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INTERVIEW WITH:

*Mr. Lionel Platteuw
Executive Director
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PM Content:

Since the establishment of the European Water Partnership it has become an essential forum for stakeholders in the water sector. Mr. Platteuw, could you please give the 2.1 million readers of The Daily Telegraph your introduction to the EWP and its role as a catalyst for cooperation on water issues between governmental agencies, academia and the private sector?

Mr. Lionel Platteuw:

The European Water Partnership was born from two initiatives. Approximately seven years ago a number of us were involved in the preparation of the water sanitation technology platform. It is one of 40 technology platforms which were initiated here by the European Commission in order to prepare the research agenda. This initiative looked into research needs in water up until 2030 and the exercise required very much of a multiple stakeholder approach. However, it was somewhat biased towards research needs in order to define the research agenda at the European level. At the same time, we were also involved in the preparation of the World Water Forum which was held in March of 2006 in Mexico City. These two events were really the pillars for the initiation of the European Water Partnership.

We saw that there was a very crying need for much better coordination and organization of the water sector. Whilst we have never sought to become the sole representative body for water, it was clear that an interface was absolutely vital to help the water sector develop and to address water needs. The initial focus was on doing this at a European level; but there remained a very strong vocation to address water in terms of the needs of humanity and not just a European approach. We nevertheless felt the need to insist on the challenges at the European level because there is a curious lack of awareness of real water challenges on a regional level. Indeed if you take the wider Europe as a geographical entity rather than the European Union itself it is evident that the water and sanitation needs are really quite important and we face some very serious challenges in areas such as Eastern Europe.

There are a huge number of disenfranchised people who have access to neither sanitation nor proper drinking water. This situation has been very much exacerbated and there are enormous uncertainties about just how much worse it will get as climate change impacts the water sector. Certainly the trends in the water sector indicate that in many areas there has been an improvement in the quality of drinking water. Although there are a number of positive developments, on the whole, the overall pressures are increasing on the water sector. We have an enormous strain being put upon water resources through human usage ranging from agriculture to industry. There really is a great deal of work to be done by trying to deploy our resources, technology and know-how. Much can also be done in order to improve the organization of the water sector and address some of these issues.

PM Content:

One of the primary objectives of the European Water Partnership is to place water on the mainstream political agenda as well as raising water's profile in the media. What are some of the difficulties you face in terms of communicating the urgency of water challenges to policy makers and the business community?

Mr. Lionel Platteuw:

Indeed we felt from the very beginning that putting water on the European agenda was absolutely vital. We are equally aware that discussions at a European level must also consider the national and regional level. There are many different actors across the water sector and throughout the political landscape. But in order to do that we basically tried to make these issues more widely known. We have really only scratched the surface of this challenge and have a very strong sense that this is about having innovation in organizations. By this I am not referring to innovation not just in a technical sense because this process is often seen in a very technical way. People often talk about technological innovation, but really what we are looking at is changing the approach and mindset to address water issues.

Accordingly we have worked very closely with EU institutions and have had a very strong echo from the European Commission, the European Parliament, as well as other EU institutions like the Committee of Regions. They have all recognized that because we have a very neutral role in water. The EWP is not really coming from a traditional sort of lobbying community of the water sector. We are an interesting organization to work with because we have the potential to really help promote change in the water sector. What we are trying to do is drive some projects which will improve water awareness. Our flagship program is called "Aquawareness" it breaks down into a water awareness and water stewardship program.

PM Content:

As you mentioned The European Water Partnership is carrying out numerous programs to foster water awareness, and a water stewardship initiative applicable to the entire water cycle. Could you tell us some more about this and how would you evaluate the impact of this initiative?

