

5th World Water Forum in Istanbul, 16-22 March 2009

European Parliament resolution of 12 March 2009 on water in the light of the 5th World Water Forum to be held in Istanbul on 16-22 March 2009

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the ministerial declarations of the first four World Water Fora, held in Marrakech (1997), The Hague (2000), Kyoto (2003) and Mexico (2006),
- having regard to the Statement of the Dublin Conference on Water and Sustainable Development (1992), which recommends adopting integrated water management and recognises the value of water in all its uses and introduces the principle of water pricing,
- having regard to resolution A/RES/58/217 of the UN General Assembly declaring the period 2005-2015 International Decade for Action ‘Water for Life’ and declaring 22 March of each year ‘World Water Day’,
- having regard to the ministerial declaration of the International Conference on Freshwater held in Bonn in 2001, which stresses the urgent need to stimulate new financing from every possible category of investor and the need to strengthen public funding of water through the contribution of private capital, while encouraging action at local level,
- having regard to the Monterrey Conference held in 2002, which introduced the concept of a Global Water Partnership as a multidimensional dialogue among equals extending to businesses, financial institutions and civil society, an initiative that was taken up by the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the G8 in Genoa in 2001, as well as by the Africa Partnership Forum in 2003,
- having regard to the ‘United Nations Economic Commission for Europe’ (UNECE) Convention, which was adopted in Helsinki in 1992 and entered into force in 1996, and which provides a legal framework for regional cooperation on the protection and use of transboundary watercourses and international lakes,
- having regard to the UN World Summit on the Millennium (New York, 6-8 September 2000) which drew up the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which provided for the halving by 2015 of the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water,
- having regard to the Zaragoza Charter of 2008 "A New Comprehensive Vision of Water" and the recommendations of the Water Tribune adopted on 14 September 2008, the closing day of the 2008 Zaragoza International Exhibition and forwarded to the Secretary-General of the United Nations,
- having regard to the second UN World Water Development Report, entitled 'Water, a shared responsibility',
- having regard to its resolution of 11 March 2004 on the Internal Market Strategy - Priorities

2003-2006¹, paragraph 5 of which states that, 'since water is a shared resource of mankind, the management of water resources should not be subject to the rules of the internal market',

- having regard to the UNDP ‘Human Development Report 2006’ concerning ‘water between power and poverty’ in which it demonstrated that poverty, rather than the physical shortage of water, is the main reason for which over one billion people are being denied access to water,
 - having regard to its resolution of 15 March 2007 on local authorities and development cooperation²,
 - having regard to its resolution of 15 March 2006 on the Fourth World Water Forum in Mexico City (16-22 March 2006)³,
 - having regard to the major initiatives by European civil society regarding water and the right of access to drinkable water for all, organised within the European Parliament, namely the World Water Assembly for Elected Representatives and Citizens (AMECE, 18-20 March 2007) and ‘Peace with Water’ - ‘faire la Paix avec l’Eau’ (12-13 February 2009) and the ‘Memorandum for a World Water Protocol’ which was discussed,
 - having regard to Oral Question B6-0113/2009 to the Commission on the 5th World Water Forum in Istanbul from 16 to 22 March 2009,
 - having regard to Rule 108(5) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas the shortage of water and sanitation is causing 8 million deaths a year, whereas more than one billion people have no convenient access to drink water at an acceptable price and whereas around two-and-a-half billion have no access to sanitation,
- B. whereas 2,8 billion people live in places affected by water tress and whereas this figure will rise to 3,9 billion by 2030,
- C. whereas poor populations are the most vulnerable to climate change and are also least capable of adapting to it,
- D. whereas multinational industries and agro-business are the main users of fresh water in the world (70% worldwide), for which the price is ridiculously low; whereas the over-exploitation of water resources has aggravated and spread more widely the process of water contamination and the general deterioration of soil quality resulting in a higher incidence of drought of an increasingly structural nature,
- E. whereas rational water services and management should determine a level of pricing that avoids overuse by some sectors and should allow investments to maintain and improve infrastructure, combined with flanking measures to ensure equitable water distribution and government support to enable poor families to pay for their basic water needs,
- F. whereas general water subsidies, resulting in artificially low water prices, lead to overuse by some sectors and are one of the main causes of water shortage,

¹ OJ C 102 E, 28.04.2004, p. 857.

² OJ C 301 E, 13.12.2007, p. 249.

³ OJ C 291 E, 30.11.2006, p. 294.

