

Ministerial Conference

Improved Water Management to Enhance Environmental Integrity

Water availability across Europe is changing. The trend is one of increasing water scarcity and droughts, mainly in Southern Europe, and an increasing risk of floods throughout most of Europe¹. These scenarios increase the vulnerability of ecosystems, socio-economic activities and human health. Integrated water management is therefore expected to play an increasingly central role in enhancing environmental integrity.

While Europe is generally considered as having sufficient water resources, water scarcity and drought are a widespread and increasingly frequent phenomenon in the European Union. Long-term imbalances, with water demand exceeding available water resources, are no longer uncommon.

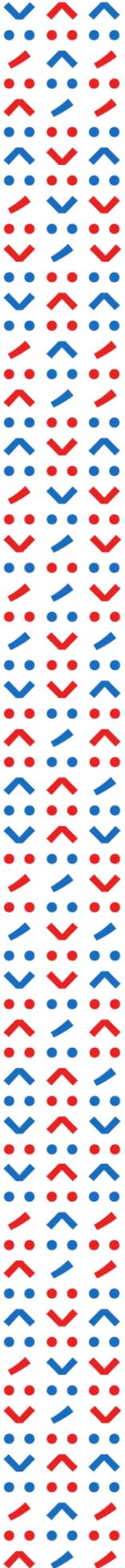
In recent years 10-17 years, on average 17 % of Europe's territory and at least 11 % of Europe's population have been affected by water scarcity. The cost of droughts in Europe over the last 30 years is estimated at EUR 100 billion. If temperatures keep rising, the water situation in Europe is expected to deteriorate further. Water is no longer a problem for a few regions, but now concerns all 500 million Europeans².

The EU's adaptation strategy aims to devote more attention to climate change in European policies, taking into the consideration the consequences for water management. The Blueprint to safeguard Europe's water resources reinforces key EU water management policies, in particular the Water Framework Directive, the Floods Directive and the Water Scarcity & Droughts (WS&D) policy. One of the key priorities of the EU's policies and actions is to *move towards a water-efficient and water-saving economy* and ensure that all Europeans have access to good quality water in sufficient quantity. The conference will be opened by the Minister for the Environment, Mr Solyomos, and the Commissioner for the Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Mr Vella. The EU's action on water scarcity and droughts will be discussed further at the conference by Ms **Marianne Wenning**, the Director for 'Quality of Life, Water & Air' in the European Commission's Directorate-General for the Environment.

The main EU policy instrument in which climate change adaptation is mainstreamed is the Water Framework Directive (WFD), which aims to achieve long-term sustainable water management based on a high level of protection of the aquatic environment. The conference will also focus on strategies and international cooperation on integrated water management for river basins. Experts from the **International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR)** and

¹ <https://www.oecd.org/env/resources/European%20Commission.pdf>

² http://ec.europa.eu/environment/water/quantity/scarcity_en.htm



the **International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine (ICPR)** will share their views and experiences from the Danube and Rhine river basins.

Sharing scientific and technical knowledge on drought and water scarcity in Europe is one of the key elements of international cooperation. Therefore, the modelling tool and prognosis system developed by the **Joint Research Centre (JRC)** will be presented during the conference.

The consequences of climate-related events vary throughout Europe. The particular experiences of Member States in various parts of Europe in addressing drought and water scarcity challenges will be discussed, paying attention to regional specificities in dealing with water issues.

Ministers will be invited to express their views on the topic at the informal meeting of EU environment/climate ministers which follows the ministerial conference.