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1. The topic of the protection and management of water resources is one of the key priorities of the HU presidency and it was indeed one of the main topics under discussion at the informal Council (Environment) held in Budapest/Gödöllő on 24-26 March 2011.
2. On 11 May 2011, the Presidency tabled draft Council conclusions on the Protection of water resources and integrated sustainable water management in the European Union and beyond <sup>1</sup>. These draft conclusions were examined at a number of meetings by the Working Party on the Environment.

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<sup>1</sup> Doc. 9826/11.

3. On 8 June 2011, the Committee of Permanent Representatives examined and approved the attached text.
4. The Council is therefore invited to adopt the attached draft conclusions at its meeting on 21 June 2011.
5. An exchange of views on Protection of water resources and integrated sustainable water management in the European Union and beyond will also take place at the Council meeting (Environment) on 21 June 2011. In this regard, the Presidency proposes that the following question be addressed by Ministers:

*How would you outline your country's most important expectations regarding the upcoming Blueprint to Safeguard Europe's Water Resources scheduled by the European Commission for 2012?*

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**Protection of water resources and integrated sustainable water management in the European Union and beyond**

**- Draft Council conclusions -**

RECOGNISING that while water availability and water quality are essential for sustainable development and green economy, waters face many threats including increasing trends of global population growth, urbanization, pollution, overexploitation, desertification and climate change.

STRESSING that these challenges are threatening our societies, especially in many developing countries. Recent studies show that competing demands for scarce water resources may lead to an estimated 40% global water supply shortage by 2030. Therefore, to achieve water resources protection and sustainable water management, a more sustained effort is necessary by all decision-makers, users and stakeholders at all levels.

RECALLING that, in the course of past decades, the EU has considerably improved and expanded its water policy instruments. Among the most important achievements are the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD)<sup>2</sup>, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive<sup>3</sup> and the EU Water Initiative (EUWI)<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Directive 2000/60/EC of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy. OJ L327, 22.12.2000, p.1.; surface water and ground water as defined in Art 2(1) and Art. 2(2).

<sup>3</sup> Directive 2008/56/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 June 2008, establishing a framework for Community action in the field of marine environmental policy (OJ L 164, 25.6.2008, p.19).

<sup>4</sup> Launched in 2002 at the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development (<http://www.euwi.net/>).

RECALLING the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region<sup>5</sup> and the EU Strategy for the Danube Region<sup>6</sup> and EMPHASIZING the importance of early exchange of experiences between macro-regional strategies on the best practices of the implementation of the water-related priority areas.

UNDERLINING how, despite the progress made, the EU still faces challenges in water management which inter alia call for full and timely implementation of relevant EU legislation, and EXPRESSING its concern with the extreme hydrological events over the last years, which climate change is likely to aggravate.

RECOGNISING the need to take into account the diversity of water-related challenges within the EU and hence the need for appropriate flexibility for the Member States when developing water policies.

#### THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

1. WELCOMES the Commission's intention to propose an EU response to these challenges by means of its Blueprint to Safeguard Europe's Water Resources (the 'Blueprint') in 2012.
2. EMPHASISES that the 'Blueprint', based on the assessment of the WFD River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs), the review of the policy on water scarcity and drought and the assessment of water vulnerability should also take into account the outcome of the water policy "fitness check", and that the Commission should assess the effectiveness and implementation of existing EU policy and legislation and work in close cooperation with the Member States and all relevant stakeholders in order to exchange information and experiences.

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<sup>5</sup> European Council conclusions of 29-30 October 2009 (doc. 15265/1/09 REV 1) and Council Conclusions on Regional approaches to management of water and the marine environment, including implementation of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (doc. 17797/09).

<sup>6</sup> Council conclusions of 13 April 2011 on the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region (doc. 8743/1/11 REV 1 - COM(2010)715 final).

