



European Parliament
Committee on Regional development

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Aquawereness Forum
"Water: who cares"
Closing panel

Brussels, 22 March 2010

By this moment of the conference, must likely everything has been said. I am taking the floor to say, first of all, in response to the question "who cares" - that I do care. For many reasons.

- Water is essential to life. If we think of all the different moments of the day when each of us comes in contact with water and of the different sectors in which water is used, then this sentence turns out to be less banal than it may seem.

Beyond meeting basic human needs, water supply and sanitation services, as well as water as a resource, are in fact critical to sustainable development.

Water is used for food production and consumption, nature, leisure, identity, culture, social norms, and virtually in all the products of daily usage.

In some parts of the world water is a major source of energy; in many it is necessary for agriculture and for many industrial processes; in some countries it makes up an integral part of the transport system.

- With population growth and economic development driving accelerating demand for everything, the full value of water is becoming increasingly apparent to all.
- Unfortunately what Benjamin Franklin said more than 200 years ago remains valid *"it is only when the well is dry that we know the worth of water"*. People, governments, business, dangerously tend to ignore water until it becomes scarce, polluted, too expensive, or mismanaged. This is a moment when we begin to care.
- Water management is becoming more and more complex in a world which is constantly challenged by changes in both human and natural systems that affect water availability, access, affordability, and quality. Discussions today have clearly shown that nobody is immune from these challenges.
- And we must understand that at global level, inefficient water management is due to low political and financial priority given to

water, to an inadequate legal framework, to poor transparency in negotiating and awarding contracts and to a lack of discussion on price levels.

- We know that Europe is regarded as a continent with sufficient water resources. We, in Europe are privileged when it comes to water. People die because of water and people suffer because of water. And in the future it can be even worse. Other areas of the planet do not share this privileged condition:
 - the shortage of water and sanitation is causing 8 million deaths a year;
 - one billion people has no convenient access to drink water at an acceptable price;
 - by 2030, 3.9 billion people mostly in South Asia and China will live in areas under severe water stress. That's 1 billion more people than today;¹
 - by 2030, the world economy is projected to double and its population to increase by one-third, requiring crop production to increase by 50%;
 - In the developing world, water abstractions — of which nearly 70% are for agriculture — are projected to increase much faster than in the last decade;
 - Global warming is a fact of life: over 10.000 years global temperatures rose by 1 degree Celsius; now the future threatens us with a potential increase between 2 and 6 degrees;

¹ [OECD Environmental Outlook](#)

- In some regions of the world climate change could reduce availability of freshwater between 20 and 30% in the next years.
- The fact that Europe is regarded as a continent with sufficient water resources does not make it immune from problems linked to water management and you have discussed it today thoroughly:
 - 17% of European territory - corresponding to the 11% of the population - is affected by water scarcity at different extents;
 - in the past 30 years the number of areas and people affected by droughts increased by almost 20%;
 - 60% of European citizens over-exploit water resources;
 - on the other hand 20 million people in Central and Eastern Europe still do not have access to basic sanitation².
- Water scarcity and drought have cascading effects on many different sectors in Europe such as agriculture, health, tourism, fisheries, as well as several industrial sectors. The opposite problem, flooding is linked to natural and seasonal conditions but can be exacerbated by inappropriate human territorial planning.
- Consequences of climate change are worsening these trends, making dry regions drier and wet regions wetter, increasing the frequency and intensity of natural catastrophes. We are all witnesses of both significant flood damages and severe drought

² [5th World Water Forum, Istanbul 2009, European Regional Document, p. 48](#)

problems which several European countries experienced in the last decades.

- Water is one of those development challenges to which there are man-made effective solutions. It is not only about scarcity or excess of water, though. It has become today a clear governance issue: water is a natural resource and a universal good. But it is a fragile resource and as such has to be responsibly managed, seeking to align availability and demand.
- This requires adequate planning, finance as well as building and maintaining of water infrastructure. This requires an integrated approach, both horizontally and vertically among different authorities at different administrative levels (EU, national, regional, local). Better policy coherence across sectors, such as regional development, land management, agriculture, energy, transport is also needed.
- At European level the legislative reference is the Water Framework Directive, which aims to an efficient water management policy focussing not only on the side of the supply but also on the demand of water.
- The Directive seeks to establish a better hierarchy in the use of water to allow accessibility for all European citizens and to implement public policies supporting water saving and penalizing wastes. In this field Europe has a huge potential: recent studies reveal that 20% of water in the EU is lost due to water inefficiency and bad conditions of the canalisations.
- An improved water management, also through investments introducing technical progress in those economic sectors

characterised by an intensive water use, would have a positive impact on water scarcity especially in times of drought.

