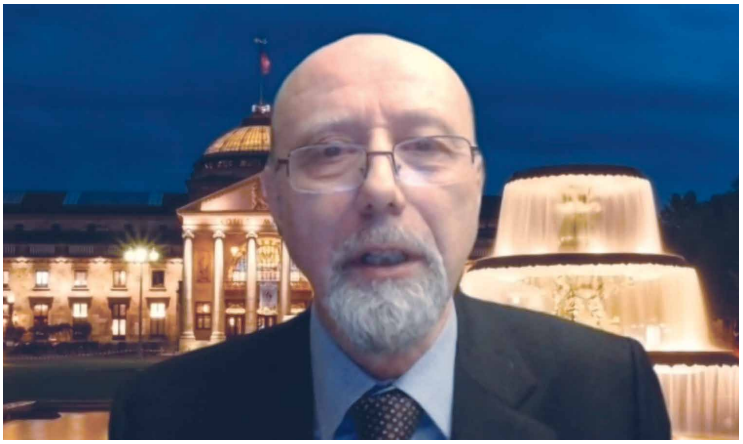
The Transaqua Project

by Claudio Celani

The following is an edited transcript of the remarks by Claudio Celani of Italy to the July 31, 2026 EIR Emergency Roundtable, titled "Solve the Immigration Crisis with Development—What You Need To Know About the Strategic Significance of Pope Leo's Encyclical." Mr. Celani is the co-editor of the EIR Strategic Alert. Subheads have been added. The video is available here.



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Claudio Celani

Hello, Anastasia. Thank you. And thanks to Helga Zepp-LaRouche for the invitation.

I will speak about a terrible injustice done by nature, which mankind is called upon to remedy. The injustice is the following. If you look at the map of Africa, somewhere between the 5th and the 10th parallel north of the Equator, you have a divide between an area which is dominated by deserts and an area which has so much water that is basically unused. I'm talking especially about the Congo River Basin. Now, the Congo is the second-largest river in the world. It's second only to the Amazon. Just to give the Europeans an idea of how much water the Congo River carries, what the discharge is, it is an order of magnitude bigger than the Rhine River. And so, while south of that divide there is a lot of water, north of that divide, there is drought and desertification, especially hitting what was once a very large lake of sweet water, Lake Chad. In the last century, Lake Chad shrunk 90%. So, today Lake Chad is only 10% of what it was one century ago. One century is not much. At my age, actually, I can see that one century is a very short lapse of time. And so, it's threatened with extinction. This is dramatic, because around Lake Chad, millions of people have lived, they still live, primarily feeding themselves through fishery.

Now, before addressing the solution, let me shift and talk to you about an Italian region called Puglia or Apulia. Now, you know, Italy has the form of a boot, and we Italians call it actually often the boot, with a high heel. This heel is facing Albania and Greece and is the Apulia region. There is 70 kilometers of the Adriatic Sea between this region and Albania.

This is one of the most productive agricultural areas, not only in Italy, but in Europe. Productivity of agriculture in Apulia is double that of the average productivity in Europe. Just to give you an idea, they produce one-fourth of the Italian durum wheat. They produce 40% of the olive oil, 35% of tomatoes which are going into processing. So, if you buy a can of tomatoes made in Italy, there is a high probability that it came from Apulia. And Apulia always ranks among the highest wine producing areas in Italy.

Europe's Largest Aqueduct

Now, this was not always the case. Actually, one century ago, Apulia was very poor. Peasants were really starving. Why? Because there was no water. The region was very dry; it was almost desert, and the only water they could get was by digging wells, and often salt water would come up. So, the Italian state at the turn of the century decided to do something. They looked at what could be done, and the Italian peninsula, the Italian boot, has a mountain chain that divides the boot in the middle from North to South, the Apennines, which are quite high mountains. So, they got the idea, because on the other side of the Apennines, there was plenty of water. They thought, how can we carry this water, or some of this water, through the mountains to Apulia and change the situation? Thus, they started to build what became the largest aqueduct in Europe today, with over 20,000 kilometers of length. Now, it's not just one line, but it's a ramification [branching system—ed.], and the

