



COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION



Conclusions on a blueprint to safeguard Europe's water resources

3211th ENVIRONMENT Council meeting

Brussels, 17 December 2012

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"RECALLING its conclusions of 21 June 2011 on Protection of water resources and integrated sustainable water management in the European Union and beyond ¹,

RECALLING the outcome document "The Future We Want" adopted in June 2012 at the Rio+20 Conference, and in particular its paragraphs 119-124 on Water and sanitation,

RECALLING its conclusions of 19 December 2011 on the Roadmap to a resource-efficient Europe ² as well as the Commission Communication on the European Innovation Partnership on Water ³,

RECALLING the European Parliament resolution of 3 July 2012 on the implementation of EU water legislation, ahead of a necessary overall approach to European water challenges ⁴,

RECALLING that 2005-2015 is the UN International Decade for Action "Water for Life", that 2012 is the European Year for Water and that 2013 is the United Nations International Year of Water Cooperation,

¹ Doc. 11308/11.

² Doc. 18346/11 + ADD 1.

³ Doc. 10032/12 - COM(2012)216 final.

⁴ Doc. [2011/2297 \(INI\)](#).

P R E S S

NOTING with appreciation that the European Environment Agency (EEA) has published in 2012 a number of reports on the State of Europe's waters, including a synthesis report ⁵,

RECALLING the discussions held on the Blueprint during the Informal Meeting of Ministers for the Environment and Climate Change, as well as during the EU Water Blueprint Conference, held in Nicosia respectively on 7-8 July 2012, and on 26-27 November 2012, and LOOKING FORWARD to the upcoming water-related events, including the Budapest Water Summit to be held in October 2013,

RECALLING the complementary role of the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD) ⁶ and of the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive ⁷ (MSFD) in safeguarding Europe's aquatic ecosystems,

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1. UNDERLINES that water is essential for human life, the environment and the economy and STRESSES that water scarcity is a major global challenge, given that fresh water constitutes only about 2% of the water on the planet and that competing demands may lead to an estimated 40% global water supply shortage by 2030.
2. UNDERLINES that while substantial efforts have been made by the Member States, further significant efforts and additional action, including better implementation of the WFD, are needed to preserve and improve EU waters, and HIGHLIGHTS in this context that while the WFD established the objective to achieve good status of all EU waters by 2015, the Commission assessment of the Member States' River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) as well as the EEA State of Water reports indicate that this objective is likely to be achieved only in 53% of EU waters.
3. UNDERLINES that 60% of the EU's territory lies in trans-boundary river basins that also extend beyond EU borders, and that the hydrological cycles are so interconnected that activities in one country, such as water use and land use, can affect the quality and quantity of water available beyond its borders, and RECOGNISES that the economic activities of the EU as a whole, as well as the EU common policies and Member State policies have significant impacts on water status.

⁵ <http://www.eea.europa.eu/themes/water/publications-2012/publications-2012-on-water>.

⁶ Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy (OJ L 327, 22.12.2000, p.1).

⁷ Directive 2008/56/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 June 2008 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of marine environmental policy (OJ L 164, 25.6.2008, p.19).

4. STRESSES that the EU needs to focus on green growth and become more resource efficient to achieve a sustainable recovery from the current economic and environmental crisis, adapt to climate change and build resilience to disasters; RECALLS that tackling these challenges may improve significantly the competitiveness, growth and employment of the European water sector as well as other water-related sectors; and EMPHASIZES the need for a framework that encourages and supports innovation in the water sector, thus increasing operational efficiency.
5. WELCOMES in this context the Commission Communication "A Blueprint to Safeguard Europe's Water Resources" ⁸ ("the Blueprint") as an instrument setting up a development path to attain the goals of EU water policy in order to help the EU and its Member States achieve the WFD and relevant MSFD goals by ensuring the sustainability of all activities that impact water, thereby contributing to securing the availability of good-quality water for sustainable and equitable water use and the ecosystems; and EXPECTS that the proposed actions of the Blueprint will also contribute positively to the goal of halting the loss of biodiversity and the degradation of ecosystem services, as well as to the efforts in combating desertification and adapting to climate change.
6. STRESSES, in the context of safeguarding Europe's water resources, the importance of applying the precautionary principle as well as the principles that preventive action should be taken, that environmental damage should as a priority be rectified at source and that the polluter should pay.