- According to the Water Framework Directive, *"Water is not a commercial product like any other but, rather, a heritage which must be protected, defended and treated as such"*³.
- This leads to a crucial issue, central in the European Vision: how to assure universal access to water. It is not only water scarcity that prevents universal access to drinking water. Once again, it is a question of how water systems are managed.
- It is undeniable that in the EU significant investments are needed to rehabilitate ageing infrastructure, maintain service quality and comply with more stringent environment and health regulations. Actually studies show that needed investments for water supply and sanitation to 2030 are much larger than for any other infrastructure⁴.
- Money, however, is not the only answer. Again, better governance is crucial in determining the sustainability as I said of investments, the level and quality of services provided and the participation of all stakeholders – including the private sector and the local actors.
- In 2008 the European Commission presented to the Council and the European Parliament its Communication on water scarcity and droughts in the European Union, focussing on policy options leading to efficiently addressing and mitigating

³ [European Water Framework Directive, 2000](#)

⁴ [OECD Environmental Outlook](#)

water scarcity and drought challenges. It was followed by a Green paper on adapting to climate change and by a White Paper last year.

- The position of the European Parliament on this debate has been clearly expressed in the report of Mr. Seeber in 2008 supporting a holistic approach in the management of water resources, combining measures of demand management, measures to optimise existing resources within the water cycle, and measures to create new resources⁵.
- The issue at stake, according to the Parliament, is how to strike a long term balance economic development, environmental protection and the sustainable management of natural resources, including water, which are the elements defining the attractiveness of a territory in the long term.
- Europe cares about water. Challenges linked to water are highly ranked by the European institutions and many instruments are available under the different policies corresponding to the Community competences.
- The European Union has not just limited itself to declarations of principles, to set up a legal framework or to establish action guidelines: it has also made available concrete policies and instruments to reach the set objectives. It is crucial, however, to potentiate the synergetic use of these tools, avoiding duplication of funding and exploiting at maximum complementarities (see **Recommendation 9**).

- The VII Framework Programme for research and development and the Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme allow investments for technological progress in this field, as happens for the use of water in agriculture thanks to the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development.
- The primary objectives of the renewed Lisbon Strategy – more jobs and economic development - go hand in hand with the promotion of social and environmental objectives. A more resource efficient, greener and smarter economy has been put at the top in the Commission proposal also for the new EU2020 Strategy.
- The European Solidarity Fund was created in 2002 as a reaction to the severe floods in Central Europe. Today, renewed action is needed at Community level to make this Fund more flexible as regards reaction both to natural and to man-made disasters. Under the current legislature the European Parliament is strongly committed to push the Council to take a position on the proposal for amending the Regulation adopted by the Commission in 2005 and aimed to increase its transparency, simplify the rules governing its mobilisation and widen its scope.
- Last in order but highly significant example of concrete instrument available at EU level is the cohesion policy. Let me explain in detail how this horizontal, EU-wide policy can be a key ally to face the water challenge.

⁵ (2008/2074(INI) - Rapporteur Richard Seeber (ENVI), p. 6

The objective of the cohesion policy is to reduce regional disparities across the EU. Due to a considerable and stable financial allocation over a multi-annual period, the Structural funds are powerful tools to help facing the water challenge in the following decades.

For the programming period 2007-2013 30,4% of the available funding - equal to €105 billion, has been allocated to direct or indirect environmental investment (nearly three times more than in 2000-2006). 50% of the total goes for investment in water and waste treatment infrastructure, renewal of contaminated sites, pollution reduction and support for nature protection. The rest is devoted to investment with an environmental impact in areas such as transport, energy, eco-tourism. About €48 billion is allocated to actions against climate change, whereas €22 billion have been focussed directly on water resources management (€14 million on waste water and €8 million for drink water).

The Structural Funds regulations allow investments in water infrastructure, water management, management of flood and drought risk, promotion of clean technologies, and rehabilitation of contaminated sites creating attractive conditions for business.

Through the co-financing system, the Structural Funds help financing capital intensive investments in the needed water infrastructure, helping Member States to comply with EU water legislation.

They also help Member States and regions to develop water management linked to the challenge of climate change (see **Recommendation 8**).

- Fact is that the cohesion policy budget has been already allocated until 2013 and it cannot be increased until then.

The European Parliament will strongly push for a future revision of the Community budget attributing a higher rank to environmental priorities and in particular to policies designed to combat the effects of climate change, including drought and water scarcity⁶.

By now, though, available funding is limited and, because of that, it needs to be allocated to clear and focussed targets so to ensure the maximum degree of efficiency.

How to reach that will surely be one of the challenging items of discussions within the Intergroup on Water recently set up in the European Parliament under the chair of Mr. Seeber.

