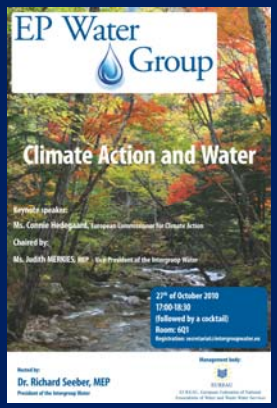
Intergroup Water/Wasser

Report on the 6th meeting of the Intergroup Water, 27 October 2010

"Water and Climate Action"

European Commissioner for Climate Action, Ms. Connie HEDEGAARD, addressed the Intergroup Water at its October meeting on the pivotal role water plays in climate change. She underlined that water issues feature in almost all aspects of the EC adaptation policy, like e.g. water scarcity, sanitation, flooding, drainage, water efficiency. The key note speech was followed by a lively debate between the Commissioner and the public. The meeting was very well attended with more than 100 participants from a wide range of organisations. The attendees were welcomes by the chair of the day, MEP Ms. Judith MERKIES and by Klara SZATKIEWICS, president of EUREAU. The meeting was concluded with a cocktail drink



Introduction speech by Ms. Klara SZATKIEWICS,

President of EUREAU

Dear Ms. Hedegaard,

As president of EUREAU, the management body of the Intergroup Water, I would like to seize this opportunity to share with you the some key concerns of the water service sector with regard to climate change:

Climate change represents a key challenge for the water sector in terms of availability of water, flooding in urban areas and impacts on water and waste water treatment systems and assets. Rapid climatic change may lead to strain and shortages, including in regions where this has never been observed before.

We feel that there is not a sufficiently high profile given to water in the climate change debate. Water should be at the centre of adaptation planning and EUREAU calls for a coherent adaptation policy across all sectors to deal with the water challenges. Policy modification is needed beyond the water sector to ensure adaptation to climate change, for example agriculture and energy.

The main priorities for the water service sector are:

- **A systematic check of climate change impacts of all Community policy areas.** EUREAU supports the Commission's proposed review of Climate Change and Water policy. EUREAU calls for full consultation, discussion and participation across all sectors to enable joined up regulation and ensure that climate change is fully integrated into the decision making process.
- **Introduce incentives to encourage mitigation and adaptation measures** EUREAU calls for more incentives and the application of better regulation principles to further encourage mitigation and adaptation.
- **Control of substances and pollutants at source and effective catchment management**
  The water sector is a high user of energy in the treatment of wastewater prior to its return to the environment and in the treatment of drinking water. The tackling of pollution at source will become increasingly important to reduce the need for expensive and high carbon emission and unsustainable end of pipe treatment. EUREAU members actively support EU policy that controls substances and pollutants at source and effective catchment

management to protect water resources and reduce treatment needs as part of an effective mitigation strategy.

- **Need for a twin track approach balancing demand and supply.**

  We need a holistic approach combining measures of demand management, measures to optimise existing resources within the water cycle, and measures to create new resources. This approach needs to integrate environmental, social and economic considerations in deciding upon the prioritisation of alternative measures to address water scarcity and droughts.

- **Essential that adaptation strategies are implemented now to ensure that water infrastructure is resilient to our changing climate**

  Water supplies and water and wastewater infrastructure should be given more prominence due to their vital role in society and for the economy. It is essential that adaptation strategies are implemented now to ensure that this vital infrastructure is resilient to our changing climate. It is imperative that public water supply should always be the overriding priority to ensure access to adequate water provision.

  The Water Framework Directive does not guarantee per se that the water issue will be dealt with effectively: it is a useful tool but even with full implementation it will not meet the challenges of adaptation to deal with all water issues resulting from climate change.

Connie Hedegaard
Member of the European Commission

Water and Climate Change

SPEAKING POINTS

- I would like to thank the Intergroup for inviting me here today.
- It is impossible to talk about adaptation to climate change without talking about water and water related issues. That is why water issues feature in almost all aspects of our adaptation policy: - water scarcity, sanitation, flooding, drainage, water efficiency to name but a few.
- Water is therefore, naturally, a key feature in our White Paper on Adaptation to climate change.
- The White Paper, published last year, presents our framework for adaptation measures and policies to reduce the European Union's vulnerability to the impacts of climate change and specifically tackles increasing the resilience of biodiversity, ecosystems and water.
- Overall, the White Paper refers to Four Pillars: 1) Building a solid knowledge base for the EU on the impacts and consequences of climate change, 2) Integrating adaptation into EU key policy areas, 3) Employing a combination of policy instruments and 4) Strengthening international co-operation on adaptation.
- I will talk more about the white paper policy areas later, but first I would like to talk briefly about the impacts of climate change.

Impacts

- Europe is expected to be hit hard by climate change. Climatic changes are however diverse across Europe:
    - The area under high water stress in Europe is likely to increase due to climate change, in particular in Southern Europe where water scarcity is already a major issue. The additional number of people affected is estimated to be between 16 and 44 million according to the IPCC – "Climate Change 2007".

  - While Southern Europe is expected to suffer heavily from increased water scarcity, most of Europe will experience more frequent periods of extreme rainfall events which may lead to an increase in the number and intensity of floods, erosion and landslides.

