

“WATER SCARCITY AND DROUGHTS”
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Part 1 - Europe’s achievements and challenges on water

Theme n°2 : “Facing water scarcity and droughts challenges: how can we meet the demands of the consumers, while still meeting the requirements of environmental legislation ?”

Mister President,
Dear Participants,

I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity of participating in the most important international event in the water sector. I feel very concerned by this matter: I am the President of the “French Water Society”, a political think tank on water issues composed of members of the French Parliament and also of enterprises and local authorities.

I come from the Normandy Region (in the North West of France), where I am Senator and President of the County Council of the Department so-called “La Manche”. My region is also concerned by water scarcity. In last summer, the French Minister of Ecology and Sustainable Development decided to stop water uses in 33 of the 95 French departments, including mine. I think it is important to stress that even the North of Europe is concerned by water scarcity.

In fact, water availability problems affect many regions in Europe and they do represent a serious and growing challenge. They lead to a total cost of around 6 billion Euros per year for EU countries. Hopefully, they do not have strong effects on human health. But meeting the water demand is however at stake: how to provide sufficient water for agriculture? for industry? This can be a limiting factor for economic development. It can also compromise the reaching of environmental standards by over-exploiting the existing water. However, it is absolutely necessary to protect the aquatic environments and to stabilise the water demand at the same time. This will be more and more challenging due to climate change. This requires a combined action at EU level.

I would wish to develop **FOUR IDEAS**.

1/ FIRSTLY,
INTEGRATED WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT IS THE RIGHT APPROACH AND
THE WATER FRAMEWORK DIRECTIVE MUST BE FULLY IMPLEMENTED.

The water problems can no longer be individually solved in a sectoral way. An integrated approach is especially needed to address the water scarcity problems, to meet all water use requirements while respecting aquatic ecosystems: we need an intersectoral approach between water uses, a coordination between upstream and downstream, between quantity and quality, between surface waters and ground water.

Since water has no national and administrative boundaries, the river basin is the most relevant scale. In France, basin management was implemented 45 years ago by the Water Act of 1964 and a Water Agency was created in each large river basin. River basin management was disseminated all over Europe by the Water Framework Directive in 2000.

More recently, the need for basin organizations was integrated by the United Nations into the Declaration of the Commission for Sustainable Development in May 2008.

To address water scarcity, the Water Framework Directive (WFD) provides some tools: river basin management planning, programmes of measures, economic instruments, public participation, transboundary coordination. Particularly, the cost-recovery principle and the incentive pricing to be set up before 2010 can help to better control the water demand.

That is why, in my mind, the full implementation of WFD is necessary to address water scarcity.

**2/ SECONDLY,
THE ALLOCATION OF WATER RESOURCES BETWEEN USES MUST BE ORGANIZED
AND WATER EFFICIENCY MUST BE STRONGLY REINFORCED.**

Providing water to the public should be the top priority.

Other water use priorities should be defined through participative processes. For example, in France, in each river basin, the priorities are decided by the Basin Committee, gathering the representatives of the State, the local authorities and the different categories of users. The priorities are then detailed at the local level by Local Water Commissions. For example, in the river basins experiencing frequent or permanent water shortage, the farmers are submitted to a compulsory allocation of water, each of them receiving a “water quota”.

Water-saving measures should be reinforced. Priority should be given to the reduction of the demand. Special attention should be paid to measures aiming to improve land-use planning and water-saving in agriculture. We have to make better use of the available water resources and avoid mobilizing supplementary resources. This is only when all water saving and water efficiency measures have been implemented, that additional water supply infrastructures should be set up and if the impacts on the environment are minimized.

Financial incentives appear necessary. National water pricing policies should be more efficient, by setting the right price for water and introducing compulsory water metering programmes.

Legal instruments are also necessary, reinforcing controls and taking measures of restriction for water uses. For example, in France, the State representative in each department can decide to reduce or suppress some water uses. He can also ask the operators of dams to release water in the river to guarantee a minimal flow protecting aquatic life.

To conclude on this point, we have to restore the balance between water offer and demand ; we have to move from a policy of offer to a policy of demand.

**3/ THIRD POINT,
IT IS NECESSARY TO SOLVE THE SHORT-TERM PROBLEMS BUT ALSO TO ADOPT A
LONG-TERM PLANNING**

Action cannot any more be done on a case-by-case basis but it must be planned in the long term by solving structural problems. Management Plans for water scarcity and droughts should be developed in order to pass from crisis management to risk management, to anticipate the consequences, to integrate prevention and adaptation measures.

In France, after the high drought of the Summer 2003, the government decided to elaborate a national action plan. This water scarcity management plan gives priority to drinking water, is focused on the water allocation between uses and the shift from water-supply oriented policy to a water-demand oriented policy. The national plan is conducted by a National Committee, gathering the representatives of all stakeholders concerned. A specific committee meets regularly in each river basin.

The challenge is to develop a long-term planning instead of a management by fits and starts.

4/ LAST POINT, WE MUST REINFORCE OUR COOPERATION IN EUROPE

The WFD defines useful tools. But it was necessary to go further. In July 2007, the European Commission published a Communication "**Addressing the challenge of water scarcity and droughts in the European Union**". After this communication, a Working Group has been put in place within the European Common Implementation Strategy of the WFD. This Working Group is preparing guidelines for a future legislative instrument. Other actions are under preparation: Europe is working towards an early warning system and the definition of common indicators to monitor both water scarcity and drought.

To progress in this way, I would like to stress the **added-value of better coordination. Upstream-downstream common cause should be increased especially in international basins:** exchange of data, coordination of monitoring and warning systems, integration of information systems, coordination of actions. **Bilateral and international agreements** should be signed. Transboundary cooperation is of high importance: to prevent socio-economic and environmental impacts, it is essential that countries act together.

To conclude this point, I want to say: water doesn't belong to a country or another, but to a geographical reality. Water must be a factor of peace and not a factor of conflict!

Conclusion

As a conclusion, I would like to stress the need:

- to adopt river basin management and fully implement the WFD;
- to set priorities and allocate water between uses;
- to improve water efficiency and save water before developing new resources;
- to adopt a long-term planning;
- to reinforce the European cooperation, especially for transboundary rivers and aquifers.

Finally, as a French Parliamentarian strongly involved in the water sector, I would like to give here my full support to the candidature of the City of Marseille for hosting the next World Water Forum. I hope you will consider, as I do, that this is a challenge for Europe.

Thank you for your attention.