

To Their Excellencies

Mr. Maroš Šefčovič
Executive Vice-President of the European Commission
Mr. Wopke Hoekstra
Commissioner for Climate Action

17 July 2024

Dear Executive Vice-President,
Dear Commissioner,

Water is a strategic and vital resource that plays a key role in sustaining life, regulating ecosystems, ensuring the well-functioning of our economy and society and the well-being of our citizens.

At the same time, water is increasingly under pressure across Europe. Climate crisis, with the increase in the frequency and intensity of extreme phenomena, is due to exacerbate this pressure and to increase water related-risks, with cross-cutting severe impacts. Increasing regions in Europe are already facing a limitation of natural freshwater resources which have become insufficient to meet water demands.

Droughts, water scarcity and floods are no longer an anomaly in Europe. According to the European Environment Agency, around 20% of the European territory and 30% of Europeans suffer from water stress every year. The economic cost is estimated at around €9 billion per year, with this figure excluding damage to ecosystems, and it could reach €65 billion per year by the end of the century. The losses are mainly felt in agriculture and food systems, the energy sector and public supply. Regarding floods, a study published by the European Commission in 2021 estimated the total costs of mitigating flood risks for the period 2016-2021 to be at least €14 billion.

Concrete action is therefore needed to boost water security and resilience across the European Union. This is a common challenge. It should be a top priority in the EU agenda, translated into a comprehensive approach at the EU level.

A higher level of articulation is required at European level, covering water in all its dimensions: fresh and saltwater resources, protection of ecosystems, human consumption, agriculture and food systems, energy and industries. This challenge requires adapting activities to existing water resources, ensuring efficiency in supply and demand, promoting environmental protection and maintenance of the ecosystems, integrating conventional and non-conventional resources and ensuring that resilience is achieved in a fair and equitable manner which respects the diverse hydrological and hydrogeological environment of Europe.

Strengthening water management in the European Union will require a strategic mobilisation of knowledge, technology and innovation, integrated planning and management tools, and monitoring (availability, consumption).

A systems approach is needed to ensure synergy and coherence across all legislative and planning processes, to better integrate water considerations and conservation objectives to ensure availability and security of water supplies through, in particular, the application of nature-based solutions such as the conservation and restoration of wetlands and other freshwater ecosystems, especially well-suited to water resilience.

Adequately funded research and innovation activities in the water sector, with a view to finding new solutions to address water scarcity, as well as improving existing ones, will be increasingly necessary.

The transition to water resilience also requires increased investment in adapting activities and territories to climate change scenarios, using both traditional and innovative financial instruments capable of mobilizing and leveraging private investment.

Participation of citizens and stakeholders will be essential to promote public engagement in all actions and to ensure that there is a real response to the needs of citizens and businesses.

The Strategic Agenda approved by the European Council on the 27 June commits to strengthen water resilience across the Union and invest in ample cross-border infrastructure also for water.

We, Ministers responsible for Environment, Climate and Water, just had the opportunity to widely discuss the keys dimensions of water resilience at our informal meeting under the Hungarian Presidency.

We therefore ask you to ensure that water will be a top priority in the European agenda over the coming years, and to materialize that commitment through comprehensive action at the EU level, including adequate and effective funding, which promotes innovation, an evidence-based decision-making process and the strengthening of international cooperation.

Please accept our warmest regards,

Leonore Gewessler, Federal Minister for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology, Austria

Alain Maron, Minister of Climate Transition, Environment, Energy, Cleanliness, Participatory Democracy, Health and Social Action, Belgium

Petar Dimitrov, Minister of Environment and Water, Bulgaria

Marija Vučković, Minister of Environmental Protection and Green Transition, Croatia

Dr. Maria Panayiotou, Minister of Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment, Cyprus

Magnus Heunicke, Minister for Environment, Denmark

Kristen Michal, Minister of Climate, Estonia

Christophe Béchu, Minister of Ecological Transition and Territorial Cohesion, France

Steffi Lemke, Federal Minister for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection, Germany

Theodoros Skylakakis, Minister of Environment and Energy, Greece

Gilberto Pichetto Fratin, Minister of the Environment and Energy Security, Italy

Simonas Gentvilas, Minister of Environment, Lithuania

Serge Wilmes, Minister of the Environment, Climate and Biodiversity, Luxembourg

Miriam Dalli, Minister for the Environment, Energy and Regeneration of the Grand Harbour, Malta

Barry Madlener, Minister of Infrastructure and Water Management, The Netherlands

Dariusz Klimczak, Minister of Infrastructure, Poland

Maria da Graça Carvalho, Minister of Environment and Energy, Portugal

Mircea Fechet, Minister of Environment, Waters and Forests, Romania

Tomáš Taraba, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Environment, Slovakia

Jože Novak, Minister of Natural Resources and Spatial Planning, Slovenia

Teresa Ribera, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge, Spain