General approach

7. NOTES with appreciation that the Blueprint recognises that the aquatic environments differ greatly across the EU and therefore does not propose any "one-size-fits-all" solution, respecting the principle of subsidiarity; further NOTES that the specificities of Member States, as well as the regional differences within each country should be taken into account, such as the variability of the quantity and quality of water resources; and STRESSES that Member States can choose the most appropriate measures or mix of measures in addition to the basic measures required under EU legislation.
8. HIGHLIGHTS that the current EU legal framework on water is extensive, flexible and essentially fit to address the challenges faced by the aquatic environment.
9. EMPHASIZES that loyal and effective trans-boundary cooperation and International River Basin Commissions play an important role in the implementation of relevant EU Water Legislation, including its international aspects.
10. UNDERLINES that all waters are connected and that the coordination between the WFD and the MSFD is central, since many of the measures needed are common, and mutually benefitting synergies can be achieved.

⁸ Doc. 16425/12 – COM(2012) 673 Final.

11. UNDERLINES that there is a need for a better implementation of the current water legislation and increased integration of water policy objectives into other policy areas, such as the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP), the Common Fisheries Policy, the Cohesion Policy as well as the policies on renewable energy, urban planning, research and technological development, transport and integrated disaster management; RECOGNISES the contribution of these policies to water policy objectives, and URGES the Commission and the Member States to ensure consistency regarding the obligations stemming from EU legislation on different policy areas.
12. STRESSES that good and effective water governance and reliable funding, both public and private, as well as innovative financing mechanisms, are key for implementing any policies, plans or measures, and STRESSES the need for adequate priority to be given to water policy objectives under national and EU funds, including EIB loans, and to address barriers to investments in sustainable water management and infrastructures.
13. ACKNOWLEDGES that the impact of climate change will have an effect on the most crucial areas of our society; STRESSES that adaptation to the potential impacts of climate change should be integrated into water management decisions within the current EU legal framework in all relevant sectors and HIGHLIGHTS the need to look in an integrated way into measures based on a coordinated disaster management approach and specifically aimed at managing the risks and countering and mitigating the effects of extreme events such as droughts and floods, whose frequency, intensity as well as environmental and economic damage appear to have increased over the past thirty years and are expected to further increase.

Specific water policy measures

14. URGES Member States to improve implementation of the WFD and other relevant EU legislation and reduce hydro-morphological pressures in river basins by securing or restoring continuity, where appropriate, as well as using whenever possible green infrastructure, such as natural water retention measures and ecosystem restoration, best available techniques and mitigation measures, thus reducing the EU's vulnerability to floods and droughts, supporting biodiversity and soil fertility as well as improving the status of waters.
15. URGES Member States to develop Flood Risk Management Plans (FRMPs) by 2015, as required under the EU Floods Directive; UNDERLINES the importance of these FRMPs to be taken into account when developing cross sectoral and multi hazard risk management plans, and RECALLS the need for a coordinated or integrated approach for RBMPs and FRMPs in accordance with Article 9 of the EU Floods Directive⁹.

⁹ Directive 2007/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2007 on the assessment and management of flood risks (OJEU L 288, 6.11.2007, p.27).

