MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on addressing the challenge of water scarcity and droughts in the European Union

(2008/2074(INI))

The European Parliament,

– having regard to the Commission communication of 18 July 2007 entitled "Addressing the Challenges of Water Scarcity and Droughts in the European Union" (COM(2007)0414) ("the Communication"),

– having regard to Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy[(1)] ("the WFD"),

– having regard to the Impact Assessment Report and studies prepared by the Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP) and the European Environment Agency (EEA),

– having regard to its resolution of 4 September 2003 on the Commission communication on water management in developing countries and priorities for EU development cooperation[(2)] ,

- having regard to its resolution of 18 May 2006 on natural disasters (forest fires, droughts and floods) – agricultural aspects[(3)],

– having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,

– having regard to the report of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety and the opinions of the Committee on Regional Development and the Committee on Agriculture (A6-0362/2008),

A. whereas the issue of water scarcity and droughts is not limited geographically to the European Union but has international repercussions and is a global problem; whereas international conflicts over water already exist and there is a rising danger of their increasing in frequency,

B. whereas water is essential to life and a common good which should not be reduced to a mere commodity; whereas ensuring fair access to water for all, including future generations, should guide all water policy,

C. whereas water scarcity and drought represent a major challenge with relevant socio-economic and environmental impacts in the EU; whereas the total economic impact of drought at EU level over the last 30 years is estimated at EUR 100 billion,

D. whereas water scarcity and drought already affect various parts of the EU with around one fifth of the EU's population living in countries experiencing stress on their water resources,

E. whereas the desertification which is affecting Community countries to differing degrees is impoverishing the natural environment and leading to degradation of soils and consequent loss of their agricultural value,

F. whereas water scarcity and drought are not equally acute in all regions of the EU, being most acute in the more southerly Member States,

G. whereas there are significant regional differences in the way in which problems resulting from water scarcity and drought manifest themselves; whereas measures to deal with these problems would be best based on a regional approach,

H. whereas water scarcity and drought have occurred with increasing frequency and severity over the past 30 years and climate change is likely to aggravate the situation, contributing to an increase in extreme hydrological events inside and outside the EU, probably affecting both the quality and quantity of water resources,

I. whereas trends in water use are unsustainable with the EU continuing to waste 20% of its water due to inefficiency,

J. whereas intense drought, accompanied by lower rainfall, is increasing the danger of forest fires, as evidenced by the devastating fires which recently swept through southern Europe,

K. whereas no comprehensive, technically and scientifically sound assessment of the water quantity situation in the EU exists; whereas the available data at regional level and on seasonal variations are very limited,

L. whereas water scarcity may be the result of natural causes, human activities or an interaction of both, either through over-use of the natural supply or through degradation of water quality; whereas the misuse of water is one of the causes of desertification;

M. whereas tourism further increases demand for water, particularly during the summer period and in the coastal areas of southern Europe,

N. whereas awareness raising and providing good information to citizens in different forms, e.g. via information and education campaigns, is of key importance to facilitate a change in behaviour and practices and the emergence of a water saving and efficient water use culture,

O. whereas public supply of water is a fundamental public service linked to public health which should not be disrupted,

P. whereas water scarcity and drought are a complex environmental issue, and should as such be regulated in close connection with and taking account of other environmental issues;

Q. whereas agriculture, as a productive sector, suffers acutely from the effects of water scarcity and drought, while at the same time playing an important role in the sustainable management of available water resources,

R. whereas multifunctional agriculture in the EU plays an important role in the preservation of landscapes, biodiversity and clean water and therefore needs financial support for certain measures as well as scientific advice on water management,

S. whereas water scarcity and droughts are a significant factor in pushing up the prices of agricultural raw materials; whereas it is necessary to guarantee a stable food supply,