## *Climate change and water policy - Integrated management of extreme hydrological events*

3. STRESSES that adaptation to the potential impacts of climate change should be integrated into water management decisions and should be undertaken also in the context of integrated land use and spatial planning, bearing in mind that water efficiency measures are also no-regret adaptation measures <sup>7</sup>.
4. RECALLS that improved energy efficiency in water supply and waste water management are climate mitigation measures and that water efficiency measures can also help in this regard; EMPHASISES that land use, land use changes and climate change policies and measures (e.g. utilization of hydropower, inland navigation, bio-energy, carbon capture and storage, agriculture, forestry) should not endanger water bodies, water-dependent ecosystems or biodiversity, and therefore HIGHLIGHTS the need to maintain and to restore river continuity where possible.
5. CONSIDERS that it is necessary to carry out a more proactive management of the risks of flood, droughts and, in general, water quantity management needs and to put more emphasis on "green infrastructures" <sup>8</sup>.
6. RECALLS in this context the Council Conclusions on Integrated flood management within the European Union <sup>9</sup> and that flood risk assessments, flood hazard and risk maps, and flood risk management plans covering all aspects of flood risk management, focusing in particular on prevention, protection and preparedness, have to be prepared throughout the EU in line with the Floods Directive (FD). <sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> "No-regret adaptation measures" are those adaptation measures that would be justified under all plausible future scenarios, including the absence of man-made climate change (<http://climatechange.worldbank.org/climatechange/content/adaptation-guidance-notes-key-words-and-definitions>).

<sup>8</sup> See LIFE Building Europe's Green Infrastructures ([http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/publications/lifepublications/lifefocus/documents/green\\_infra.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/publications/lifepublications/lifefocus/documents/green_infra.pdf)).

<sup>9</sup> Adopted by the Council (JHA) on 12 May 2011 (doc. 9241/11).

<sup>10</sup> Directive 2007/60/EC of 23 October 2007 on the assessment and management of flood risks (OJ L288, 6.11.2007, p.27).

7. STRESSES that the handling of extreme weather events and climate change should be considered in an integrated way with land use planning and management including agriculture, nature conservation and infrastructures. The promotion of sustainable multi-purpose natural water retention measures (reforestation, floodplain restoration, soil management, wetlands development, etc.) can often provide cost-effective responses to extreme events while offering additional benefits in relation to other environmental, climate and socio-economic objectives.
8. EMPHASISES that flood risk management planning based on the FD and river basin management planning under the WFD should be coordinated as a key part of integrated water resources management.
9. RECALLS that extreme events will have adverse effects on groundwater resources and therefore more attention should be given to the protection and the improvement of the assessment tools and the sustainable use of these resources and the related research.
10. RECALLS the Council Conclusions of 30 October 2007 on Water scarcity and drought <sup>11</sup> and those of 11 June 2010 on water scarcity, drought and adaptation to climate change <sup>12</sup> and EMPHASIZES that further efforts are necessary, especially in the increasing number of Member States that are affected, to tackle water scarcity and drought.
11. CONSIDERS that there should be a proper allocation of available water resources to uses, including the environment, taking into account water supply and demand, and NOTES the Commission's considerations in this respect presented in the Flagship initiative for a resource-efficient Europe of the Europe 2020 Strategy <sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Doc. 13887/07.

<sup>12</sup> Doc. 11061/10.

<sup>13</sup> Doc. 5869/11.

## *Integration of water into EU policies*

12. STRESSES the importance of mainstreaming water policy by improving the efficient use of water resources, reducing pressure on water bodies and managing trade-offs among water uses. RECOMMENDS the further integration of water management aspects into other EU policies, particularly into the Cohesion, Transport, Energy, Climate, Maritime and Common Agricultural and Fisheries Policy.
13. RECALLS that water utility infrastructure projects are among the largest EU funded projects. In view of future water infrastructure needs and the ageing of current water infrastructure, which *inter alia* results in leakages of networks, these aspects should be adequately considered in the future EU Cohesion Policy in an economically and environmentally sustainable way.
14. RECALLS that agriculture is a major user of water resources, as well as an important cause of diffuse and point source pollution (nutrients, pesticides) and hydro-morphological changes, despite the initiatives already undertaken to reduce these impacts. RECOGNISES that cost-effective changes to agricultural practices, such as improved soil tillage practice, buffer strips in riparian areas and more efficient fertilizer applications, can have major benefits for water and that the application of modern technologies for irrigation offers the potential for major water savings.
15. STRESSES that while the CAP supports important EU objectives that are set out in the Treaties, it should also further enhance the reduction of the environmental and climate change impacts and the internalization of the environmental costs of agricultural activities.
16. UNDERLINES therefore that water policy objectives need to be better integrated into the forthcoming reform of the CAP that should seek win-win opportunities for the support of environmental and climate benefits through the CAP in rural areas which also contribute to achieve the objectives of the relevant water strategies and legal instruments.