- The impact of climate change on water is expected not only to affect water quantity, but also water quality and increases the risk of contamination of public water supplies. Warmer water, extreme rainfall and droughts can increase the total microbial loads in freshwater and have implications for disease outbreaks and water-quality monitoring.
- In addition to physical impacts there will also be significant economic impacts particularly in water-dependent economic sectors. This includes agriculture and the water services sector but also other sectors such as energy and tourism. For example:
  - Agriculture is highly sensitive to climate change and weather extremes. Changes in rainfall can affect water availability, run-off and related soil erosion rates and soil moisture, all of which are important for crop yields.
  - Additional water demand for agriculture and industry is expected to conflict with the additional demands for human consumption if adaptation measures are not put in place in due time.
  - Climate change affect the availability and temperature of cooling water for power plants and the river flows that are feeding hydropower stations.
  - Warmer surface waters are more prone to pollution which may also have consequences for bathing waters and related human health risks.
- Adaptation means planning ahead for the years and decades to come and preparing for the inevitable impacts of climate change. The risk to water availability due to climate change means that it is vital to keep our water resources clean, our aquatic ecosystems healthy and to maximise our water efficiency. Early action is needed to build capacity to adapt in the water sector, but also in other sectors that are water dependent (agriculture, transport, energy, tourism, industry, etc).
  - Healthy water ecosystems will be more resilient to climate change impacts, and may help to mitigate the effects of floods and droughts.
  - By restoring aquatic ecosystems, which naturally buffer, purify and conserve water, the effects of droughts, floods can be alleviated.
- River floods are the most common natural disaster in Europe. Global warming is generally expected to increase the magnitude and frequency of extreme precipitation events

- According to an IPCC study, without adaptation strategies, river flooding would affect 250,000 to 400,000 additional people per year in Europe by the 2080s, more than doubling the number with respect to the 1961–1990 period.
- Wetlands are vulnerable to climate change but, if properly protected and managed, also can increase resilience to climate impacts.

- In order to come to grips with water scarcity and droughts, the first priority is to move towards a water-efficient and water-saving economy.
  - There is a huge water saving potential in Europe. At least 40% of Europe's water consumption is wasted. Appropriate water pricing should an important tool to achieve this.
- The water services sector (waste water and drinking water industries) is also a GHG emitting sector.
  - Saving water also means saving energy and thus lowering the carbon impact of extracting, transporting and treating waste water and drinking water.

Mainstreaming

- The political views of the Commission on the new budget period were published on October 19 in the Budget Review Communication. The Budget Review makes it clear that climate policy, including adaptation and water management should be a key part of the new financing framework.
- As of mid-2011, the Commission will table proposals for the next financial framework post-2013, which will include proposals for changes to the major EU policies accompanied by funding, such as the Common Agriculture Policy, including the Rural Development Policy, and the Cohesion policy. The opportunity to integrate climate change and water related issues into the new financial perspective must not be missed.
- Funding for a swift transition to a low-carbon, climate resilient and resource efficient green growth economy and society should be increased. This would allow for, among other things, increasing investments for delivering good quality water, efficient water use, resilient aquatic ecosystems, multipurpose floodplains, etc.
- The idea of 'mainstreaming' adaptation to climate change thinking into EU policies was already one of the priority actions identified in the White Paper. Conceptually, you are certainly aware of what mainstreaming is about, as it is something your group has also been considering in relation to integrating water concerns into other policies.

- The Water Framework Directive, its Daughter Directives (on groundwater and environmental quality standards) and the Floods Directive, though not including climate change related provisions, could contribute to adaptation, in that they address all pressures and impacts on the aquatic environment in a cyclic management approach.
- Another key document that needs to be integrated in the forthcoming 2012 Blueprint to safeguard EU waters is the "follow-up report to the 2007 Communication on Water Scarcity and Drought" that presents a work programme for the medium and long term with a particular focus on improving water efficiency in agriculture, industry, household appliances and in buildings.

- Another priority pillar of the white paper is the development of the knowledge base for adaptation including in relation to water related issues, and the Commission has recently launched a major project to develop the climate change impacts and vulnerability clearinghouse.
  - The clearinghouse will help with disseminating scientific information, data and case studies about climate change impacts and vulnerability, to build a consistent and updated knowledge base.
  - It will assist an effective uptake of this knowledge by EU, national, regional, local or sectoral decision makers, by offering guidance, tools, best practices for assessments of vulnerability to climate change at different geographical levels and of adaptation plans and measures.
- With the clearinghouse operational we hope to have a tool that can be used by decision makers to develop their adaption strategies. In relation to water, we are looking to help with the identification and understanding of risks and the development of vulnerability maps, and then with guidance and ideas on how to deal with these risks and how to increase resilience.
- In terms of moving our policies in the right direction, an Adaptation Steering Group has been established. This group includes representatives of all interested EU Member States, the European Parliament, the Committee of the Regions, the European Environment Agency, as well as other representatives of civil society, and it held its inaugural meeting in September.
- Amongst others things, the Steering Group is helping the Commission taking forward the mainstreaming agenda and will help with the development of a comprehensive EU strategy for adapting to climate change for 2013, that is presented in the White Paper on Adaptation.

- I hope the work of this Intergroup can inform and enrich the strategy, on which we are now working, in relation to water issues.
- To conclude, I would like to stress again how crucial water is for developing adaptation policy and how important the work of the European Parliament can be in guiding this policy development.
- Climate change will affect water quantity as well as water quality and these impacts are already visible. There is a vast potential for adaptation in the water sector and water using sectors and for strengthening the resilience of aquatic ecosystems.
- Thank you very much.