T. whereas large amounts of water are required in agriculture and, as it therefore depends on water supply, agriculture must be included as a responsible actor in integrated regional water management systems as regards balanced use of water, stopping water wastage, adapted landscape and crop-planning as well as protection of water from pollution,

U. whereas drought is also a contributory factor in the proliferation of certain phytosanitary pests, resulting in substantially lower harvests,

V. whereas the Commission's Fourth Report on Economic and Social Cohesion (COM(2007)0273) identifies climate change, in particular drought and water scarcity, as one of the new challenges with far-reaching territorial implications that cohesion policy has to tackle, having affected to date 11% of the population and 17% of the territory of the European Union,

1. Welcomes the Communication and supports the proposed first set of policy options for action, but regrets that its scope is limited to the EU and Member State level only; recalls that water scarcity and drought is a problem with an international dimension and that action needs to be taken accordingly;

2. Stresses that the cross-regional and trans-border nature of river basins can have a serious cross-border impact on upstream and downstream regions, and that it is thus indispensable for the Member States, as well as regional and local authorities, to cooperate on the issue of water scarcity and drought, ensuring sustainable and fair use of water resources; considers that the specificity of the water scarcity and droughts issue requires coordinated action at EU and Member State level as well as at regional and local government level;

3. Regrets that the Communication limits itself to promoting general objectives, proposing only a limited number of precise measures and no concrete timetable for their implementation in regions threatened by water scarcity and droughts; regrets the absence of realistic goals and time constraints for reaching them, as well as the lack of emphasis on the need for close co-operation with national, regional and local authorities; calls on the Commission to present an ongoing programme, in particular a progress report in 2009 and the review and development of the European Union's strategy;

4. Highlights the importance of the regions as a driving force behind technological innovation in the field of water, given that water efficiency will be an increasingly important factor for competitiveness; therefore urges regional authorities to consider national and international inter-regional cooperation, information exchange and strategic partnerships, with a view to organising efficient regional water management;

5. Calls on regional and local authorities to take advantage of the great opportunities offered by the Structural Funds and invest in the improvement or renewal of existing infrastructure and technology (in particular in regions where water resources are wasted

due to leakages from water pipes) including, notably, clean technologies that facilitate the efficient use of water and can be linked to integrated water resource management (IRM), in particular to address the challenge of water efficiency (in terms of savings and reutilisation) in the industrial and agricultural sectors as well as on the part of domestic consumers;

6. Maintains in this context that infrastructure funding should be allocated with a view to implementing measures to improve the management and supply of high-quality water, in keeping with existing needs;

7. Recalls that a demand-side approach should be preferred when managing water resources; takes the view, however, that the EU should adopt a holistic approach when managing water resources, combining measures of demand management, measures to optimise existing resources within the water cycle, and measures to create new resources, and that the approach needs to integrate environmental, social and economic considerations;

8. Notes that supply-side measures should also be considered, with a view to achieving the most economically and environmentally efficient solution, optimising the balance between supply and demand, and ensuring an uninterrupted public water supply including during drought conditions, in accordance with the principle of sustainable development; takes the view that action should be encouraged to establish an effective hierarchy of water uses, and that the construction of diversions to transport water over large distances should not be the solution to the problem of water scarcity; stresses, however, the importance that supply-side measures may have for the regions most affected by water scarcity and drought, which may take the form of traditional options, such as the construction of infrastructure to regulate watercourses, or alternative and innovative solutions such as the sustainable re-use of waste water or desalination;

9. Highlights the contribution made by European farmers to combating soil erosion and desertification and seeks recognition of the pivotal role played by European producers in preserving plant cover in regions affected by persistent drought or threatened by wind-blown sand; emphasises the specific benefits of permanent crops, orchards and vineyards, grassland, pasture and forestry for water collection;

10. Stresses the importance of the issue of water management in mountain areas and calls on the Commission to encourage local and regional authorities to develop a sense of solidarity between downstream and upstream users;

