

# Former Italian Prime Minister Calls for International Support for Transaqua

December 3, 2020 [Africa](#), [African Union](#), [Andrea Mangano](#), [Bonifica](#), [Cameroon](#), [Central African Republic](#), [Chad](#), [China](#), [David Beasley](#), [Italy](#), [Lake Chad](#), [Lake Chad Basin Commission](#), [Marcello Vichi](#), [Niger](#), [Nigeria](#), [Romano Prodi](#), [Sahel](#), [Transaqua](#), [UN](#), [World Food Program](#)



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*Below, I have reprinted a slightly abridged article from EIR magazine, which reports on important new impetus for Transaqua. Romano Prodi, former Prime Minister of Italy, former President of the European Commission, and former UN Special Envoy for the Sahel, has called on the EU, UN, and AU, to join with with China in moving forward with Transaqua, a mega water-development project to transform the Sahel. With this high level of backing for Transaqua, it is now incumbent on the Lake Chad Basin Commission to take the initiative to secure a contract for a feasibility study of the design of Transaqua, outlined below.*

## Italy's Prodi Puts Transaqua Back on the International Agenda



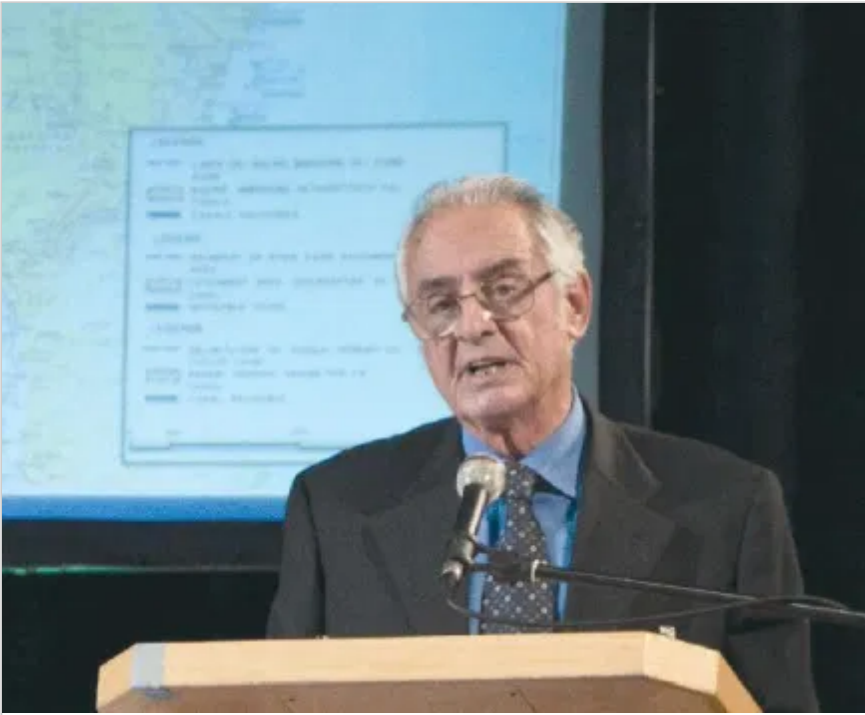
CC/Francesco Pierantoni Romano Prodi, former Prime Minister of Italy, former President of the European Commission, and former UN Special Envoy for the Sahel.

Nov. 23—At this time when the world's nations have not yet adequately responded to the call for help launched by the World Food Program (WFP) to avoid mass starvation in the developing sector, the issue of Transaqua has again come into focus as the *durable* solution to famine, terrorism, and emigration in Central Africa. On November 13, Romano Prodi, the former EU Commission President and former UN Special Envoy for the Sahel, launched a strong call for the EU, the UN, the African

Union (AU), and China to join hands in financing and building this giant infrastructure platform, that can be the locomotive of agro-industrial development for the entire African continent.

Transaqua—also called the Transaqua Inter Basin Water Transfer Scheme—is a project that dates back to the mid-1970s, when engineers from the Italian company Bonifica witnessed the drying up of Lake Chad and came out with the idea of refilling the lake by transferring water from the Congo Basin, where immense quantities of water were simply wasted into the Atlantic Ocean, unused.

By building dams along some of the right-bank tributaries of the River Congo and connecting these reservoirs with canals, the Bonifica engineers, under the direction of Dr. Marcello Vichi, calculated that with only 5% of the water that goes into the River Congo, it was possible to transfer up to 100 billion cubic meters of water per year into Lake Chad. These tributaries are at high altitude, so that water in this dam and canal system can travel across the Central African Republic-Chad watershed by means of gravity alone.



EIRNS/Julien Lemaître Dr. Marcello Vichi speaks at a Schiller Institute Conference, “Rescuing Civilization from the Brink,” in Rüsselsheim, Germany, July 2, 2011.

