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Water Blueprint

November 2013

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- While regretting that I am not able to be with you in person today, I am very pleased to have a chance to address this video message to you on the state of play of EU water policy.
- As you know, the Commission adopted the Water Blueprint on 14 November last year. This is our new strategy for the protection of Europe's water resources and also one of the priorities highlighted in the Commission Roadmap to a more Resource Efficient Europe.
- The proposals in the Blueprint are the fruit of a real collective effort of consultation and preparation. This has involved Member States, river basin authorities, the water service sector, water-using industries, the scientific community, NGOs, and the European Parliament.
- Our assessment of more than a hundred River Basin Management Plans prepared by the Member States shows the extent of the challenge. On present trends, it is fairly clear that 47% of the EU water will fail to achieve good status by 2015.
- As pointed out in the report from the European Environment Agency, this is obviously not good enough to achieve the Water Framework Directive goal of good water status everywhere. The main message of the Blueprint is that **we need to really step up our action a lot in order to get closer to this goal. We may be some way away from achieving it, but it can be done by working together at all levels.**
- The purpose of the Blueprint is to help direct efforts where they are needed so that there will be a real impact right across Europe. The timeframe for the action we propose spans from 2013 until 2020.

- We think that we need to improve policy **implementation**; to increase policy **integration** and fill in few policy **gaps**. Let me address these three aspects.
- On **implementation**, - the first strand of action in the Blueprint - we already have the key legislation in place. The Water Framework Directive is of course at the heart of our policy and it is complemented by important legislation, particularly on water quality: on nitrates, waste water treatment, industrial emissions, and chemicals. In spite of this, we are not fully achieving our goals, so we need to reinforce implementation efforts to deliver improvements that people expect.
- This can be done, for example, by reinforcing nitrates action programmes; by better investment planning for waste water treatment; and by ensuring that permits for industrial emissions duly account for water impacts.
- Compliance with EU legislation is an essential part of delivering better water status, and the Commission will play its full role to ensure it.
- For good water management, quality and quantity are two aspects that cannot be separated. Water managers need to know how much water is available before they can allocate it and, when doing this, they must take into account what nature needs to deliver its benefits. The problem is that in many parts of Europe, we don't really know the full picture.
- Therefore, we have started by trying to address a missing link: the water accounts. The work we have done with the European Environment Agency is a good basis to make sure that water balances in each river basin are within sustainable limits. Reliable water accounts will allow us to calculate how much water should be set aside for a proper ecological flow that maintains the services provided by our water ecosystems.

- This is why the Blueprint stresses the need to improve the data on water availability and to develop a common understanding of ecological flow. After that, we can work on a sound methodology to implement water efficiency targets in the river basins in which they are needed.
- Another aspect tackled by the Blueprint is the issue of water pricing and cost recovery, including environmental costs. At the moment, this policy isn't working: we have implementation gaps and methodological hurdles which have prevented improvements in water efficiency. Incentive water pricing must be in place for all water using sectors as required by the Water Framework Directive and, to this end, we recommend that metering be generalised. We also want to develop a common methodology for cost-recovery calculation which allows for comparable results throughout the Union. Water users should adequately contribute to the recovery of the cost of all water services, including the environmental, economic and resource costs.
- Let me also highlight one of the many implementation tools proposed in the Blueprint in relation to which I think that networks of river basin authorities can play an essential role:
 - We have proposed the establishment of a peer review process to allow river basin authorities to evaluate the management plans developed by others with a view to learning from each other and spreading good practices, particularly in water governance. The Commission will soon launch a support contract for this and I hope we will receive a good response from interested Member States and River Basin authorities.
- All of these areas are particularly promising for innovation. Innovation to get better public policies, but also to encourage the private sector to take ideas to market. We need to make sure that we remain competitive in a market which is on track to double in size by 2030. That is one of the reasons why the

Commission has also launched, together with the Blueprint, an Innovation Partnership on water.

- The implementation instruments I have outlined will not fully deliver if we do not do something more. We must act **to integrate water policy objectives much more into other policies**. This is the second strand of action in the Blueprint.
- In this respect, agriculture is essential. The Blueprint identifies natural green infrastructures such as floodplains, wetlands or buffer strips along river banks, as well as farmers' compliance with water policy, as key measures to be supported by agricultural policy.
- The Commission proposals on the reform of the CAP offered good opportunities for this. They have been partially supported by the European legislators and we shall now work together to make the most of them by developing CAP implementing rules..
- The Blueprint also highlights the need for water management priorities to be included more strongly in the Cohesion and Structural Funds and loans of the European Investment Bank. Member States who want to finance projects in the water sector from Cohesion funds should, as a minimum, have a river basin management plan in place as well as a proper pricing policy.
- The last part of this year and the beginning of the next one are crucial moments for Member States to define their priorities for EU funding through partnership agreements currently negotiated with the Commission. It is our collective challenge to try and integrate water policy objectives in these priorities now.
- In the Blueprint preparatory process, we also looked to see if something new is needed to fill gaps in water policy. We agree with the vast majority of stakeholders that our legislation is well developed and extensive. But **there are**

two main areas where progress is needed: water efficiency in buildings and water re-use. This is our third strand of action in the Blueprint.

- We are of course conscious that **there should not be a one-size-fits-all approach** to very different situations in the Member States. Therefore, we propose **to focus on adding value at EU level.**
 - First, in the Eco-design Directive, we will look into options to make products such as taps and showers more water and energy efficient. This will not only achieve considerable water resource savings but also create opportunities for economic growth and new jobs.
 - Second, we will work on setting EU quality standards for water re-use. A set of quality standards could address public fears, for example, about food grown with re-used water. This would help alleviate pressure in water-stressed areas.
- Finally, there are additional measures which underpin and reinforce the Blueprint.
 - First, we are also working to strengthen resource efficiency in economic policy under the European Semester. Given the importance of the water-sector for growth and jobs, we can identify some measures on water-efficiency which can help avoid unnecessary public subsidies as well as promote opportunities for innovation in the sector.
 - Second, we will look into options to reinforce inspections, for instance in relation to water abstraction permits.
 - Third, the Blueprint also puts considerable emphasis on the knowledge base for water policy. We propose to continue developing the Water Information System for Europe (WISE) to link it better with national data bases and facilitate decision-makers' access to essential information. The Commission

Joint Research Centre's hydro-economic model can help water managers assess the cost-effectiveness of the measures included in their River Basin Management Plans. We look forward to refining this tool so that it can become a great help for all water managers.

- Ladies and Gentlemen,
- As you can see, our policy proposals are wide-ranging. The EU Council of Ministers has by and large endorsed them in December 2012 and they have also now been included in the Work Programme adopted by the EU Water Directors last June under the Common Implementation Strategy of the Water Framework Directive.
- We look forward to work with all stakeholders to turn these ideas into action as soon as possible and in particular with River Basin authorities and their networks as they have been identified in the Work Programme as essential to link the European process with the implementation of water policy on the ground.
- At the same time, we will continue to conduct a series of bilateral discussions with all Member States in order to ensure that the Commission recommendations, based on our assessment of Member States' River Basin Management Plans, are adequately taken up to improve the next Plans due in 2015.
- The Blueprint is not just a response to an environmental necessity. The EU needs to focus on green growth and become more resource efficient to achieve sustainable recovery from the current economic and environmental crisis while adapting to climate change.
 - I thank you for your attention and wish you a very successful conference