11. Recalls the link between climate change, water scarcity and drought and integrated territorial care aimed at maintaining and preserving local water resources and is deeply concerned about the possible impact on public health; calls for account to be taken of the impact on water resources when policies to combat climate change are drawn up; asks that an in-depth study be made of the inter-relationship between the development of biofuels and the availability of water resources; calls, likewise, for a specific assessment to be made of installations with a high consumption of water resources; stresses the need to mainstream the issue of water into all policy areas and to create a truly integrated approach when addressing it, including all of the financial and legal instruments of the EU; underlines that all political levels (national, regional and local) should be involved in the process;

12. Believes that a link should be established between water scarcity and drought and climate change and their specific strategies, bearing in mind that concerns as regards adapting to climate change must be integrated as priorities in the implementation of the WFD;

13. Urges the Commission and Member States to acknowledge that deforestation and unrestrained urban development are contributing to growing water scarcity; calls on the Member States and the authorities concerned to pay heed to water-related considerations in their land-use planning, especially in connection with the development of economic activities in sensitive river basins, including in the islands and outermost regions; stresses that any supply of water regardless of the purpose of its consumption must comply with the principle of fair water tarification, thereby encouraging companies especially to use water more efficiently;

14. Stresses that the revision of Community budget priorities should accord a higher ranking to environmental measures and, in particular, to policies designed to combat the effects of climate change, which include drought and water scarcity, ensuring that the necessary additional resources are available;

15. Asks the Commission to take into account the inter-sectoral link between the social and economic impact of climate change on land usage and the energy costs associated with climate change; encourages the EU to conduct all water efficiency evaluations using objective and economic indicators;

16. Acknowledges that water scarcity and droughts have direct effects on economic, social and territorial cohesion; maintains that this should be adequately considered in the development of future cohesion policy and that all necessary budgetary measures and other instruments need to be made available to this end;

17. Points out that a region's economic situation, competitiveness and development opportunities are determined by the complex environmental issues mentioned in the Commission's communication;

18. Acknowledges the importance of the WFD as a framework for achieving "good status" for all European waters, promoting inter-regional cooperation, sustainable water use and protection of available water resources while contributing to mitigating the effects of floods and droughts, and calls upon the Commission and all the Member States to implement fully its provisions and to ensure that water scarcity and drought measures have no negative effects on water quality objectives;

19. Stresses the need to clarify the definition of 'prolonged drought' (in the context of the WFD) and its implications for achieving the environmental objectives of the WFD in periods of drought and after such periods; points out that water scarcity and drought are related but different, and differentiated strategies should be adopted for them;

20. Stresses that there is a close link between drought, soil erosion, desertification and forest fires;

21. Takes the view that the river basin management plans required under the WFD should also integrate drought and other hydro-meteorological disaster management and set up crisis management tailored to the concrete needs of river basins threatened by water

scarcity and droughts including cross-border coordination, public participation and early warning systems operating at different levels, i.e. European, national, regional and local; highlights the need to avoid creating barriers to the natural course of rivers in an effort to minimise flooding, and encourages more extensive impact assessment as regards sealing off the natural courses of the water flow;

22. Underlines the role of forests in the water cycle and the importance of a balanced mix of forests, grassland and crop land for sustainable water management; in particular highlights the role of soils with high organic content and adapted crop rotation; warns that the increasing consumption of land is a threat to agriculture, food security and sustainable water management;

23. Points out that desertification is closely connected to the forest economy; urges that greater use be made of afforestation to restrain and alleviate extreme surface and groundwater flow and to combat soil degradation and erosion;

24. Recommends that the Community civil protection mechanism make provision for intervention in crisis situations resulting from extreme drought;

25. Stresses the importance of reassessing the available quantities of groundwater throughout the EU and the rules governing the use thereof, the principal objective being to ensure rational use of groundwater resources according to the needs of the individual country concerned;

26. Notes that the Communication fails to address the problems arising in numerous regions from the non-purification of waste water;

