which I had the opportunity to explain to him in full detail, with facts and figures, the reasons why Aragon is opposed to the Ebro transfer project.

There is resistance in the areas most adversely affected by the transfer, such as the Ebro Delta and Aragon. Furthermore, the Autonomous Community of Cataluña has just declared its opposition to the Plan.

At no point has the general public been provided with actual figures regarding the cost of the measures. Even the defenders of the Plan have been forced to admit that the real cost of transferred water is much higher than that of desalinated water. There will be no future users of transferred waters, if they are to consume water at that price. As we have said and have demonstrated from

the outset: this is a project which, because of its very high cost, cannot have any users.

The Plan is feasible if huge public subsidies are to be provided, both for building the infrastructures and for exploiting them. Paradoxically, Aragonese money is being used to build a scheme that threatens its own future. Similarly, without European subsidies, the project is unthinkable.

The Government of Aragon requested prestigious international experts on water to review the Plan objectively. Some of these analyses are included in this Special Issue. These reviews were presented and discussed in public in the European Commission and the European Parliament. I hope their conclusions will help to persuade the public that the Ebro transfer does not fit in with the context of modern concepts of water management, that water prices and construction and execution costs are unfeasible, that regulation of uses does not go far enough, that the environmental impacts of the transfer are unsustainable, and that the recycling of wastewater, improvements in irrigation and desalination, can resolve the problem. It is my hope that the opinions, studies and assessment of this problem by some of the world's foremost water research centres from Mexico and the United States will change the minds of those who stubbornly refuse to accept what is obvious.

Water plays such an important part in our awareness as a people that we have decided that all our ideas and knowledge on the subject are worth disseminating throughout the world through the holding of a World Exhibition. This is why it is our aim to host EXPO 2008 in Zaragoza. The central theme for this exhibition is to be Water and Sustainable Development of Cities. We are convinced, as Ortega and Gasset said, that the topic of our time is water. Without water, there is no progress. Without water, there is no life. Without water, there is no future.

This is where the future of Aragon lies. Water is a driving force for the development of cities and regions in the 21st century. Nothing and nobody has the right to play around with natural resources as is now being planned in Spain. Zaragoza aims to be a major city centred on two strategic elements: water and logistics. Aragon is determined that her entire territory will take part in a better future. The papers and analyses contained in this Special Issue will go a long way to establish that the National Hydrological Plan of Spain cannot be justified in economic, social and environmental terms.

Finally, I would like to express my own personal appreciation to Professor Asit K. Biswas and Professor Antonio Embid for their hard work and dedication which made this Special Issue possible

Marcelino Iglesias Ricou
President of the Government of Aragon
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