## *Ecosystems and role of ecosystem services*

17. RECALLS the importance of the value of multiple services provided by water bodies and water related ecosystems (e.g. providing resources for drinking water and fisheries, maintaining biodiversity, flood protection, nutrient removal capacity of wetland areas, water-regulating role of forests, transport of sediments) which remain largely unaccounted for in the development and implementation of policies and projects affecting water.
18. HIGHLIGHTS the connection between extreme hydrological events and their negative effects on ecosystem services. RECALLS that water ecosystems are under increased pressure due to human activities including urbanization, agriculture, forestry, industry (in particular pollution risk), flood protection facilities and infrastructure development, spreading of invasive alien species, etc. and that the effects of climate change will add further pressure. The biodiversity and natural services provided by these ecosystems have significantly decreased; therefore it is necessary to prevent their further degradation and fragmentation and to restore them as much as possible.
19. RECALLS that the restoration of damaged water-based ecosystems is an important measure under the WFD RBMPs to achieve the "good status" of water bodies, including good ecological status for surface water bodies. Ensuring the sustainability of freshwater ecosystems and their services underpins efforts to achieve food and energy security, climate change adaptation and mitigation and flood protection.



20. REITERATES the need for new infrastructure projects to be in line with the WFD objectives, including the requirement of non deterioration of the ecological status of rivers thereby preserving the provision of ecosystem services and their buffer capacity against droughts and floods, as well as avoiding fragmentation and discontinuity. STRESSES that the ecological effects of infrastructure projects on rivers should be kept to a minimum by taking appropriate mitigation and compensation measures that foster the objectives of the Birds <sup>14</sup> and Habitat <sup>15</sup> Directives, as well as those of the WFD or other objectives beneficial to the protection of the environment. Comprehensive assessments must be completed for all projects that have potentially adverse effects on river ecology and the cumulative effects of separate interventions need to be considered.
21. CALLS for ecosystem services and their economic value to be identified and to be integrated into all relevant sectoral policies and instruments (e.g. economic, trade, transport, agriculture, climate, energy), as well as into public procurement and private sector decision-making.
22. HIGHLIGHTS that due emphasis needs to be paid to the importance and value of water related ecosystem services, including the need for appropriate accounting, as well as to their trans-boundary character. CONSIDERS that the most relevant measures that could be widely implemented at EU and national level as well as the policy instruments that can accelerate the implementation of those measures should be identified, and that exchanges on best practices should be promoted.

### *Innovation, science-policy interface*

23. RECOGNISES the need for improving the interface between science and policy to enhance evidence-based decision-making and assist governance to launch more relevant water-related research, and CALLS for the development of a roadmap for water research to be considered under the next EU Framework RTD Programme.

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<sup>14</sup> Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2009 on the conservation of wild birds (OJ L 20, 26.1.2010, p.7).

<sup>15</sup> Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (OJ L 206 , 22.07.1992, p. 7), as subsequently amended.

24. HIGHLIGHTS the importance of innovation and therefore INVITES the Commission to investigate an innovation partnership on water in close cooperation with the Member States, with a view to achieving sustainable and efficient use of water.
25. UNDERLINES the need, at the EU level, to further develop the Water Information System for Europe (WISE) <sup>16</sup> and to provide common and simple policy-relevant indicators of sustainability/vulnerability of water resources and information on policy responses;

### *Intra-EU and international cooperation*

26. RECALLS the transboundary character of many EU river basins and STRESSES the need, reflected in the WFD and in the FD, for cooperation within and beyond the EU, with due regard to the management of both water quantity and quality, in particular within trans-boundary river commissions relying on positive experiences, such as the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR). EMPHASIZES the important role of the UNECE Convention on the protection and use of transboundary watercourses and international lakes <sup>17</sup>, for cooperation with third countries. RECALLS the Council Decision of 27 June 2006 <sup>18</sup> and ENCOURAGES the Commission, as regards matters falling within the Union's competence, in close cooperation with the relevant Member States and in accordance with that Decision, to continue negotiating international agreements on cooperation in European river basins shared between certain member States and third countries with a view to concluding these agreements.
27. CONSIDERS that the experiences of WFD-related international agreements, the intra-EU and international cooperation and coordination (including dispute settlement mechanisms) should be assessed and evaluated, with special attention to the strengthening of bi- and multilateral coordination mechanisms, and that the results would provide a valuable contribution to the future water policy in the EU.