- Water does not respect geographical borders: 60% of the river basins in the EU are cross-border and sea pollution is clearly a transnational issue. Here again the cohesion policy may help tackling challenges through its territorial cooperation programmes, fostering cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation. These programmes in fact allow exchanges of good practices and networking among partners and facilitate interregional or cross-border cooperation on water

⁶ (2008/2074(INI) - Rapporteur Richard Seeber (ENVI), p. 7

projects. They offer a perfect "neutral" framework, as referred in **Recommendation 9**, where to develop regular debates among relevant partners and stakeholders.

- Also the new macro-regional dimension inaugurated by the Baltic Sea Strategy launched last year represents an added value in this context, as it identifies the best level to tackle environmental challenges, water management and adaptation to climate change through an integrated and cross-sectoral strategy.
- The Cohesion policy is such a good vehicle for carrying about water, because the cohesion policy is the champion of inclusive governance in the decisional processes as well as in the implementation of policies. It is based on principles of partnership and multi-level governance, which are both essential for winning the water challenge. In this sense the work of European Water Partnership (EWP) is to be twice welcomed: not only for tackling such a strategic issue but also for the inclusive approach adopted in the redaction of the European Water Vision: the wide regional consultation conducted across Europe in 2008 has allowed enriching the original document with interests and specificities of European regions, so increasing its correspondence to their needs.
- It is true that today in Europe the State level is still the main level as regards defining policies, allocating resources and responsibilities. So let me emphasize, correctly and fully integrating regional and local authorities across the EU in design and implementation of decisions as regards water

management as well as consequences of climate change is crucial: these issues must be taken into the highest account at the moment of planning the use of soil and of implementing development strategies and investments on a territory⁷. And nowadays in Europe these tasks frequently are a competence of sub-national authorities.

- The European Parliament in its 2009 resolution on water in the light of the 5th World Water Forum (Istanbul, March 2009)⁸ highlighted that *"water resource management should be based on a decentralised, participative and integrated approach involving users and decision makers in the definition of water policy at local level"*
- In its 2009 opinion on the Commission Communication "Water scarcity and droughts", also the Committee of Regions⁹ highlighted the importance of subsidiarity and multi-level governance in this context. The same applies to the strategic role of regional and local authorities in *"planning land and water use, developing the various economic sectors, protecting the environment and ensuring supply to citizens of sufficient good quality water"*.
- So vital role of regional and local authorities in water protection and management should be recognised and better "exploited" by EU co-funded programmes.

⁷ [EP report on water scarcity and droughts 2008 \(rapporteur Mr. Seeber\)](#) p. 6

⁸ [European Parliament resolution on water in the light of the 5th World Water Forum \(Istanbul, March 2009\)](#)

⁹ CoR opinion on "Addressing the challenge of water scarcity and droughts in the EU" - DEVE-IV-020

- Water is a public good. This does not mean only that public authorities must take the appropriate decisions for its correct and sustainable management: all users and providers must share responsibility in this field and contribute with concrete initiatives and increased awareness.
- Universal ownership of the "water" value is a key objective to be achieved. Also the private actors are part of the solution: business can play an active and responsible role in ensuring socially equitable, ecologically respectful, and economically viable water management through its capital, know-how and technology.
- **Recommendation 7** rightly suggests the development of innovative business models and the setting up of new partnerships: public-private partnerships in particular must be enhanced, since they combine public ownership and private investment, which can result in improved access to water and sanitation and in a more efficient and sustainable use of the resource water.
- In the last years in the Member States and regions the water challenge has been taken more seriously into account through awareness raising campaigns to promote water savings and inform the public about the different domestic actions launched.

It is crucial that this engagement continues with renewed effort at all levels and that full application of the Water Framework Directive is ensured across the EU (see **Recommendation 3**).

- The entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty has added new important tools to achieve these goals: the European Parliament has gained extended co-decision competences and can and will be even more active in future than it has been so far.

The recognition of territorial cohesion as a Community objective, complementary to the economic and social cohesion, generates more space for EU activities aiming to achieve a better management of water resources.

The extension of subsidiarity to the regional and local level allows for a more active role of these authorities in the water policy.

Legislative provisions are indeed important to allow the development of strategies. Funding and projects are the instruments to implement those strategies. But PEOPLE are the *conditio sine qua non* to ensure the success of this implementation.

So the civil society must be actively involved at all stages and levels in this area. Offering water efficient technologies ready for use is needed but not sufficient: we need to change mentalities towards a more water-friendly behaviour. We need what the European Vision calls a "true water democracy" (see **Recommendation 4**) and this must be a shared endogenous development process.

- Initiatives like the European Water Vision and the Aquawareness Programme, launched in 2008 in the European Parliament, are effectively contributing to accelerate this cultural change not only promoting water-saving values among private, industrial, business and agricultural users, but intervening directly at the level of the general public, helping to make people better aware that they are those who, first and foremost, can contribute to making this change happen.