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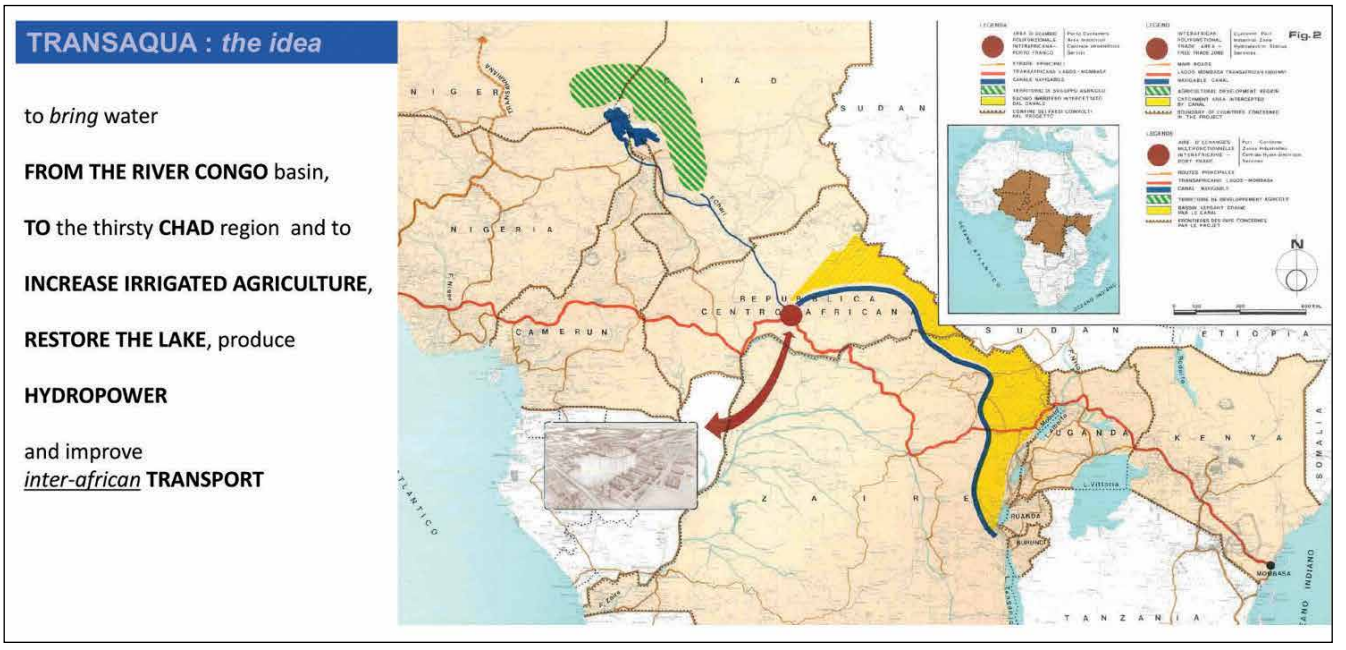
FIGURE 1



Bonifica SpA

Main features of the Transaqua project, shown in a schematic by the Italian engineering firm Bonifica SpA.

way they did it was by building an aqueduct with a complex of tunnels and bridges and viaducts, so that the water could be brought from the western side of the mountains to the eastern side of the mountains, using only gravity.

Therefore, they had to build 200 kilometers of the main aqueduct with a slope which had to be steep enough to move the water, but not too steep, so that the water would not become too fast and destroy the aqueduct. To give you an idea, the slope they created is 2.5 centimeters every 100 meters. So, this already became in 1939 an aqueduct that brought water to the cities. Now, in the postwar period, a man came in, and this man plays a key role in the Transaqua; that's why I'm talking about all this. He is the most famous agricultural engineer of the last century in Italy; his name is Francesco Curato. He expanded the aqueduct and brought water to the countryside. Through the 1939 aqueduct, cities had water now, but peasants had no water. So, he expanded and doubled the size of the aqueduct, and that's the reason why today Apulia is the most productive agricultural region in Italy.

