

Pan-European Regional Preparatory Meeting for the United Nations 2023 Water Conference

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Statements by Ms. Marijana Mance, European Commission, DG Environment

Session 1 - Make drinking water and sanitation available, safe and affordable for all

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- Access to safe and sufficient amounts of water and sanitation is essential for our daily life, for instance, for drinking and food preparation.
- The access to clean drinking water and sanitation is not only essential to every person's life, but is also a fundamental human right, recognized both by the Human Right Council and the UN General Assembly.
- The European Union has a history of over 30 years of drinking water policy. This policy ensures that water intended for human consumption can be used safely on a life-long basis. A subsequent high level of water quality corresponds positively with health protection.
- The main pillars of the policy are to:
 - Ensure that drinking water quality is controlled through standards based on the latest scientific evidence and data;
 - Secure an efficient and effective monitoring, assessment and enforcement of drinking water quality standards;
 - Provide the consumers with adequate, timely and appropriately information;
 - Contribute to broader EU-wide water and health policies.
- A lack of access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) has severe effects on the health, dignity, gender equality, culture and prosperity of people, while compromising the realization of other human rights, therefore ensuring a human rights-based approach in water management and governance is crucial for leaving no-one behind.
- Ensuring effective and sustainably managed water and sanitation services through adequate institutional frameworks, regulation, capacity building, and climate resilient infrastructures, remain priorities for the EU and its Member States.
- Furthermore, the integrity of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, including their biological diversity, depends on sustainably managed water resources. Indeed, safe water,

sanitation, hygiene as well as available water resources and healthy ecosystems are inseparably linked to human health.

- Also with regard to pandemic preparedness and response, the safe access to WASH services and facilities remains a key – as revealed again by COVID-19.
- Most adverse effects of climate change are felt through too much or too little water, for instance through water extreme events, such as droughts or floods. Climate impacts on water resources, which are already evident today, are projected to even worsen in many regions. Consequently, guaranteeing a safe access to WASH will need to build on climate resilient planning and action, for instance through concrete climate adaptation measures in the water domain.
- Established regional water cooperation can also be strong vehicles to promote climate resilient water resource management and security beyond national borders.
- Finally, strengthening the complementarity between humanitarian, development and peace actions to support the safety of water resources, water personnel and water infrastructure is key. In this context, we stress the importance of compliance with international humanitarian law (IHL), international human rights law (IHRL), international labour rights.

Session 3 – Water Governance

Ladies and Gentleman,

- Strengthened inclusive, multi stakeholder and integrated water governance at all levels is crucial for the successful and coherent implementation of the water-related SDGs and of the Agenda 2030 as a whole.
- The effective governance of water often does not stop at country borders, which is most evident with river basins.
- In that context, one of our main priorities is supporting transboundary water cooperation, as a tool for progress towards sustainable development, including water security, peace and stability. The EU and MSs underline in this context the relevance of global and regional operational arrangements, instruments and frameworks, such as the UNECE Water Convention;

- In very concrete terms, Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM)¹ is the basis for strengthening governance, especially through promoting inclusive, participatory, multi stakeholder and cross-sectoral mechanism of concertation and decision-making at all levels, which also requires support from relevant global/regional/national/local institutional frameworks;
- Good governance in the international arena always calls for a coherent coordination. Therefore, the 2023 UN Water Conference will be a crucial moment to strengthen multilateralism on water with the UN at its core. This includes particularly supporting the implementation of the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework, the strengthening of UN-Water and the establishment of a UN special envoy for water, for a “stronger voice of water” in- and outside the UN system together with governments and stakeholders.

Session 6 – Accelerate progress through partnerships, financing, data, research and innovation

- In order to achieve progress towards water-related targets of the Agenda 2030 and to strengthen an overall good ecological status of water, it is important to support the transboundary cooperation on water. Such cooperation is most effective, when grounded on the basis of relevant legal instruments like national legislation, the Water Framework Directive in the EU; or UNECE Water Convention globally and with the strong support of regional organisations like the River Basin Commissions.
- We are dedicated to promoting partnerships in this effort.
- To carry forward water cooperation, the EU+MS seeks a complementarity approach that favours a regional / basin approach involving all sectors and stakeholders.

For instance, constructive dialogue on water and energy issues in Central Asia, have led to initial agreements, as well as to the EU-Central Asia Platform for Environment and Water Cooperation.

- Multi-country interventions are meant to sustain national level interventions by ensuring environmental flows, downstream economic activities (energy, agriculture), disaster coordination (droughts, floods, pollution), and conflict mitigation.

¹ The core process that promotes the coordinated development and sustainable and multi-stakeholder management of water, land and related resources in order to maximise economic and social welfare in an equitable manner without compromising the sustainability of vital ecosystems.

- For information, the EU with eight Member States and the EIB in cooperation with the African Union are preparing the regional Team Europe Initiative Transboundary Water Management on Africa to reinforce development and regional integration through transboundary water management. The Initiative has been officially announced at the Dakar World Water Forum in March 2022.
- Water spurs the need for cooperation at all levels, from the community level, where everything starts, to regional and multilateral level. Between 2014 and 2020, we have dedicated more than 2.5 billion euros to water cooperation in more than 110 countries and we are happy to collaborate with the UNECE region in this dedicated effort!