

The European Union's Initiative "Water for Life" – The Mediterranean Component

Ministerial Intervention – Announcement

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With a view to translate into concrete actions the political ambitions, the new goals and targets agreed in Johannesburg and aiming at ensuring an effective follow-up, the European Council in March 2003 (Spring Summit, 20-21.3.03) stressed the need for further development and implementation of the Union's "Water for Life" Initiative and renewed EU's commitment to keep a leading role in promoting sustainable development on the global scale.

Greece which has traditionally strong linkages, social, cultural and economic, with South East European countries and countries bordered by the Mediterranean and SE Europe, has undertaken a leading role in promoting the European Union's Water Initiative in the sensitive areas of the Balkans and the Mediterranean, seeking to make significant progress in poverty eradication and promoting a catalyst for peace and security in the region.

Water issues have had a very prominent place during the Hellenic Presidency of the EU that gave great emphasis on further promoting the EU Water Initiative and raising high the momentum on water issues within the political agenda of the EU.

To mention a few of the most important events that took place during the Hellenic Presidency:

- the 3rd World Water Forum in Kyoto (16-23 March 2003),
- the Informal Council of Environment Ministers in Athens (3-4 May 2003)
- the International Conference on "Sustainable Development for Lasting Peace, Shared Waters, Shared Future, Shared Knowledge" that took place immediately after the Informal Council and was coorganised by the Hellenic Presidency and the World Bank (Athens, 6-7 May)
- the CSD XI in New York (28 April – 8 May 2003)
- the Hellenic Water Week in Athens (17-20.6.2003) with which the series of water related events was concluded.

The Mediterranean Component of the EU Water Initiative which is currently undergoing its design phase but shows positive and steady progress, aims:

- to assist design of better, demand driven and output oriented water programmes in the region,
- to facilitate better coordination of water programmes and projects, targeting more effective use of existing funds and mobilization of new financial resources as well as to enhance strategic cooperation.

The focus Themes that have been selected for the Component jointly with our southern partners to reflect real needs and through a multi-stakeholder process, are:

- Water supply and sanitation, with emphasis on the poorest part of the societies
- Integrated water resources management, with emphasis on management of transboundary water bodies

- Water, food and environment interaction, with emphasis on fragile ecosystems
 - Non-conventional water resources
- while as horizontal Themes are identified
- Transfer of technology, transfer of know how, capacity building and training
 - Education

So far the progress that has been demonstrated since Johannesburg is significant. The EU and primarily the Commission has mobilised important human, financial and technical resources to speed up the process and further develop the Initiative. Nevertheless, the challenges we are facing are significant; last Spring during CSD 11 the EU has been successful in setting Water Supply and Sanitation as one of the priority themes to be addressed during the 1st thematic cluster for the coming Implementation Year 2004/2005 of the CSD. Now in the coming CSD 12 we have to present the progress we have achieved since Johannesburg to meet the water related MDGs/WSSD targets. The EU has raised the expectations of the International Community thus during the 1st semester of 2004 we will have to demonstrate tangible results.

Greece together with the Commission and its partners have moved ahead very successfully with the promotion of the Mediterranean Component of the Initiative: the Operational Plan of the Component describing the content, proposed structure and main activities until the end of 2003 has been launched already, expression of political will and commitment as well as awareness raising among partners is proceeding and important building blocks have been identified.

In order to achieve early and tangible results and bring change in the water sector as we have envisaged, the cooperation of all is required; Greece is committed to continue assisting the process for promoting the EU Water Initiative and leading efforts in the Mediterranean Region; the Commission should continue to assist and lead efforts for the overall Initiative, in every possible way, as it has been doing successfully so far and a better involvement of the other EU Member States should be secured.