- G. whereas water distribution is extremely unequal, while it should be a fundamental and universal right, and whereas it is most appropriately determined and managed at local level,
 - H. whereas liberalisation and deregulation of water distribution in developing countries, and in particular in the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), without a proper accompanying regulatory framework, can result in price increases that hit the poorest and reduce their access to water,
 - I. whereas, however, public-private partnerships, that must combine tight and transparent regulations, public ownership and private investment, must be directed towards improved access to water and sanitation for all, as well as more cost-efficient use,
 - J. whereas the main obstacles to efficient water management are the low political and financial priority given to water, poor management, an inadequate legal framework, a lack of transparency in negotiating and awarding contracts, corruption and a lack of discussion of price levels,
 - K. whereas, according to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the share of official development assistance (ODA) devoted to water and sanitation is only 9 % of bilateral ODA and 4,5 % of multilateral ODA and whereas distribution is unsatisfactory since the LDCs, which are the most needy, have only received 24 % of funding,
 - L. whereas the World Water Forum, which meets every three years, provides an opportunity for discussion and shaping global policy decisions on management of water and water resources, and regretting that to date, initiatives by the World Water Forum have not been included to any great degree in the work of the United Nations,
1. Declares that water is a shared resource of mankind and that access to drinking water should constitute a fundamental and universal right; calls for all necessary efforts to be made to guarantee access to water for the most deprived populations by 2015;
 2. Declares that water is considered as a public good and should be under public control, irrespective of whether it is managed partly or entirely by the private sector;
 3. Stresses that any water management policy should also cover the protection of public health and the environment; stresses also that the World Water Forum should help in a democratic, participative and consensual manner to develop strategies conducive to a type of economic and agricultural development that can guarantee a high level of water quality;
 4. Calls for the abandonment of systems of general water distribution subsidies, which undermine incentives for efficient water management by creating overuse, to free up funds for targeted subsidies, in particular for poor and rural populations, aimed at affordable access for all;
 5. Stresses the value of establishing shared water management bodies where countries share a common basin in order to create or strengthen forms of solidarity conducive to the appeasement of tensions and the resolution of conflicts;
 6. Draws attention to the vital role of women as regards supply, management and conservation of water;

7. Calls on the Member States, despite the financial crisis, to increase their contribution to ODA in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goal relating to supplies of drinking water, for which the investment requirement amounts to an annual sum of USD 180 000 000 000;
8. Calls for the resources of the European Water Fund for African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries to be strengthened within the 10th EDF and for new forms of funding, including private funding and innovative partnerships, in particular solidarity-based financing, to be developed;
9. Takes the view that bilateral ODA should support some multilateral measures such as the African Water Initiative;
10. Considers that ODA should be used in conjunction with the resources of local authorities, voluntary donations, bank loans and private capita, to ensure that funding for the water sector is as comprehensive as possible;
11. Stresses the need to create guarantee mechanisms that can be set up by financial and development institutions to counter investors' caution on the water market;
12. Points out that, in its tasks of determining policies and the necessary resources, selecting partners and allocating responsibilities, while delegating implementation measures to local authorities, the State is still a major player in water policy;
13. Stresses that water resource management should be based on a decentralised, participative and integrated approach involving users and decision-makers in the definition of water policy at local level;
14. Calls on the Commission to develop water awareness programmes in the Union and in the partner countries;
15. Stresses the need to support local public authorities in their efforts to implement a democratic water management policy that is efficient, transparent, regulated and respectful of sustainable development objectives in order to meet the needs of communities;
16. Calls on the Council and the Commission to recognise the vital role of local authorities in water protection and management, so as to ensure that they are given responsibility in all countries for management of the water sector and regrets the fact that the competences of EU local authorities are insufficiently valued and exploited by European co-financing programmes;
17. Calls therefore on the Council and the Commission to encourage EU local authorities to devote a proportion of the levies collected from users for the water supply and sanitation services to decentralised cooperation measures;
18. Calls, in the context of retained public ownership and within the right legal regulatory framework, for increased efforts to engage the private sector in water distribution, in order to benefit from its capital, know-how and technology to increase access to water and sanitation facilities for all and the recognition of access to water as a fundamental right;
19. Considers that it is the states' responsibility to incorporate small private service providers in

their national water supply strategies;

20. Considers that systems of public-private partnerships, whereby the public authorities retain the ownership of the infrastructure and conclude a management contract with the private sector, can be one way of improving affordable access to water and sanitation;
21. Stresses the importance of promoting new approaches such as the irrigation of rural areas and the creation of green belts around towns, in order to strengthen food security and local autonomy;
22. Considers that the role of non-governmental organisations working on the ground as intermediaries with local communities is an essential additional element in guaranteeing the success of projects in poor countries;
23. Hopes that cross-subsidies can be introduced to enable the most disadvantaged, in terms of access to water, to be supplied with water at an affordable price;
24. Is convinced that local savings can also be used, and that this requires governments to remove all legal, tax and administrative obstacles which may stand in the way of local financial markets;
25. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to adopt a water management aid policy, based on the principle of universal, fair and non-discriminatory access to safe water;
26. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to facilitate and support the efforts of developing countries in adapting to and reducing the impact of climate change; recalls, in this connection, the importance of rapidly setting up the Global Climate Change Alliance;
27. Calls for the issues relating to water management, water resources and the right of access to water for all to be included on the agenda of the COP 15 agreements in Copenhagen (7-18 December 2009) regarding the future of the Kyoto Protocol, in the light of the work done by the 'Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change' (IPCC) experts;
28. Stresses the importance of taking account of the needs of the poor in devising water supply and management policies, with special reference to communities most vulnerable to climate change;
29. Calls on the Presidency to represent the Union at the Istanbul Forum, with a mandate to:
 - treat access to drink water as a vital and fundamental human right, and not merely as an economically tradable good, subject only to the rules of the market,
 - advocate the approach expressed in this resolution;
30. Wishes to see the opening of negotiations, under United Nations auspices, on an international treaty recognising the right of access to drinking water; calls on the EU Member States and the Union Presidency to take political and diplomatic initiatives in this direction in the UN General Assembly and Human Rights Council;
31. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the ACP-EU Council of Ministers, the United Nations Secretary-General and the general secretariat of the International Committee for the Global Water Contract.

