

Commissioner Janez Lenarčič
Crisis Management
European Commission
B-1049 Brussels – Belgium

Brussels, 9th June 2020

Subject: Main priorities for water under the Commission 2019-2024

Dear Commissioner,

For nine consecutive years, the World Economic Forum has ranked water crises as a top global societal risk in terms of impact on every aspect of our lives. The post COVID19 situation in Europe is a wake-up call to switch to a new paradigm in which consideration for water security and risk management are prerequisites.

The EU Water Alliance, composed of a broad range of water-related stakeholders, has therefore addressed key messages to Von der Leyen's Commission (see annex 1). As you are entrusted with the role of Commissioner for Crisis Management to ensure civil protection and humanitarian aid operations, water-related challenges are of interest to your directorate, being as they are, important factors in the provision of long-term solutions and the addressing of the challenges posed by climate change.

Therefore, this large coalition of water-related stakeholders kindly requests a meeting with you to discuss the following points of interests, which accordance with your portfolio are capable of having an impact on society in Europe and beyond:

- Access to water and sanitation are a human right and have a direct impact on social and economic development, especially so when addressing subjects such as sanitation conditions, health and food. By providing water to all and by protecting and restoring freshwater ecosystems such as wetlands, Europe will be better prepared to prevent and react to water-related emergencies such as flooding, droughts or diffuse pollution.
- Water-related risks, many of them closely related to sanitation represent the principal challenges of the decade. These are risks which directly affect food safety and security, water security, waterborne-diseases and the solutions for them – such as the current COVID-19 pandemic - and extreme environmental events. As a result, any health, disaster, climate policy or strategy has to carefully consider water issues within a holistic approach. There exists a unique opportunity to ensure that water-related challenges become visible and to dismantle the silo-approach presenting a global picture of the connections between water and health, innovation, security and economic development. By investing in a Water Smart Society, Europe will contribute to the reduction of negative environmental, material, economic and health factors, thus reducing the risk to all citizens.

- Many crises worldwide originate from water hazards: too much water due to floods, too little water during droughts or excessive water pollution. Preventing such emergencies requires the integration of ecosystems and Nature Based Solutions (NBS) within national strategies and plans for disaster risk reduction and resilience building. In the light of climate change and disaster management, this encompasses increasing the resilience to water-related hazards of the potentially most affected communities, counteracting migration drivers or mitigating and adapting to them. In times of crisis, water supply and sanitation are a primary concern. Preparation for moment in which utility services are interrupted is key to disaster management. Plans for immediate responses, as well as recovery and reconstruction mechanisms, need to be in place.
- Humanitarian aid strategies and packages and the way that such measures may lay the foundations for restoration and re-development require a fundamental understanding of the key role that access to water and sanitation play. Basic services of WASH (including wastewater treatment) are fundamental during disasters, in displaced people's camps and other extreme situations. The EU has experience of acting as hosting countries and understands the pressure of a sudden increase in demand regarding its infrastructures. The question as to how to establish efficient, but flexible long-term planning which answers the needs of the people affected and the nation states who must answer such needs is one that must be answered clearly and carefully.
- Therefore, it is not unreasonable to state that the EU should support investment in technological and non-technological research and innovation aimed at identifying and preventing risks in water-related infrastructures not only in Europe but also beyond. This research is also key to maintain Europe as a frontrunner in the mitigation and adaptation to Climate Change, in no small measure thanks to the application of nature-based solutions.
- In order to address environmental threats it is also essential to develop disaster risk strategies and to improve access to early warning systems that will permit the EU to respond effectively prevent so far as is possible risks identified within policies related to water diplomacy.
- Water and sanitation can no longer be considered as secondary factors. On the contrary they are sectors which require a presence at the forefront of policy-making procedures responsible for determining future investment criteria.
- As in all cases we would recommend fully inclusive approaches that involve all stakeholders and lead to the joint ownership of the solutions.

We are determined to form a proactive part of the solution.

Therefore, we look forward to scheduling a meeting to discuss these issues at your earliest convenience. The contact point for further communication is Durk Krol, Water Europe Executive director, durk.krol@watereurope.eu, tel: +32 2 7068292

EU Water Alliance

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Water Europe Director
Durk Krol



On behalf of:



Enclosed:

- Annex 1: EUWA Manifesto