



Council of the
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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Council
Subject:	Initiative for the resilience of water bodies and water availability in the European Union <i>- Information from the Portuguese delegation, supported by the Cyprus, Hungarian, Italian and Romanian delegations</i>

Delegations will find in the Annex a note from Portuguese delegation, supported by the Cyprus, Hungarian, Italian and Romanian delegations on the above-mentioned subject, to be dealt with under "Any other business" at the Council (Agriculture and Fisheries) on 23 January 2024.

Initiative for the resilience of water bodies and water availability in the European Union**Background**

Our contribution is given in the context of the Commission's awaited initiative under the European Green Deal, on water resilience, scheduled for the first semester of 2024.

Rising temperatures, reduced rainfall and the intensification of extreme hydro-meteorological events are putting the well-being of populations and ecosystems under great pressure, resulting in more frequent and severe droughts, as well as floods, with high losses for communities.

Water scarcity has a strong impact on the development of food production activities.

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN's 2030 Agenda address various dimensions of sustainable development (social, economic, environmental) that promote peace, justice, and effective institutions. SDG2 aims, among other things, by 2030 to ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, help maintain ecosystems, strengthen the capacity to adapt to climate change, extreme weather conditions, droughts, floods, and other disasters, and progressively improve land and soil quality.

According to the European Drought Observatory, around 42 per cent of continental Europe is in a warning state and around eight per cent in an alert state. This scenario is particularly worrying in the southern European member states, affected by severe and prolonged droughts, which have become more frequent in the 21st century. It should be noted that shortages have also been experienced in the center and north of Europe for prolonged periods.

This situation calls for concerted action on the part of the European Union. In this regard, we welcome the initiative on water resilience, scheduled in the European Commission's 2024 work program.

We believe that a response to this threat should concentrate objectives, priorities, and instruments in a strategy of its own. In this respect, we advocate the establishment of a Plan, which we call “RewaterEU”, aimed at promoting the resilience of water bodies and the availability of water in the European Union.

It will be essential to strengthen the efficient management of water reserves by increasing installed storage capacity and utilizing new water sources, which will make it possible to store water in times of abundance (floods) and thus ensure and increase the EU's water security.

The signatory member states, therefore, invite the European Commission to consider the following elements:

Objectives

It should contribute to **reduce the European Union's vulnerability to the effects of climate change on water resources**, by guaranteeing:

- Access to water for public supply, in quality and quantity, for the citizens of the European Union, at fair prices
- The availability of water for agriculture, ensuring the EU's food security and sovereignty and responding to SDG2
- The availability of water for other purposes such as energy production, industrial use, tourism, or the protection of different ecosystems, as appropriate to each type of water body.

Measures

It should provide for measures to achieve its **short, medium, and long-term objectives, among which, the following are particularly noteworthy:**

- **Storage, transport, and distribution of water:** Optimization of the operation of existing infrastructures complemented by the construction of new infrastructures and the interconnection of systems.
- **Water management:** implementing measures such as reducing water losses in urban and rural systems, promoting efficient water use and reducing losses in water supply and distribution systems.
- **Water reuse:** implementation of measures such as the use of water for reuse for non-potable purposes in the urban, tourist, industrial and agricultural sectors.

- **Development and use of technologies:** building desalination units, taking advantage of the economies of scale, linked to the joint demand for these infrastructures and carrying out digital water management based on a water registry.
- Planning based on monitoring natural water resources and water consumption, which will enable water resources to be licensed in line with actual water availability, reducing situations of conflicting uses.

Financing

This initiative should be financed by a combination of European Union funds and private investment.

Principles

- **Participation of citizens and stakeholders:** it should be developed in a participatory manner, involving citizens and stakeholders, helping to make the plan effective and responsive to the real needs of people (communities) and businesses.
- **Innovation:** should promote innovation in the water sector, with a view to finding innovative solutions to the challenges of water scarcity.
- **Awareness-raising:** stimulate awareness of the importance of water. This will promote change of behaviors and promote water saving.
- **Education:** should promote higher education in the field of hydraulic engineering and hydrology, to support the choice of the most interesting technical solutions in water, energy, and environmental aspects.

Therefore, an initiative in the field of water resilience is critical for the future of the European Union, helping to combat the effects of climate change on water resources and guaranteeing access to water for all citizens. We look forward to its **presentation** by the European Commission.