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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations

Subject: European Conference "Climate change and the European water dimension
– Enhancing resilience" (4-5 November 2020)
- Information from the Portuguese delegation

Delegations will find in the Annex an information note from the Portuguese delegation on the above subject, to be dealt with under "Any other business" at the Council (Environment) meeting on 17 December 2020.

European Conference "Climate change and the European water dimension – Enhancing resilience" (4-5 November 2020)

- Information from the Portuguese delegation -

Climate change is one of the biggest challenges of the 21st century. Heat waves, droughts, floods and heavy rain events result in premature deaths, damage – to the agricultural and forestry sector, buildings and infrastructure, industry and the economy – and dynamic ecosystem changes.

In 2017-18, the European Commission evaluated the first EU Strategy for Climate Change Adaptation and announced the presentation of a new, more ambitious Strategy as part of the European Green Deal package. Germany, Portugal and Slovenia have agreed to make the water-climate nexus a common theme of their Trio Presidency in 2020 and 2021.

Water is expected to feature prominently in the new EU adaptation strategy. Already, the impacts of climate change on water balances and water bodies in EU member states are manifold, differ regionally and are increasingly being felt throughout Europe. Climate change results in more frequent and more intense extreme events, namely droughts and floods, water scarcity, gradual shifts in water availability and quality, and changes in many water-dependent ecosystems.

Changes in water balances often have cascading effects on other sectors, including transport, agriculture, forestry and energy. This shows that water-related adaptation can only be successful as a cross-sectoral, joint effort. Water does not stop at borders – this also applies to the impacts of climate change. Adaptation therefore requires cross-border cooperation, in river basins and regions. The goal is to strengthen the adaptability and resilience of ecological, economic and social systems.

Against this background, the Trio Presidency of Germany, Portugal and Slovenia organised the virtual European conference ‘Climate change and the European water dimension – Enhancing resilience’, on 4 and 5 November 2020. For two days, more than 350 experts from all EU Member States examined needs and opportunities related to climate change adaptation in the water sector.

In an extensive exchange, including during a number of working groups, participants discussed concrete policy recommendations on the following topics:

- mainstreaming water-related climate resilience in EU policy and international frameworks;
- highlighting the water dimension in cross-cutting topics of the new EU Adaptation Strategy, notably due to the intensification of droughts and scarcity;
- supporting sustainable water management as a key building block for climate resilience in the EU Member States.

These policy recommendations can be accessed via the following link:

https://www.bmu.de/fileadmin/Daten_BMU/Download_PDF/Klimaschutz/climate_change_european_water_dimension_policy_paper_bf.pdf. The Trio also plans to share the policy recommendations with the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety of the European Parliament, the Commission for the Environment, Climate Change and Energy of the Committee of the Regions, and relevant offices of the European Commission.