Mr. Lionel Platteuw:

The "Aquawarenes" program is having a formal launch on June 30th of this year. What we have been doing so far is to have a very wide consultation process to bring participants and stakeholders to develop this program. We are reaching out to communities in order to try to make them aware of the need to participate and help define the program. Here I include for example the agricultural & farming communities, NGO's, industry and local government. The idea is that if you are going to make an impact on the water cycle, you are going to have much more interaction between these actors who all either use water or are involved in wastewater, and whose actions make a major impact on the water cycle. We clearly have a strong

vocation to look at sustainability and biodiversity. Some of our stakeholders come from these areas but we are not positioning ourselves as a purely environmental NGO because we are acting in a very neutral way which is in line with our multiple stakeholder strategy.

PM Content:

In preparation for the World Water Forum to be held in Istanbul during March of 2009, the EWP is spearheading a consultation known as "The European regional process" involving many international institutions, the European Commission, multinationals and SME's. To what extent can this kind of consultation help to develop effective management strategies and mobilise international funding for water sector initiatives?

Mr. Lionel Platteuw:

The World Water Forum has traditionally been more of a sort of governmental meeting of minds. There has been a very strong presence from NGO's. I think we are seeing that with the increase in water awareness the need is for a much greater multiple stakeholder collaboration. So far we have had a number of initial stakeholder meetings where the key themes are being distilled and identified in the water sector. One example is water and energy. How much energy are we consuming for our water pumping and water processes? On the other side of the equation we want to determine to what extent can water resources be used to explore renewable energy reserves from hydro? These six themes have been selected by these stakeholder discussions and they will be aired at the meeting of the World Water Forum in Istanbul.

The other regions of the world are present in this process. There is one in America, Africa in Asia and a complicated one occurring in the Middle East. This is really a platform for the exchange of ideas. Equally it is an opportunity for politicians and the key actors to crystallize their ideas and come to terms with some of the real challenges we face. We are trying to put water at the centre of the political agenda. The current discussions are on the food crisis and many people have associated it with water issues. But of course this is sadly a very well known situation since water has been for some decades, one of the key obstacles to adequate food and nutrition. It has been a major factor in addressing HIV/AIDS, and issues such as infant mortality through links with malaria and other diseases. Putting water back into the centre of these issues can also help us to look for better ways of making water available for food. The energy angle is a very interesting one as well and is very much a part of European objectives of meeting the Kyoto protocol and a global objective.

PM Content:

Approximately 90% of the water drawn in developing countries is used in agriculture for irrigation. The agricultural sector seeks to produce more food using less water per unit of output and reducing the negative impact on aquatic ecosystems. How can

better water management contribute towards more effective higher yielding agriculture in the years ahead?

Mr. Lionel Platteuw:

It would be a bit of a trap for me to try and simplify the means of making water available for agriculture in developing countries. Certainly as the European Water Partnership we believe that an integral solution to the water crisis in the developing countries is the only viable one. By integral I mean the collaboration of different participants. No single solution can be found without the proper participation of the political authorities. The focus must be placed on *innovative techniques* but not necessarily technologies.

We all know that there are massive governance issues in terms of water. In addition, we recognize that there is a rather sterile debate about the public sector versus a private sector solution to the provision of water. We think a much more innovative multiple stakeholder approach and the development of appropriate organizational solutions are what is needed. There has been a great deal of criticism from the NGO community and sometimes from other stakeholders about the water solutions being provided and sometimes criticized as being imposed upon regions and communities. What we must take into consideration are the actual local requirements. It is important to have an approach which addresses the needs of all stakeholders. To be practical, an agricultural sector that requires innovative solutions has to use more efficient methods of irrigation. These methods can draw on some very recent technology but also on age-old traditions. The solutions will be political and financial. We are working very carefully on the financial dimension of this although we are not particularly advanced in providing financial solutions in the poor economies.

PM Content:

UNESCO's 2nd World Water Development Report published in March 2006 emphasized that a key element in today's water crisis is one of governance and inadequate policy formulation. In your opinion what role does good governance play in the water sector in terms of balancing the economic & political dimensions of water?