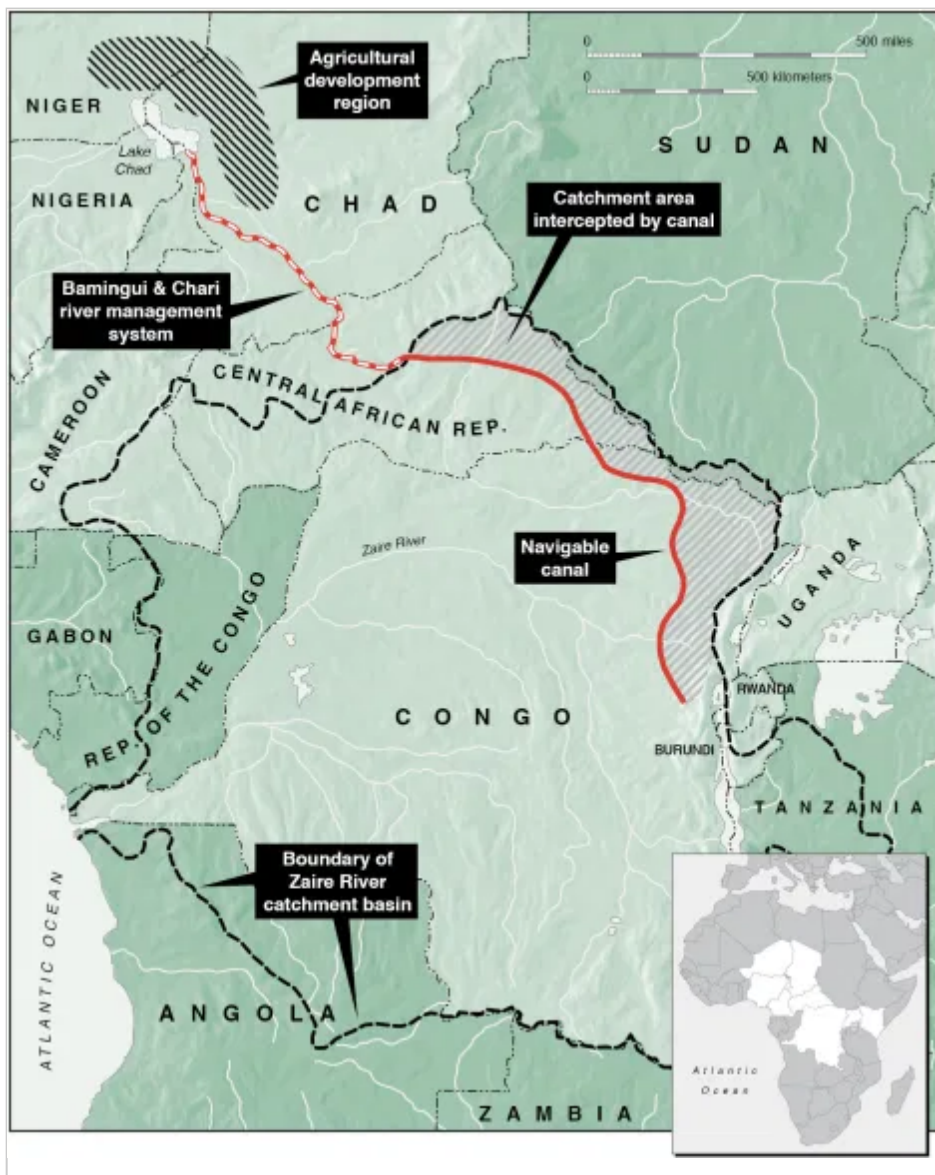


Figure 1-The Transaqua Project, as Proposed by Bonifica

Besides refilling the gradually disappearing lake, the infrastructure would provide a 2400 km waterway that would boost trade from the southern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), close to the Great Lakes region, up to Bangui, capital of the Central African Republic, and down to Lake Chad. The numerous dams would provide plenty of electricity and irrigation capability for 7 million hectares of farmland, providing the platform for developing agro-industrial activities.

After many decades of oblivion and thanks to efforts by *EIR* and the Schiller Institute, Transaqua received a new impulse in February 2018, when the plan was adopted at the International Conference on Lake Chad in Abuja, and the Italian government pledged to fund part of the feasibility study.

Since then, however, the momentum has slowed down. After Abdullah Sanusi, P.E., left at the end of his mandate as Executive Secretary of the Lake Chad Basin Commission in 2018, no significant impulse has come from that institution, which brings together the five riparian member states around the lake—Cameroon, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, and the Central African Republic.

On the Italian side, with the exception of an amendment drafted by Sen. Tony Iwobi—who managed to include initial funding for the feasibility study in the Italian government budget for 2021—a political shift in the government has led to a change in ministerial personnel, and the tender for the study has been left up in the air. The Covid-19 pandemic has overwhelmed an unprepared and incompetent government.

