Cross-border Mediterranean project led by Technion scholar gets 4.3m. euros

Mare Nostrum initiative has partners and advisers from nations across the region

By SHARON UDAASIN

The European Union has awarded a multinational Mediterranean preservation project — led by a Technion professor — a grant of $4.3 million euros to develop mechanisms for protecting the basin’s coastline.

The three-year project, called Mare Nostrum, is receiving funding as part of the European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument’s Cross-Border Cooperation in the Mediterranean Program. Aiming to bridge the legal-institutional gap in the implementation of Mediterranean policies on “integrated coastal zone management” (ICZM), Mare Nostrum has 11 partners from Israel, Jordan, Malta, Greece and Spain as well as advisers from Turkey, Germany and Italy.

Project participants are in Haifa for a launch conference, which began with an Israeli coastline tour on Sunday.

“The Mediterranean Sea has for millennia served the people living on its shores as a precious common resource,” said Prof. Rachelle Alterman, initiator and coordinator of Mare Nostrum and an urban planning and law professor at Haifa’s Technion-Israel Institute of Technology. “The project’s primary goal is to contribute to bridging the policy-implementation gap between the ideals of ICZM and its actual effects on the ground at the local, national and cross-border levels.”

Project participants have identified lack of institutional coordination, insufficient legal mechanisms and existing property rights as the impediments toward implementing a more cohesive cross-border plan for preserving the Mediterranean Sea, a statement from the program explained. Not only can the project help to protect the sea through legal and institutional instruments, but it can also lead to improved dialogue and cooperation across international lines, the statement said. This way, socioeconomics and environmental sustainability can improve all along the Mediterranean perimeter, with the coastline itself becoming more and more resilient to natural and manmade hazards, the project stressed.

“The major aim is to get the partners on the same page for this extensive project,” Alterman told The Jerusalem Post on Sunday night. Rather than work government-to-government, the project is to operate through the cooperation of academic, municipal and NGO partners, she explained.

“This entire package is supposed to work together to produce more implementable regulations and solutions to help protect the Mediterranean Sea,” said Alterman, who is an expert on land regulation.

While there are international protocols and conventions in place regarding the Mediterranean Sea, they do not function well on the ground, independently, she said. In the framework of the project, Alterman is therefore employing a strategy different from the typical top-down policy fulfillment routine. Instead, she said, that project participants will examine instruments on the ground and then incrementally begin to share these instruments and ideas — creating laws and regulations that will be integrated “one notch at a time from the bottom-up.”

Alterman stressed that she also hopes to engage North African countries toward the latter portion of the three-year project.

“We want to have a cultural and language bridge to North African stakeholders through our excellent Jordanian partner — the Amman Center of Peace Development,” she said.

Sunday’s tour of the Israeli coast was the very beginning of the Mare Nostra participants’ work together on managing the conflict between development and conservation of this multinational coastline.

“Israel is just one of the partners,” Alterman said. “But as a starter, I wanted them to get a taste of our own regulations. This is just an appetizer.”