

Possible Turkish Role in the Solution of Regional Water Shortage in the Middle East

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Peace Pipeline Project

The Peace Pipeline Project was first aired by then Prime Minister Turgut Ozal in 1986. A feasibility study for the Project was completed in 1988. The project envisaged that Turkey would provide whole Arabian Peninsula, with the exception of Yemen, with water from its Seyhan and Ceyhan Rivers, both empty in Mediterranean in the Adana region, through a pipeline. In fact the Peace Pipeline Project consists of two separate pipelines namely western and eastern (Gulf) pipelines. It is estimated that the Project would cost 20 billion USD and could carry 16 million cubic meter of water a day.

The western pipeline with a total length of 2,700 km will start in Turkey, continue to Syria and Jordan, probably Palestine, and reach Saudi Arabia. In the first announcement made by Turkey mention was made of a plan to use this pipeline to give water to Israel as well. However, due to negative responses from Arab countries, this plan was never mentioned again. The eastern (Gulf) pipeline is designed to pipe water from Turkey to the Gulf States namely, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates and Oman, through Syria and Jordan again. The eastern pipeline will have a 3,900 km length. The average cost of water was calculated at 0,85 USD per cubic meter for the eastern pipeline and slightly higher, 1.07 USD, for the eastern pipeline. Compared with the cost of desalinated water, these are much cheaper.

The Peace Pipeline Project has never found a chance of implementation, despite its feasibility. First financial problems prevented it. However the real obstacle is political. Arab states are not ready to rely on water from Turkey. Syria and Saudi Arabia are expressed their opposition to the Project, although Jordan seemed cooperative. The possibility of giving water to Israel attracted criticism from the Arab media.

A single and much shorter pipeline would be an alternative to the original project. In this case a pipeline would be built to carry water from Seyhan and Ceyhan Rivers to Syria, Jordan, Palestine and probably to Israel depending on the developments in the peace process in the region. This is a shorter version of the western pipeline, cutting at least half of the original length and of course costs amounting nearly a total of 4-5 billion USD. Finance for the project would come partly from the US, and probably EU, who engage in building peace and stability in the region and the Islamic Development Bank. It should be noted

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that water is an important element of the Arab-Israeli conflict and will continue to be the same in the future, especially given the high population growth rate and increasing demand for water in the arid lands of the Middle East. To materialize such a project, cooperation of Syria who opposed to the original plan is essential. After the death of the Hafiz Asad, the new Syrian administration under Beshar Asad has seemed to change the traditional way the Syria behaved in the past. The new administration tries to build good relations with the west, particularly with the US. It also tries to bring changes to the Syrian social and economical life, adopting a much more open society project both in terms of economics and social structures and individual liberties. Syria also tries to establish good relations with Turkey, as witnessed in the case of expelling Abdullah Ocalan and following events. Once Syrian cooperation is secured there remains no obstacle for the Peace Pipeline Project. However the willingness of the US to support the project financially, and if it will be extended to Israel a settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, seems preconditional.

Manavgat Water Supply Project

The Manavgat Project is based on a plan to provide both regional countries and other cities of Turkey suffering from water-shortage with water from the Manavgat River in Antalya. Antalya is itself with important water shortages, especially in summer where demand to water is high due to tourism and seasonal drought. The plan first reported at the end of the 1980s, although the project was initiated in 1993. 150 million USD was spent for the Manavgat Project which was finally completed in 2000. The project consists of a 11 km pipeline to carry water from the Manavgat reservoir to a water station at the Mediterranean Sea 2 km away from coastal Antalya.

Since the declaration of its plan to build the Manavgat Project by Turkey, the transportation of water from Antalya to its final destination is regarded as being the most important problem for the feasibility of the Project. After all those years, it still remains unsolved. The water tankers, like petrol tankers, have been thought as a way of transportation. However, their capacity is quite limited to carry huge amounts of water. Another means of transportation would be huge plastic bags hauled slowly by boat loaded with water. This alternative also does not seem reliable since it has not been tested anywhere to that extent.

The Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs of that time, Ismail Cem, declared in 2000 that Libya is interested in buying water from the Manavgat Station. However, there has been no further development in providing Libya with water. It could be argued that Libya changed her mind. It is reported that in August 2002 Turkey and Israel reached an agreement over the Manavgat water. According to the Turkish Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources Israel agreed to buy water from the Manavgat station for 20 years on a 50 million cubic meter yearly basis. Although the price of the water was not made public it is reported that a cubic meter water will cost one USD to Israel. Despite the Turco-Israeli accord for Manavgat water, the question of transportation had not been solved. At the end

of January 2006, it was declared that the parties cancelled the water agreement as a result of the high cost of Manavgat water.

From the initiation of the Manavgat Project, it was criticized by the Arab media reporting that Turkey would provide Israel with water. However, the project is not designed for Israel alone. The amount that Israel agreed to buy was only 10% of the water available from the Manavgat Station. Remaining water could be supplied to any country interested in buying water on the basis of mutual negotiations. It could be said that Arab countries are always reluctant to buy water from other countries, even they could get water at cheap rates compared to de-salinazition of sea water. This could be partially due to the fact that many of them aim to be self-sufficient in water, like Saudi Arabia and Libya. Other Arab countries, like Jordan, could be willing to buy water but they lack of financial resources. Increasing level of diplomatic and commercial relations between Turkey and Arab world may introduce a possibility of water export from Manavgat station. There is also a chance for exporting water to Cyprus, including both Northern and Southern parts of the island.