### **Prodi Not for Colonial Songs about Africa**

Now, a seminar organized by the Turin Center for African Studies on November 9-13, “Water Diplomacy and the Culture of Sustainability: The Lake Chad Basin,” has put Transaqua back on the list of strategic priorities. Speaking at the final roundtable, Prodi said the project cannot wait any longer: “Please, don’t come with environmental objections, the former EU chief said. “Don’t sing the song that human intervention can damage the environment: In this case, we help nature to recover a situation of internal balance, to the advantage of African peoples—an internal balance that has been lost.”

Prodi’s reference to pseudo-environmental objections to Transaqua is important, because one of the main sources for those objections has been that very EU Commission that Prodi has chaired in the past, whose structure and ideology Prodi knows very well...

Back in 2013, the EU Commission rejected Transaqua, ostensibly with environmental motivations. Answering a query by European Parliament member Cristiana Muscardini, EU Development Commissioner Andris

Piebalgs stated that “Preliminary feasibility studies... indicate that the project would involve major environmental risks.”

Opposition to Transaqua has also been fed by former European colonial powers which still have political control over some governments in the region. Notably, the government of Canada, on behalf of the British Commonwealth and of French government institutions, has recently funded a [paper](#), “Soft Power, Discourse Coalitions, and the Proposed Inter-basin Water Transfer Between Lake Chad and the Congo River,” which claims that Transaqua is an imperialist scheme pushed by the government of Italy, China, and the Schiller Institute...



Representatives gather for a UN-sponsored international conference on the Lake Chad Region in Berlin, September 3-4, 2018.

## ‘Something To Do Together with China’

Rejecting such phony objections, Prodi stated:

“What we must do, in my view, is a strong action of healthy lobbying, a call on Europe, the African Union, the United Nations, China, to carry forward this project. Be aware that the Lake Chad Basin covers one eightieth of the entire African continent. This is enough to understand its importance. And it affects the poorest, most disgraced and left-behind area.

“Since such a large project as Transaqua involves political, financial, technological, and security aspects, it needs strong political leadership and economic power. Thus, the EU, UNO, and OAU—should try to involve China, because [some] reports connect Lake Chad with the Silk Road. What is the political problem of the Silk Road? It has been a Chinese thing. We must find something to do together with China.”

The video of Prodi's presentation, in Italian with English subtitles, can be viewed [here](#).

The day before, on November 12, the seminar had featured engineer Andrea Mangano, a veteran of the Bonifica team that had developed the original Transaqua idea in the 1970s. In an interview format entitled "Lake Chad and Infrastructure: Challenges and Ideas," he presented the updated version of the project—similar to what Mangano himself and other Bonifica officials have presented at Schiller Institute and *EIR* events in recent years.

### **Starvation Warnings from WFP's Beasley**

Recently the UN World Food Program's Executive Director, David Beasley, warned that the Central Sahel region faces one of the world's fastest-growing humanitarian crises. This is the region most affected by the deterioration of living conditions due to the drying out of Lake Chad, conditions that have offered grounds for recruiting young people to the terrorist Boko Haram. Terrorism has added to economic devastation and caused huge migration waves in the region.

More than 13 million people now require urgent humanitarian assistance, five million more than estimated at the beginning of 2020, Beasley said, characterizing their plight as "marching toward starvation."

In October, Beasley travelled in several nations in the region, together with the development ministers of Germany and Denmark, to solicit not only emergency aid, but also long-term investments in infrastructure. On October 9, Beasley was in Niger when he got the news that the World Food Program had been awarded the 2020 Nobel Peace Prize. He said to reporters that day:

The fact that I was in the Sahel when we received the announcement is really a message from above, that "Hey, world. With all the things going on around the world today, please don't forget about the people in the Sahel! Please don't forget about the people that are struggling and dying from starvation."

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EIRNS Left to right: Mohammed Bila (Lake Chad Basin Commission), Andrea Mangano, Marcello Vichi, and Claudio Celani (EIR), discussing plans for Transaqua in the Rome Bonifica office, summer 2015. Lawrence Freeman also participated in this discussion.

Transaqua is exactly the infrastructure that could stabilize the entire region. You don't need to wait until the first dam is built and water starts to come through the Chari River to Lake Chad from the Congo basin: The many jobs created by the project will immediately start to stabilize the region in terms of providing incomes for thousands of families.

Unfortunately, the October 20 donors' conference organized by Denmark, Germany, the EU, and the UN in Copenhagen, took the restricted view of humanitarian intervention. Some \$1.7 billion dollars were pledged for emergency aid—and this is of course welcome— but it failed to address the root of the problem and adopt long-term solutions.

Mr. Prodi's words must be followed by deeds, so that the "healthy lobbying effort" in favor of Transaqua is successful in bringing together the international coalition to build Transaqua.

*\*I do not support everything in EIR's article, and also note its omission of my central role in advancing the Transaqua project.*

*Lawrence Freeman is a Political-Economic Analyst for Africa, who has been involved in the economic development policy of Africa for over 30 years. He is the creator of the blog: [lawrencefreemanafricaandtheworld.com](http://lawrencefreemanafricaandtheworld.com)*