Mr. Lionel Platteuw:

Well the motivations of key actors in the water sector whether you take them to be political entities, elected officials, bureaucracies, or an administrative centre, are dependent upon the instruments that they use and the regulatory framework within which they operate. There is a universe of research available on governance since several generations of humankind have worked on these extraordinarily complex and rather intractable problems of good governance, and also more specifically from the perspective of development and the water sector. From a European perspective, the first point is to acknowledge that within Europe there are many of improvements which can be made in terms of the way our own governance operates on water. As I said at the beginning, much of this is

not particularly unique to the European context. By extension therefore if we can develop appropriate solutions by working with local stakeholders via our water stewardship or water awareness program; then we have at least some best practices and good models that can be replicated.

Needless to say globalization means that we have stakeholders from countries such as Greece, Spain, or the U.K. One sees that many of these actors are actually also present in the developing countries working in Asia and Africa on different projects. The institutions we are with whether it is the World Bank, the World Business Council on Sustainable Development, or European institutions, are all working carefully at a global level. We really have a sense that the best way to address this is by looking at best practice and by trying to understand the motivations of elected or unelected actors in the water sector to create and act in the best interests of the efficient provision of water and sanitation. The complexity is that if you try to understand who these actors are and what instruments are required for each of them, you really need an appreciation of the right models to do that.

The financing models for example are really crucial because in many of these countries we don't have the existing infrastructure to work with. The provision of water and adequate sanitation really requires in some cases substantial investment. We never say that the financial challenges are the biggest; but if you do not have adequate investment in infrastructure in some of these countries you don't really stand a chance of reaching any adequate standards of drinking water and sanitation.

PM Content:

Today inadequate sanitation & lack of access to clean drinking water is one of the single greatest mortality factors in the world. Cholera, dysentery, typhoid & various waterborne parasites can flourish in these circumstances. In addition to investment & significant capital expenditure on infrastructure, what are some of the biggest challenges towards addressing sanitation and improving access to water in the parts of the world where it is most needed?

Mr. Lionel Platteuw:

It is fairly easy to do a historical criticism of why despite the enormous efforts that has been made in development. I think a positive way to address it is to try and insist on the contextual framework of how these problems are addressed. One must emphasize innovative thinking and forward looking mindsets in order to address these challenges. We have to look ourselves in the mirror and ask ourselves why the world is still facing such and extraordinary crisis of development, and how more than a billion people have become accustomed to this. It is an astonishing situation and a vast majority of mankind does not want to live with. We really need to look at a different way of approaching these challenges. For example, when one considers the substantial budgets that governments and multilateral institutions commit to development, we can see that many of these efforts are going against the trend of other factors. Here I would look at the trade framework and the agricultural subsidies that exist. The amount of

investment that we make at the European Union level to try to maintain our agricultural subsidies represents approximately 40% of the European Union's budget. Although there are huge efforts underway you have to see the framework and understand that it is the trading regime that is hurting agriculture.

PM Content:

Hydroelectric power is one of the most cost effective and environmentally sustainable renewable energy resources. In recent weeks crude oil prices have broken all records surpassing 123\$ a barrel. In this context what role do you believe hydropower and other renewable energies will have in the world's rapidly changing energy scenario?

Mr. Lionel Platteuw:

Hydro has been exported for many years both in the developed and the developing world. I would rather focus on renewable sources of energy. Obviously the price of oil is creating a massive incentive and stimulating the renewable energy sector. We are seeing some really massive investments in a number of renewable energy options in Europe and the U.S. This is driven by oil prices, the regulatory framework including the emissions trading scheme and the Kyoto Protocol. Hydro is one solution which has to be considered very much on the merits of each particular region. There are some highly controversial initiatives ongoing now in Sudan and China. It is very difficult to generalize and propose that hydropower would be the universal solution.

PM Content:

The scientific community has been developing new technologies in filtration & membranes with diverse applications in water management, industrial productivity, & environmental protection. Many countries are making significant investments in desalination technology. How would you define the overall contribution of technology & science in the field of sustainable water management?