27. Stresses that the need to protect groundwater resources should not be forgotten if they are to be included in overall water resource management;

28. Calls on the Council, the Member States, and regional and local authorities, as far as other specific policies are concerned, to take into account the points made in the Communication, so as to avert counterproductive effects on water resource conservation;

29. Stresses that worldwide experience proves that river diversion leads to irreparable damage of ecological and hydromorphological conditions and may mean that people have to move from their homes and that businesses have to relocate, thus disturbing social and economic cohesion; calls on the Member States to prevent any deterioration of their river basins and fully respect the requirements set out in Articles 1 and 4 of the WFD and calls on the Commission to grant EU funding only to projects that fully comply with those requirements;

30. Urges the Council, without further delay, to adopt a decision on the proposed regulation establishing the EU Solidarity Fund (COM(2005)0108) in order to provide a better definition of the criteria and of the eligible events, including droughts, and hence enable damage caused by natural disasters to be countered more effectively, flexibly, and swiftly, bearing in mind also that Parliament adopted its position as long ago as 18 May 2006[(4)];

31. Welcomes the fact that water saving is the Commission's first priority in response to water scarcity and droughts; urges the Commission in this connection to ensure that use of Structural Funds does not run counter to this priority, to incorporate sustainable water management as a criterion that projects must satisfy, and to obtain evidence of the utilisation by local and regional authorities of water savings and of their compliance with the requirements of the WFD, before granting them funding from the Structural Funds;

32. Considers it necessary, where a watercourse passes through more than one Member State, to introduce inter-regional and trans-national cooperation for the integrated management of watercourses, particularly in relation to farming;

33. Recalls that almost 20% of water in the EU is lost due to water inefficiency and stresses the need for major investments in order to improve technical progress in all economic sectors (focusing on the most intensive water uses and the sectors where the water saving potential is most significant); notes that poor water management is a problem that influences water scarcity, and that may have more negative impacts in times of drought but that does not cause it, since drought is a natural phenomenon;

34. Proposes to the Commission – given that the water scarcity and drought problem is closely linked to the complex of issues surrounding the wasteful use of water – that the criterion of economical water use should be incorporated into the system of conditions for the award of subsidies from EU funds;

35. Encourages the EU to support technology, exchanges of good practice and innovation that are less water- and energy-intensive and aimed at improving efficiency in the use of water;

36. Calls on the Commission, bearing in mind that losses owing to leakages in the public water supply network in urban centres may exceed 50%, to look into the possibility of promoting a network of cities to encourage sustainable water use with the aim of exchanging good practices such as re-use, saving and improved water efficiency and jointly carrying out pilot demonstration projects; calls, likewise, on local authorities to improve supply networks for water distribution that have become obsolete;

37. Stresses that 40% of the water used in the EU could be saved; calls for concrete measures and financial incentives to promote a more efficient and sustainable use of water; calls, likewise, for the widespread installation of metering devices to measure water consumption in order to encourage saving, re-use and the efficient and rational use of water; encourages the Member States most affected to use part of their structural funds for projects to improve water use and water saving; encourages river basin authorities to pursue a cost-benefit analysis for alternative water management measures in all sectors;

38. Stresses the need to combat waste and balance water uses, in particular through re-use, bearing in mind its manifold values: biological, social, environmental, symbolic, cultural and in terms of landscape and tourism;

39. Recalls that Article 9(1) of the WFD lays down that "Member States shall take account of the principle of recovery of the costs of water services (...) in accordance in particular with the polluter pays principle" and "shall ensure by 2010 that water-pricing policies provide

adequate incentives for users to use water resources efficiently (...) [and] an adequate contribution of the different water uses (...) to the recovery of the cost of water services";

40. Considers that, while water management policies must be based on the polluter pays principle, they should also be accompanied by measures to put an end to the significant losses that occur as a result of defective equipment and unsuitable crops and agrarian systems;