16. NOTES with concern that diffuse and point-source pollution still threaten the status of EU waters, despite the progress achieved under legislation on nitrates, waste water treatment, industrial emissions, priority substances, chemicals, biocides; ACKNOWLEDGES the progress made under the new legislation on plant protection products; UNDERLINES the need to take into account the impact that land use changes may have on water status; INVITES the Commission to consider the need to propose cost-effective EU source-control measures in the framework of the above legislation, as appropriate, and to strengthen coherence between relevant legislation; URGES Member States to enhance efforts towards a full implementation of the above legislation, and CALLS ON Member States to involve all relevant stakeholders, in particular the private sector, in order to secure long-term investment plans in these areas.
17. HIGHLIGHTS the pressing need to address unsustainable use leading to water stress and to correct over-allocation of water where they occur and WELCOMES the Commission proposal to develop, within the WFD Common Implementation Strategy (CIS) process, guidance on ecological flow as well as on water accounts, which, together with other indicators and tools, will contribute to the improvement of water allocation.
18. STRESSES the importance to address the issues of illegal water abstraction and water loss by leakages and CALLS ON Member States that face these problems to take appropriate enforcement measures.
19. UNDERLINES that water efficiency can help reduce water scarcity and water stress problems; RECALLS the need for Member States to ensure, in line with article 9 of the WFD, the use of incentive water pricing; INVITES Member States, where relevant, to rely on volumetric metering as an effective tool to increase water efficiency; WELCOMES the Commission's intentions to develop through the CIS process, a common methodology for an adequate and more comparable cost-recovery (including environmental and resource costs) that takes into account social, environmental and economic effects, as well as a common methodology for water efficiency targets which, where relevant should integrate existing management tools and be integrated into RBMPs and NOTES that there are other instruments and tools, apart from the economic ones, that can improve water efficiency, such as education and awareness raising.
20. EMPHASISES the need to manage water demand by improving irrigation efficiency, promoting water-efficient technologies and other measures, including through the CAP instruments; WELCOMES the Commission's intention to accelerate the development and spread of best practices on sustainable leakage levels, and also WELCOMES the Commission's decision to develop voluntary EU Eco-label and Green Public Procurement criteria for key water-related products and to include water-related products in the Eco-design Working Plan.

21. NOTES with interest the Commission's intention to propose a regulatory or other instrument setting common EU -wide environmental/health standards for water re-use under strict sanitary and environmental conditions, as this would help alleviate water scarcity, reduce vulnerability and promote long-term investment plans in the area of waste water infrastructure.
22. LOOKS FORWARD to forthcoming Commission initiatives on strengthening inspections and surveillance requirements applicable to the full body of EU environment law through the appropriate means, including through existing networks such as IMPEL ¹⁰.
23. WELCOMES the Commission's proposals regarding drought risk, in particular those on green infrastructures such as natural water retention measures, the European Drought Observatory and where applicable, the integration of drought risk management and climate change aspects into overall river basin management planning, and UNDERLINES the importance of reviewing current funding opportunities with regard to their ability to tackle issues of water scarcity and droughts.
24. NOTES that the measures planned in the Blueprint will be supported by a range of cross-cutting tools such as the Innovation Partnerships on Water and on Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability; the further development of the Water Information System for Europe (WISE); the improvement of the science-policy interface; voluntary peer reviews of RBMPs; and the use of awareness raising tools.
25. WELCOMES the Commission's intention to further streamline the reporting cycles under water legislation, statistical requirements and data collection, in line with the INSPIRE Directive ¹¹ and CALLS ON the Commission to consider options for further simplification of the contents of reporting, taking into account priorities for intended uses, in order to avoid duplications, increase efficiency and reduce the administrative burden.
26. NOTES that the Commission intends to look into water related aspects in the Annual Growth Survey and to make country-specific recommendations for Member States where appropriate, in the framework of the European Semester process, in order to identify economic and water environment win-win actions.

¹⁰ EU Network for the Implementation and Enforcement of Environmental Law.

¹¹ Directive 2007/2/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 March 2007 establishing an Infrastructure for Spatial Information in the European Community (INSPIRE) (OJEU L 108, 25.4.2007, p.1).

27. REITERATES the commitment of the EU and its Member States to continue the strengthening of international cooperation *inter alia* through the support for the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, to be progressively realized for populations with full respect for national sovereignty, as well as integrated water resources management in third countries and the improvement of trans-boundary cooperation, with a view to contribute to the achievement of the MDGs, Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and the Rio+20 outcome.

Follow-up

28. NOTES the Commission's intention to take stock of the outcome of the current Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) negotiations and consider the need for additional proposals, if necessary, to achieve the water policy objectives.
29. HIGHLIGHTS the fact that the WFD CIS process, which involves the Commission, the Member States and relevant stakeholders, is playing a supportive role in the WFD implementation, and in this respect, WELCOMES the Commission's intention to implement and monitor the Blueprint proposals, where relevant and agreed as CIS priority, through this process.
30. CONSIDERS that the Blueprint constitutes a significant policy instrument to improve the EU water policy and INVITES Member States to contribute to its implementation, involving all relevant stakeholders."