

Commissioner Mariya Gabriel
Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth.
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 Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth, water-related challenges have a direct impact on your mission to ensure that education, research and innovation enable society to undertake a successful transition to a climate-neutral economy and new digital age.

You are responsible for a mission of paramount importance: The investment in future generations. By establishing water-related challenges as priorities, the foundations will be laid for the more efficient achievement of Green Deal objectives. The creation of water-related employment provides an opportunity to establish the improved basis for the welfare and employment growth amongst the youth and the more vulnerable sectors of the population. Moreover, the ongoing COVID-19 crisis underlines the importance of the water-health nexus (access to water, WASH, hygiene, drugs and disease monitoring). Even though Coronavirus is easily removed in wastewater treatment plants, wastewater and drinking water treatment plants remain vulnerable places when one is discussing diseases. Research is required so as to be able to better confront possible increasing pressures on water systems.

Therefore, this large coalition of water-related stakeholders kindly requests a meeting with you to discuss these and the following challenges and opportunities. Water is key to the aims of your directorate if it is to have a positive impact on society in Europe and beyond:

- Elevating water to the rank of key topic for Research and Innovation in Horizon Europe work programmes, especially with regards to nature-based solutions, digitalisation and emerging pollution in infrastructures and river basins, thus supporting high standards and innovative approaches and solutions (technological and non-technological). Water-related challenges are key risks for society and Europe should ensure additional investment flows not only in Horizon Europe but also within the skills agenda and additional funds that invest in the future.

- Investing in joint research between key water-use sectors (energy, agriculture, transport, and the environment) from local to global scales. This is an essential step to ensure the success of solutions through the creation of a broad support base representing many sectors of society. To this end, Water-oriented Living Labs (WoLLs) are a powerful collaborative tool to test new solutions and synergies to be applied in a Water Smart Society, in other words, a society in which the true value of water is recognised and comprehended, and all available water sources are managed in such a way that water scarcity and pollution of groundwater are avoided.
- Strengthening the commercial value of innovations in water within and beyond the EU. The quintessential importance of water by guaranteeing a complete innovation value chain covering all technology readiness levels.
- Investing in underpinning research for improved early warning, early action and mitigating solutions regarding water-related risks such as floods, droughts, and water pollution, protecting citizens from these natural hazards.
- Focus on the new generation, placing European youth as an actor of change in the field of water, sustainable development, and the achievement of the Green Deal.
- Implementing improved education with regards to water issues and training in line with the major current challenges, which will not only improve the employability of young people but also enhance their capacity to take action and demonstrate entrepreneurship and leadership.
- Increased inclusion of young water leaders in decision-making processes and a strengthening of mechanisms to better incorporate the voice of young people at all levels. For example, through intra-generational dialogues between decision-makers/experts and young leaders, in order to foster the exchange of experience and the consideration of the needs of youth.
- Access to clean water and sanitation has a transformative effect on the lives of young women because it contributes to women's safety and dignity and engages them in societal activities such as education and employment, improving their lives by empowering them. In general terms, access to water demands a water smart strategy and collaboration to ensure that no sector of the population is excluded.
- Maximising synergies for the issue of water with other European tools such as CAP, FEDER and FEADER. Fostering the creation of new innovative financial mechanisms (EIB) for an innovative water sector strengthening a commercial value for innovation in water. Water-oriented Living Labs can help increase the impact of the directorate's actions in supporting national or regional authorities while also involving citizens and young people.
- Citizen science can help to fill the data gap and improve public awareness and engagement.

EU Water Alliance

- Methodologies for the dissemination of *fit-for-purpose* funding should and can be adapted.
- The digitalisation of the economy, particularly Artificial Intelligence, is a key challenge for the water sector in order to secure the correct quality and quantity of water for the economy as a whole. This priority will have a substantial impact on the water sector and is expected to greatly support and contribute to the achievement of the EU Green Deal.
- Finally it is recommendable that JRC and WISE platforms also include stimuli aimed towards human capital, namely to ensure the training and availability of the required skilled workforce.

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

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