



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

2009 - 2014

Committee on Petitions

2011/2297(INI)

25.4.2012

OPINION

of the Committee on Petitions

for the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety

on the implementation of EU water legislation, ahead of a necessary overall
approach to European water challenges
(2011/2297(INI))

Rapporteur: Nikolaos Chountis

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SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Petitions calls on the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions in its motion for a resolution:

1. Declares that water is a shared resource of humankind and a public good and therefore should not be a source of profit from trade, and that access to water should constitute a fundamental and universal right; stresses that the sustainable use of water is an environmental and health necessity that plays a fundamental role in the climate regulation cycle; reiterates that 'the management of water resources should not be subject to internal market rules' (EP Resolution P5_TA (2004)0183) and invites the European Commission and the Member States to guarantee public ownership and management of water and water utilities;
2. Is concerned that the balance between the need for water and available resources has reached a critical level in many regions of Europe and that climate change could make the situation even worse; water scarcity and drought now affect the whole territory of some Member States on a permanent basis; emphasizes that climate change and the subsequent changing weather conditions significantly affect the quality and availability of European water resources, that Europe's high water stress areas are expected to increase from 19 % today to 35 % by the 2070s and that climate related extreme weather events constitute further challenges to efficient water management;
3. Urges extreme caution regarding the potential serious negative environmental impact of schemes designed to engineer deviation or modification of existing river courses and flows which can seriously aggravate threats to the sustainability of water resources and ecological balance; recalls that the use of desalination plants to alleviate water scarcity in certain regions may be necessary but that these should in all cases be in conformity with the strictest environmental standards both as regards their site, their level of energy consumption and their safe disposal of extracted salt;
4. Notes that, by contrast, other countries do not suffer from shortages of water but are having difficulty in managing the excess of water resulting from regular or heavy rainfall, flooding, river erosion and pollution affecting river basin and coastal areas, as well as the effects of these phenomena on the local population, as are witnessed by many petitions received;
5. Takes note that the Water Framework Directive (WFD) sets up a framework for the protection of all water bodies in the EU – ground waters and surface waters, lakes, rivers and coastal waters – and has the objective of achieving 'good ecological and chemical status' by 2015;
6. Expresses concerns that in the field of WFD implementation at present, ineffective application and enforcement remains a major problem in some Member States; current implementation status shows that some Member States lag behind schedule, that the comprehensive clean-up of the EU's waters is far from acceptable and that the objectives are often not pursued with sufficient consistency in other EU policies; expresses its hope

that the ongoing reform of the Common Agricultural Policy will address the problems related to agricultural water management; highlights that good water management has to be integrated into all European policies on sectors that use and pollute water, and stresses that local, regional or national adaptation measures can only be effective if coordinated at EU level;

7. Considers that waste water from urban resources represents one of the most significant pollution impacts on the aquatic environment, in rivers and on the coast, and that the successful implementation of the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive has a significant influence on the water quality in all Member States, and thus on the successful implementation of the WFD;
8. Draws attention to the severe impact that such pollution can have on human health, as witnessed by petitions received from Ireland (Galway), France (Brittany) and other Member States; recalls its resolution of 2 February 2012 on the issues raised by petitioners in relation to the application of the Waste Management Directive, and related directives, in the Member States of the European Union, and which drew attention to the dangerous levels of water contamination resulting from badly managed or illegal landfill sites and quarries, which has led to infiltration and pollution of groundwater and of water tables (nappes phréatiques);
9. Notes that despite the progress made in the implementation of the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive, there are still gaps concerning the compliance rates on collecting systems and/or treatment; asks the Commission to provide more support for the financing of waste water treatment plants and small- and large-scale infrastructure for collecting systems in the EU, including the reuse of treated waste water for irrigation and industrial purposes;
10. Notes also that since 1988, among the petitions relating to environmental complaints addressed to the Committee on Petitions, 601 of these petitions (Spain 166, UK 129, Germany 97, Italy 60, France 55, Greece 34, Netherlands 16, Portugal 16, Ireland 12, Poland 4, Romania 4, Finland 3, Bulgaria 2, Hungary 2 and Slovenia 1), sometimes co-signed by several signatories (see petition 0784/2007, co-signed by 2036 signatories), concern the quality and quantity of water in the Member States; acknowledges that these petitions are proof that water is a significantly serious problem for the European Union citizens;
11. Takes note that, according to a Eurobarometer survey of March 2012, 68 % of Europeans think that water quantity and quality problems are serious, 80 % believe that chemical pollution is a threat to the water environment, 62 % feel that they are not sufficiently informed about problems facing groundwater, lakes, rivers and coastal waters in their countries, 67 % think that the most effective way of tackling water problems would be awareness-raising about water related problems, and 73 % think that the EU should propose additional measures to address water problems in Europe;
12. Reminds the Member States of their obligations under the WFD to achieve good water status by 2015, and calls on the Member States and the Commission to act as quickly as possible to take all necessary measures and to make sufficient funding and technical assistance available to reach these water quality targets; considers that the participation of

citizens, the competent authorities at the various levels of government, productive sectors, environmental NGOs and the civil society is essential for successful implementation of the WFD and sustainable environmental management as a whole;