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.water.europa.eu/>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.unece.org/env/water/>

<sup>18</sup> Doc. 8634/06.

28. CONSIDERS that the water situation in many parts of the world is worrying and can only be improved if national and international institutions, in particular the EU and the UN, further increase their efforts in water-related capacity building, especially for the benefit of developing countries. Europe has the knowledge and technology to lead that change, *inter alia* by promoting technology transfer and assisting developing countries in accessing modern, “ecologically-sound” technology and know-how. HIGHLIGHTS the importance of exchanges of experiences and solutions via international events, such as the 7th Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference <sup>19</sup>, the UNCCD COP 10 <sup>20</sup>, the Bonn 2011 Conference <sup>21</sup>, the 6th World Water Forum <sup>22</sup>, the UNCSD 2012 (“Rio+20”) <sup>23</sup>, the Ramsar Convention COP 11 <sup>24</sup> and the UNCBD COP 11 <sup>25</sup>.
29. REITERATES the EU commitment to support the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015, including to halve the proportion of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation. RECALLS the collective commitments made in Johannesburg in 2002 to integrate sanitation into water resources management strategies, and STRESSES the importance of water resources management for sustainable development and the central role of water in the green economy in the context of the Rio+20 Conference. RECALLS the destabilising impact of conflict over shared water resources and water scarcity on regional relations and peace and security in many parts of the world.

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<sup>19</sup> To be held in Astana on 21-23 September 2011.

(<http://www.unece.org/env/efe/Astana/welcome.html>).

<sup>20</sup> To be held in Changwon (Republic of South Korea) on 10-21 October 2011  
(<http://www.unccd.int/cop/cop10/>).

<sup>21</sup> The Water, Energy and Food Security Nexus: Solutions for the Green Economy (Bonn, 16-18 November 2011) (<http://www.water-energy-food.org>).

<sup>22</sup> To be held in Marseille on 12-17 March 2012 (<http://www.worldwaterforum6.org>).

<sup>23</sup> To be held in Rio de Janeiro on 4-6 June 2012 (<http://www.uncsd2012.org>).

<sup>24</sup> To be held in Bucharest on 19-26 June 2012 (<http://www.ramsar.org>).

<sup>25</sup> To be held on 8-19 October 2012 (venue to be determined) (<http://www.cbd.int>).

30. CALLS for an updated and strengthened EU policy and implementation framework for sustainable water management in developing countries, building upon experience gathered through EU initiatives such as the ACP Water Facility. Such a framework should recognize the inter-linkages between water and other sectors of development policy and reinforce the catalytic role of water in inclusive growth and for sustainable development. REITERATES the need to improve aid effectiveness and ownership in the water and sanitation sector through an effective implementation of the EU Code of Conduct on Division of Labour and STRESSES the importance of a revitalised thematic strategy for the EUWI, also in relation to the EU Africa MDG Partnership.

***Governance (Overall policy issues/Next steps)***

31. BELIEVES that good governance is key for managing water sustainably and that water related problems often originate from other sectors and consequently need to be addressed in an integrated manner by “thinking outside the water box”.
32. CONSIDERS that good governance implies stability but also flexibility to react to the changing environment. Within the EU it is of utmost importance to monitor the implementation of the water scarcity and droughts policy<sup>26</sup>, the WFD and the FD to draw conclusions and to disseminate good practice.
33. STRESSES that an adequate participatory approach and transparent planning are essential for good governance and also facilitate conflict prevention, management and resolution.
34. UNDERLINES the need to ensure that measures from river basin management plans, flood risk and drought management plans are eligible for support from EU cohesion policy programmes and in the national, local and regional development programmes, when relevant.

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<sup>26</sup> As set out in the Commission communication of 18.7.2007 on Addressing the challenge of water scarcity and droughts in the European Union - COM (2007)414 (doc. 12052/07).