

Informal Meeting of Ministers for the Environment and Climate Change

Nicosia, Cyprus
7 – 8 July, 2012

Cyprus Presidency Concluding Remarks on the Blueprint Discussions on the 7th of July

Following the invitation of the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the European Union, an Informal Meeting of Ministers for the Environment and Climate Change was held in Nicosia on 7 and 8 July 2012.

The first day of the Meeting was dedicated to water. The main topic on the agenda was the forthcoming Communication on the “Blueprint to Safeguard Europe’s Water Resources”, which is a key environmental item in the Commission’s Work Programme for 2012.

On the 7th of July, the Meeting was attended by the Ministers for the Environment or Heads of Delegations from all Member States of the European Union, the acceding or candidate countries or other countries that have a special relationship with the European Union, the European Commissioner for Environment, the Chairman of the Committee for the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety of the European Parliament and representatives of the Secretariat of the European Council.

The discussions were based on a background paper circulated by the Cyprus Presidency, with the objective to allow the Ministers / Heads of Delegations to contribute to the preparations for the Blueprint and lay the ground for the adoption of Council Conclusions on 19 December 2012.

During the Meeting, it was:

Confirmed that improvements in the implementation of the current water legislation are the first priority and that, in relation to other policies, better integration is needed, in particular with the Common Agricultural Policy and Regional Policy. Improved coherence is also needed with energy, transport and land use policies.

Stressed that the current EU legal and policy framework for water is largely adequate for addressing the key challenges that Europe’s waters face and that any new legislative proposal should be thoroughly evaluated.

Underlined that there is no “one-size fits all” solution that satisfies all needs and circumstances and that the specificities of Member States should be taken into account.

Emphasised that reliable funding (both public and private) is key for implementing any policies, plans or measures.

Highlighted that the following actions must be taken at EU level to foster integration and implementation of water policy, taking into account the subsidiarity principle:

- **Achievement of more efficient water governance**, through the development of peer review processes for river basin district authorities, the reinforcement of inspections and surveillance and the development of guidance to integrate the notions of water balances, minimum environmental flows and water efficiency targets into river basin management planning.
- **Improvement of information collection, dissemination and sharing**, by further developing the Water Information System for Europe (WISE), increasing the interoperability of available information, decreasing the administrative burden by harmonising the reporting cycles of the water related Directives, addressing the knowledge gap in water quantitative management, exchanging information and best practices and improving analysis of the costs and benefits of water protection measures.
- **Protection of water ecosystems**, through Green Infrastructure that promotes natural water retention measures.
- **Boosting of innovation**, through innovative processes, such as the European Innovation Partnership (EIP) on Water.
- **Improvement of drought management**, through the further development of a European wide early warning system for droughts, the integration of drought management planning into overall river basin management planning, the establishment of a drought emergency fund and the enhancement and better utilisation of the funding opportunities currently available to tackle water scarcity and droughts.
- **Management of water demand**, by improving irrigation efficiency and implementing efficiency measures in buildings through the inclusion of water efficiency requirements for appliances in the Eco-design Directive work plan.
- **Strengthening of international cooperation**, through the achievement of the water related Millennium Development Goals, the support of integrated water management in third countries and the improvement of transboundary cooperation.

Finally, it was:

Acknowledged that rising water demand and the impacts of climate change are expected to increase the pressure on Europe's water resources and phenomena such as scarcity, droughts and floods. In this respect, the importance of increased efficiency in water use and improved resilience to extreme weather events was highlighted.

Underlined that the taking up of water efficiency and resilience measures could be improved through reliable data and information, the establishment of European Standards on water re-use and the setting up of water efficiency targets and sustainable leakage levels for water infrastructure.

Recognised that current pricing schemes in Europe often fail to combine the objectives of efficiency and fairness and do not allow the degree of cost recovery required for the sustainable financing of

water policy. Reasons for the lack or inefficient use of such instruments include insufficient knowledge, barriers to acceptance, low social acceptability, inappropriate pricing structures and lack of pre-conditions such as metering and abstraction control.

Highlighted that Member States need to enhance the use of economic instruments and define incentive water pricing policies that take into account the social, environmental and economic effects of cost recovery as well as the geographic and climatic conditions of the region or regions affected. Such policies must also be promoted in conjunction with other water policy instruments, awareness raising and education, development of guidance documents, stakeholder involvement, payments for Ecosystem Services, metering, abstraction control including GMES satellite technology, conditionalities for using EU funds and the appropriate use of information and data.