

# Improving water resilience in the EU

## Conference statement

All of Europe and all sectors of its economy are affected in different ways, but there is a common factor: climate change impacts are frequently felt through excesses or shortages of water. Europe's water is under significant pressure and the EU urgently needs to improve its resilience and ensure sustainable freshwater supplies for people and the environment.

Therefore we call the European Commission to

1. Prioritise the full implementation of the EU Green Deal, which through building a resilient Europe can mitigate the impact of climate change, halt biodiversity loss and limit resource use, including water;
2. Implement the EU Nature Restoration Law without delay and use the National Restoration Plans to re-establish freshwater wilderness and enhance nature-based solutions offered by freshwater habitats;
3. Develop a new water and climate resilience law with a requirement for Member States to create EU Natural Water Reserves to protect critical water supplies and their catchments in water-stressed areas;
4. Provide adequate finance for upscaling the restoration or protection of floodplains, rivers, wetlands, and natural water retention measures, for instance through an EU Sponge Facility;
5. Launch a framework for the setting of sectoral water efficiency and water abstraction targets at basin level, covering all water users;
6. Enforce the EU Water Framework Directive including an increase in the European Commission's legal resources to deal with the current backlog of pending complaints and cases;
7. Develop a mechanism of climate adaptation proofing of all new EU legislative and non-legislative acts by an independent, scientific "Adaptation Panel" which would screen all EU measures and legislative proposals and ensure the integration of climate change adaptation into sectoral plans affecting water and land use;
8. Eliminate EU subsidies for activities which are harmful to river morphology, water quality, natural water retention in the landscape, and groundwater, in line with target 18 of the Global Biodiversity Framework;
9. Introduce true water valuation and stop considering surplus water as a problem or threat;
10. Provide the necessary financial (including the reform of CAP), legislative and institutional support to local farmers, family farms, farmer communities using traditional knowledge of sustainable landscape management, improving the health of soil, status of water bodies, mitigating climate change and enhancing biodiversity;
11. In order to protect landscapes and lives of local people and communities, stop financing opaque water transfer and hydropower projects in the Western Balkan by the EU and its MSs;
12. Update and regularly monitor the list of pollutant including PFAS in order to guarantee safe drinking water to all EU citizens;
13. Fully implement the INSPIRE and Aarhus directives in order to reach full transparency about land use related data which would improve to economic performance in the EU. The EU lags behind leading economies in GIS data management, especially the comprehensive DEM data (digital elevation model with free access to editable data formats);
14. Follow UN guidances (World Water Development Reports) when implementing water-related policies, prioritize bottom-up approach, and support local communities, traditional knowledge, and civil society instead of funding large-scale opaque grey infrastructure projects prone to corruption.

# Improving water resilience in the EU

## Conference statement

Considering the water management emergency in 2022 and in 2024 that provided clear evidence of how climate change impact our water resources in the Carpathian basin, we demand the Hungarian government to take the following urgent actions in order to guarantee the urgent implementation the EU Water Resilient Strategy:

1. Take scientific evidence and climate change models for the Carpathian Basin into account in order to transform the current, outdated water management practice that result in overdrudging of streams and canals, vegetation clearance of maintenance corridors;
2. Develop a national land use and land stewardship strategies, which is based on the coherent network of the landscapes and considers nature-based solutions such as sustainable beaver management, to accommodate excess water is the solution to avert desertification and the onset of catastrophic climate events;
3. Promote agricultural practices which retain water in the landscape through the inclusion, bottom-up approaches by supporting local groups of farmers, communities practicing traditional ways of land management (eg. traditional grazing practices, notch system management, floodplain orchard management, sustainable agroforestry, paludiculture...);
4. Reinterpret the definition of flooding and inland water, adapting the operating rules for existing water management structures, and adapting agricultural regulations and subsidies so that areas with water retention opportunity become an integral part of agriculture land use;
5. Achieve at least 30% floodplain cover during floods through controlled flood flow diversion. Use sustainable gravity-flow landscape elements to spread water during the high-water level of our rivers;
6. Use the available EU funds including the Common Agriculture Policy to support the landscape restoration with water, for instance aiming to water recharge of approximately 10% in the Great Plain;
7. Stop the development around our lakes as iconic freshwater ecosystems in order to save and restore their natural values and implement the Balaton Green Minimum through empowering local governments, enhance subsidiarity regarding resource allocation, implementation, monitoring of water projects;
8. Assess the water balance of the country, which must be updated regularly, but at least every 4 years. Include the calculations for virtual water trades in different sectoral strategies including battery production, biofuel, ethanol production from corn;
9. New regulation is required for flood protection, the drainage system and underground water wells, which must aim at protecting water resources for future generations;
10. Enforce legislation regarding the monitoring of underground water abstractions;
11. Stop using the EU exemption procedures for letting the large-scale spraying of nerve killing agents over wetlands, without scientific evidence, but with serious damage caused to ecosystems, disguised as mosquito control;
12. Provide adequate financing for water utilities in order to eliminate wasting drinking water and to improve sewage water treatment. Provide funding for simple optimization or intensification of WWTPs , where relevant including of reed or willow zone before entering small river courses, sensitive water bodies;
13. Implement full transparency about projects that impact surface and groundwater resources and forbid designating projects as priority projects for the national economy which are harmful for our freshwater resources;
14. Promote projects which aim to enhance climate resilience via restoring the ecological functions of lakes, rivers and wetlands, eg. the ecological removal of bank protection hard infrastructure, barrier removal from streams, restoring the natural zonation of vegetation, rehabilitation of the natural morphology of our surface waterbodies.
15. Speed up the process of domestic implementation of the Water Framework Directive to achieve good water status. Ensure adequate budgetary resources, legislative changes and strengthen the system of environmental, nature protection and water institutions and authorities.