13. Calls on the European Commission carefully to monitor the implementation by the Member States of the WFD so as to ensure that it is done properly and effectively, and consistently to urge the Member States to make concrete progress; points out that, in many instances, petitions have uncovered problems related to the transposition and proper implementation of the EU water legislation, and invites the European Commission to be more determined in its inquiries, in particular when examining petitions;
14. Draws attention to a number of negative factors denounced by the petitioners – including waste landfills, failure by competent authorities to control water quality, irregular or unlawful agricultural and industrial practices, urban and energy-related development, agriculture and industry – which impact the environment and human health and are responsible for poor water quality; calls therefore for the establishment of more targeted incentives for efficient water management and – in particular for poor and rural populations – affordable access to water for all, and the distribution of water in areas facing shortages, particularly those areas situated at a distance from large urban agglomerations equipped with water infrastructure;
15. Regrets that the European Commission proposal amending the WFD (COM (2011)876) adds only 15 new chemical substances from a list of 2000 potentially dangerous substances that should be monitored and reduced, and fails to set out clear timetables to phase out the most dangerous chemicals, despite explicit legal requirements agreed upon since 2000; asks, therefore, the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, in its recommendation to the Commission, to pay particular attention to the priority substances mentioned above – very often identified by petitioners as ‘toxic and radioactive waste’ – given the high degree of risk they pose, as water contaminants, to human health;
16. Urges the Commission to step up the battle against the increasing release of pollutants such as anti-biotic and drug residues, as well as hormone residues from anti-conception pills, in water, as these residues have a negative effect on human health and the environment;
17. Reiterates that the WFD prescribes coordination between Member States for sharing a common river basin where use of water may have transboundary effects, and urges such Member States as may be concerned to engage in a regular transboundary communication and cooperation to support the implementation of the WFD with regard to priority substances, priority hazardous substances and nutrients pollution;
18. Considers that nutrient enrichment is one of several factors responsible for the pollution of surface water bodies, affecting biodiversity and diminishing valuable ecosystem services; recognises that investigated nutrient conditions may account for more than half of the failures expected in the effort to achieve ‘good status’ in surface water bodies by 2015;
19. Asks the Commission to develop and publish in 2012 a road map to set recommendations focusing on improving the efficiency of water resources and land use, developing an

approach for mainstreaming the water issue into all policies and improving governance of water management as well as research and data collection; in this context welcomes the increasing inclusion of environmental regulations in the CAP; the Commission is also invited to publish in 2012 a 'Blueprint to safeguard EU water' based on the review of the WFD implementation, the review of the EU Water Scarcity and Drought Policy as well as the review of the EU adaptation policy as related to water management;

20. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to develop water awareness programmes and information campaigns so as to introduce a water saving and water efficient culture among the citizens of the European Union; insists that these awareness programmes must be aimed at citizens of all ages, so that this public and essential asset can be used more effectively and efficiently;
21. Believes that public involvement is a precondition both for protecting water resources and identifying the problems and the most appropriate measures to solve them; calls, therefore, for more cooperation between the national, regional and local authorities responsible for these matters in the Member States, and between these authorities and the Petitions Committee whenever the latter is addressing the concerns of European citizens with regard to water issues;

RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

Date adopted	24.4.2012
Result of final vote	+: 18 -: 0 0: 0
Members present for the final vote	Margrete Auken, Elena Băsescu, Philippe Boulland, Simon Busuttil, Giles Chichester, Lidia Joanna Geringer de Oedenberg, Roger Helmer, Carlos José Iturgaiz Angulo, Peter Jahr, Lena Kolarska-Bobińska, Erminia Mazzoni, Csaba Sándor Tabajdi, Jarosław Leszek Wałęsa
Substitute(s) present for the final vote	Zoltán Bagó, Birgit Collin-Langen, Kinga Göncz, Phil Prendergast
Substitute(s) under Rule 187(2) present for the final vote	Kyriacos Triantaphyllides