Mr. Lionel Platteuw:

Well I think there are some parallels with the aforementioned energy debate. Many people are advocating making energy available more cheaply. On the opposite end of the spectrum others emphasize the need to focus on energy efficiency. This is a rather simplistic debate that has gone on and we are in a somewhat similar situation with water. It is possible of course to desalinate & treat fairly contaminated water to turn it into drinkable water. Even human urine can be processed so that it is perfectly suitable for drinking water. The problem is always the cost and the challenges to determine the best ways to address them. There are situations where desalination is a sensible option. However, there are a lot of drawbacks to desalination. We have to acknowledge that technical development is making a difference and that desalination is becoming much more energy efficient. There are ways to dispose of the by-products of desalination such as the brine.

I am very cautious about the extent to which technology can provide solutions. For example despite the size of the water sector and appreciating its importance for human use; there is very little understanding of what is really happening in the water cycle. What is the impact of the chemicals that reach the water table after either industrial or personal use such as the ingestion of antibiotics? If you look at the chemicals that are used in the agricultural sector, there is a great deal of information that we are still in the process of gathering.

One of the roles of the European Water Partnership is not only encourage the research and work to improve our understanding; but also we are rather painfully aware that there is a great deal of research that has not been adequately exploited. This is a waste of resources and a poor reflection of the overall coordination of the water sector. It is one of the reasons why we sense that much more exchange and coordination in the water sector can really yield benefits. Sometimes we have to realize that reinventing the wheel is rather inefficient. Many people have done some excellent work that hasn't been exploited. This exploitation can be in terms of developing products and commercializing ideas that have sat on a shelf. We are really looking at the whole process and our challenge is to determine the triggers needed to really exploit proper innovation and disseminate the best practices.

PM Content:

Mr. Platteuw what have been some of your biggest professional satisfactions throughout your career in the water sector and now as Executive Director of the European Water Partnership?

Mr. Lionel Platteuw:

The people who work in the European Water Partnership are certainly motivated and share a very strong consensus of ideas. I happen to also be acting as an advisor for other organisations in the environmental sector. We are undergoing a period of change and adaptation. What is interesting about working in the water sector is that there is a wave of interest and the appreciation that we need to act more on water. Clearly this fits in very well with the issue of sustainability that we are entering into now. It is certainly very rewarding to see that the growing interest in environmental sustainability is something which makes working with these organizations rather interesting, because there are an awful lot of different initiatives underway. Here in Brussels we are seeing an explosion of interest whereby even the most traditional thinkers in terms of industry are really working on environmental footprints and trying to understand their real impact. This has been driven by public opinion and new instruments which are aimed at ensuring better stewardship & improved management. There is a universal consensus really that we need to be working in this area and make the right choices. There is also a consensus that we have an obligation to future generations to do that. There is a great deal of ground to catch up on.

PM Content:

What would be your final message to the 2.1 million readers of the Daily Telegraph, and particularly those active in your field to consider the EWP as their partner in the sector today?

Mr. Lionel Platteuw:

We are really seeking much more engagement from different stakeholders in the water sector. There are a great number of organisations we are already connecting with but we are still a modest organisation that really relies on the resources and the dedication of a number of people who believe in our initiatives. Our request would be for more people to get involved. It could be in terms of participating on particular projects or by sharing best practices in water. I reckon that the main trait of the people we are working with is that they are willing to question a little bit their own practices and their way of thinking. There are some relatively easy quick gains to be made providing that we are willing to overcome some of the traditional barriers that have stood in the way of more sensible policies in terms of water supply and sanitation. We are really grateful for all of the superb organizations, businesses, NGO´s and governmental actors we are presently working with. But we know that this is still a relatively small niche group of people. In the last month we established a new partnership with the global footprint network which is a worldwide organization of ninety different partners who analyze environmental footprints in the overall sustainability dimension. Partnerships with organizations like this are an excellent way for us to spread knowledge and making sure that the projects we are working on are really tailored to the needs and initiatives we are working on but without again re-inventing the wheel. There is an extraordinary range of activities going on and helping to disseminate these diverse initiatives is a role in itself.

PM Content:

Many thanks for your time and comments and we wish you the best of luck.