Now, eventually Dr. Curato became president of an engineering company called Bonifica, which was a state-owned company, part of a large conglomerate called Istituto per la Ricostruzione Industriale [IRI], Institute for Industrial Reconstruction, which alone was maybe one-third of the Italian economy. It was a conglomerate, so they produced everything. So, Bonifica, backed by the financial power of IRI, started to work in Africa, in Egypt. Then they went to Central Africa, and there Curato looked at the situation at Lake Chad. The situation of Lake Chad was already dramatic, and he noticed this divide which I mentioned at the very beginning, and said, "How can we take some water from the south and bring it to the north and revitalize Lake Chad?"

Planning the Transaqua Project

It's clear that with his background, he already had a feeling that this would be possible. So he appointed the foreign policy official of Bonifica, whose name is Marcello Vichi, who built up a team. And I send greetings to Marcello, who is now over 90; he lives in Rome. And he led the team that made the preliminary studies. So, they went there, they flew over the area with airplanes, and sometimes also sailed with canoes on those rivers, and they came to the conclusion that it would be possible to build a canal that starts from the southeastern part of the Democratic Republic of the

Congo (DRC), uphill, and intersects all the right-hand tributaries of the Congo River, going slowly down, down, down, building reservoirs at each intersection, and then connecting them, so that you would arrive at the watershed between the Congo Basin and the Lake Chad basin, in the Central African Republic. And at that point, you have reached a place where water can just flow down to Lake Chad through the Chari, the main tributary of the lake. They calculated that by taking 4% to 8% of the water from the Congo River Basin, that this would be enough to generate a yearly amount of 100 billion cubic meters of water.

So, in **Figure 1**, you see the thick blue line which is the Transaqua Canal, and then the red point is the place in the Central African Republic, where you can have a multi-functional inland port. Then from that point, water goes down through the Chari River, the tributary to Lake Chad.

So, as I said, this canal is built by intersecting the right-side tributaries of the Congo River; and I calculated that between 20 and 30 dams and reservoirs would be built. And each one of these dams then would produce electricity, via hydroelectric power. Thus, you have water going down to Lake Chad; you have hydropower; you have transportation because the canal is navigable; and to build the canal you have to build the road to bring the materials there. And last but not least, you have the regulation of the rivers, and this is very important because these rivers are unregulated; they have periods of drought and periods of flooding.

Take, for example, the largest tributary, which is the Ubangi River. Now, the Ubangi River is two times bigger than the Rhine River, so it's a big river. It has a very large catchment basin, and it goes through Bangui, the capital city of the Central African Republic, which is connected then through the Ubangi River, which is navigable to the Congo River and down to Kinshasa, [the capital of the DRC] potentially. But the Ubangi is not regulated. It has periods of floods and periods of drought, and during the periods of drought it cannot be navigated. So, if we build Transaqua, one of the side effects would be the regulation of these rivers, which would allow navigability throughout the year. Also agricultural production will not be destroyed by floods, and would be irrigated throughout the year.

Billions for War, Nothing for Transaqua

So, this is the idea of Transaqua. And I was involved in negotiations with the Lake Chad Basin Commission, the Bonifica company, and the Italian government. We came to the point where, in 2019, there was a conference in Abuja, Nigeria, where Transaqua was presented, and all the member countries of the Lake Chad Basin Commission approved Transaqua as the only solution to revitalize Lake Chad. And the Italian government, through the ambassador present there, promised to co-finance the feasibility study. So, the feasibility study is the next step. It doesn't cost much, maybe up to $5 million, but it's inexplicable why this money apparently cannot be found. Billions are being found to finance wars, but a few millions to finance Transaqua are not found.

But it's up to the countries in Africa to rise up and fight for this. I just want to tell our African friends, you should fight for this. You should not listen to slanderous propaganda, especially from the West. Let me just mention one of these, spread by Western sources: They tell the Congolese elite that somebody wants to steal their water—which is so stupid. It needs one minute to demonstrate that this is stupid; because they get the canal, they get the electricity. It is the pollution of Western ideology which is blocking this.