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Committee on Regional Development

2008/2074(INI)

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OPINION

of the Committee on Regional Development

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

on addressing the challenge of water scarcity and droughts in the European Union
(2008/2074(INI))

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SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Regional Development 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:

- A. whereas the fourth cohesion report 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,
- B. Whereas the impact of water scarcity and droughts in the European Union is more pronounced in certain regions and most strongly felt in the poorest regions, leading to land abandonment, forest fires and soil degradation, and hindering significantly the social and economic development of those living in such regions, and whereas the economic effects of water scarcity and droughts constitute a challenge to the achievement of the Lisbon objectives and the objectives of cohesion policy,
 1. 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 May 2006; points out, in this context, that, in order to improve drought risk management, it is necessary to optimise the use of the EU Solidarity Fund and the European Civil Protection Mechanism and that the Member States and regional and local authorities should apply the existing Water Framework Directive (Directive 2000/60/EC);
 2. 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 full utilisation by local and regional authorities of water savings and of their compliance with the requirements of the Water Framework Directive, before granting them funding from the Structural Funds;
 3. 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 are made available to this end;
 4. 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;

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. 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 its river basins and fully respect the requirements set out in Articles 1 and 4 of the Water Framework Directive and calls on the Commission to grant EU funding only to projects that fully comply with these requirements;
8. Notes that the Commission's communication on the challenge of water scarcity and droughts (COM(2007)0414) fails to address the problem arising in numerous regions from the non-purification of waste water;
9. Stresses that the need to protect groundwater resources should not be forgotten if they are to be included in overall water resource management;
10. Urges that support be given to all rational rainwater collection systems that meet good public health standards;
11. 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 abovementioned communication regarding the challenge of water scarcity and droughts, so as to avert counterproductive effects on water resource conservation;
12. 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 tariffication, thereby encouraging companies especially to use water more efficiently;
13. 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;

14. 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;
15. 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;
16. 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;
17. Points out 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;

RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

Date adopted	29.5.2008
Result of final vote	+: 45 -: 2 0: 2
Members present for the final vote	Emmanouil Angelakas, Stavros Arnaoutakis, Jean Marie Beaupuy, Rolf Berend, Jana Bobošíková, Victor Boştinaru, Wolfgang Bulfon, Bairbre de Brún, Gerardo Galeote, Iratxe García Pérez, Eugenijus Gentvilas, Zita Gurmai, Gábor Harangozó, Mieczysław Edmund Janowski, Tunne Kelam, Evgeni Kirilov, Constanze Angela Krehl, Florencio Luque Aguilar, Sérgio Marques, Lambert van Nistelrooij, Jan Olbrycht, Markus Pieper, Pierre Pribetich, Wojciech Roszkowski, Elisabeth Schroedter, Grażyna Staniszevska, Catherine Stihler, Kyriacos Triantaphyllides, Oldřich Vlasák, Vladimír Železný
Substitute(s) present for the final vote	Bernadette Bourzai, Jan Březina, Den Dover, Emanuel Jardim Fernandes, Fernando Fernández Martín, Francesco Ferrari, Louis Grech, Ramona Nicole Mănescu, Francisca Pleguezuelos Aguilar, Zita Pleštinská, Samuli Pohjamo, Christa Prets, Jürgen Schröder, Richard Seeber, Bart Staes, László Surján, Manfred Weber
Substitute(s) under Rule 178(2) present for the final vote	Manuel Medina Ortega, Nicolae Vlad Popa