41. Stresses that a lot of progress towards more efficient use of water can be achieved in some countries in the agricultural sector; hopes that the Common Agricultural Policy health check will take this problem into consideration and will propose concrete actions promoting a more sustainable use of water through incentives to mobilise the best available practices and technologies, in particular support for rural development, through cross-compliance, the application of the polluter pays principle and the user pays principle, and Rural Development Programmes; considers that the European Union should support measures to improve water management in agriculture, promoting a modernisation of irrigation systems to reduce water consumption and boosting research in this field;

42. Underlines the role that environmental programmes in the framework of the second pillar of the CAP play in the setting of incentives for agricultural practices for protecting the sustainability and purity of water resources;

43. Underlines the fact that biofuel production will increase demand for large quantities of water and stresses the need to closely monitor the impact of the use of biofuels and to regularly review European Union and national biofuel policies;

44. Points out that major water users (such as power plants) do not consume water but release water to the water cycle after having used it in their processes; stresses that by doing this they have a strong effect on surface water availability, ecological systems and public health by increasing the water temperature; underlines the need to take these effects into consideration;

45. Recalls that consumers have a major role to play if a sustainable use of water resources is to be achieved in the EU, calls therefore on the EU to launch a public information and education campaign to make people aware of the water issue and encouraging them to take concrete actions;

46. Points out to the Commission that by devising an efficient water pricing policy which reflects the true value of water, it may encourage consumers to be more sparing in their use of water;

47. Stresses the pre-eminent role of regional and local authorities and civil society organisations in awareness-raising campaigns and in organising educational activities;

48. Calls on the Commission and the regions and cities of the Member States to encourage the development of a water saving culture within the EU by promoting rain water catchment and by launching campaigns to raise public awareness of water saving, for instance through suitable educational programmes; calls on the Commission to encourage the exchange of good practice among regions, cities and civil society organisations, focusing

on measures to save water (including the purification of rain and waste water), improve water efficiency and manage the risk of droughts;

49. Considers it necessary to promote information, awareness and training campaigns for producers in order to make an active contribution towards the sustainable management of water resources;

50. Takes the view that a labelling system for the water consumption of products, which already exists for energy efficiency, would be an appropriate tool for achieving a more sustainable water consumption, but stresses that:

(a) such a system should be voluntary, and

(b) existing labels and labelling schemes should be taken into account to avoid confusing consumers with an overload of information;

51. Urges that water performance criteria should, where possible, become part of construction standards for buildings;

52. Encourages all stakeholders to develop a voluntary scheme for labelling sustainable water management and to draw up voluntary water savings programmes in the various economic sectors (for example agriculture, tourism, manufacturing);

53. Points out that devising an efficient water pricing policy which reflects the true value of water may encourage consumers to be more sparing in their use of water;

54. Takes the view that water must remain a public good and a fundamental element of countries' sovereignty which should be accessible to everyone at fair 'social and environmental prices', taking particular account of the specific situation of each country and the various farming systems in existence, as well as the social role played by farming;

55. Calls on the Commission to consider financing in 2009 a pilot project intended to cover research, surveying and monitoring for the development of prevention activities to halt desertification and steppe formation in Europe thus preventing erosion, deflation, agriculture and biodiversity losses, increasing soil protection and fertility and the soil's capacity to retain water as well as its abilities in coal sequestration; reiterates the importance of establishing reliable and transparent data so that policy can be truly effective;

56. Welcomes the establishment of the European Drought Observatory and the early warning system; stresses the importance of an extended discussion on its basic objectives, budget and organisation;

57. Calls on the Commission to promote the entry into operation of the European Drought Observatory within the framework of the European Environment Agency and emphasises that it should work on complementing national data by standard regional and local seasonal information on precipitation and cross-sector consumption to enhance sound, strategic decision-making;

58. Underlines the importance of soil rich in humus, an adapted crop rotation system and a balanced mix of forest, grassland and crop land for sustainable water management; warns that the increasing consumption of land constitutes a threat to agriculture, security of food supply and sustainable water management;

59. Calls on the Commission to support the Member States in reforesting areas which have been affected by cyclical drought and fires on the basis of respect for their bio-climate and ecological characteristics, and hopes that rehabilitation of the rural and urban landscape will be treated as a matter of particular importance, having due regard to specific local features;

60. Takes the view that water scarcity and cyclical droughts have accentuated the scourge of fires and their gravity, increasing the fragility and risk of destruction of many species that are characteristic of forests in southern European countries, for which forests often represent the main natural resource;

61. Stresses that planning for the European agricultural model should take account of the most frequent and acute environmental hazards as well as water scarcity and drought and that, in that context, an effective crisis management mechanism should constitute a fundamental element of the CAP;

62. Takes the view that the environmental value of forests and agricultural production must be reassessed in a context of climate change where it is absolutely vital to balance the increase in greenhouse gas emissions with an increase in forest cover, whose contribution as a carbon sink must be taken into account in all policies on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions;

63. Supports the Commission's commitment to continue to highlight the challenge of water scarcity and drought at international level, in particular through the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change;

64. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and Commission.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

Water is a concern for all actors in the society. It is a precondition for human, animal and plant life as well as an indispensable resource for the economy. However, water is a scarce resource. Protection of water resources, of water ecosystems and of the water we drink and bathe in, is one of the cornerstones of environmental protection. Concerted action at EU level is therefore necessary to ensure effective protection of this precious resource.

Extreme weather conditions have occurred with increasing frequency over the past 30 years. In recent years increased rainfall has caused floods in some parts of Europe, whereas other areas experience drought and heat waves. With the intensifying consequences of climate change as many as 3.2 billion people could be facing water scarcity in the future. In 2007 the EEA estimated that around one third of Europeans already live in water stressed areas where

demand for water exceeds it supply. The cost of drought over the past 30 years has risen to almost 100 billion Euros and the 2003 drought alone cost the EU economy 8.7 billion Euros.

There three main challenges that the EU should address: extensive, unsustainable and inefficient water consumption and related water waste; lack of awareness of the problem; and the lack of integrated approach when addressing the water issue.

Climate change is not the only challenge Europe has to confront. Despite the rising pressure on the water resources, extensive, unsustainable and inefficient water consumption, growing almost twice as fast as the world population continues. Europe alone wastes at least 20% of its water due to inefficiency. One way to approach this problem would be the full implementation of the Water Framework Directive and its pricing provisions. Investments into water-saving technologies are also needed.

Measures on the demand-side should be preferred to a simple increase in the supply of water. Supply side measures should only be considered after the options of enhancement of water efficiency, improvement of demand management and educational measures have been exhausted. Transfers of water over great distances should not be the solution to the problem of water scarcity and the issue of cross boarder transfers should strictly stay within the competence of each Member State.

Lack of information and the absence of a far-reaching awareness campaign are striking considering the scope of the arising problem. Developing a responsible water-saving and efficiency culture requires an active awareness raising policy in which all actors in the water sector need to be involved. Information, education and training are priority areas for action. There are numerous options of dealing with this challenge. Labelling as an effective way of providing targeted information to the public on water performance and on sustainable water management practices is only one of the possible paths to be taken.

The challenge of mainstreaming water issue into all policy areas and creating a truly integrated approach when addressing the issue needs to be met. All political levels (national, regional, local) should be involved in this process. All EU policies together with all EU financial instruments should take into account the growing water scarcity.

Finally, the issue of water scarcity and droughts is not geographically limited to European Union and it has international repercussions. Numerous international conflicts over water already exist and a danger of them increasing in frequency rises. It is therefore necessary that a broader approach with respect to water scarcity and drought is adopted.