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From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations

Subject: Water Diplomacy - Council conclusions (19 November 2018)

Delegations will find attached the Council conclusions on Water Diplomacy as adopted at the 3652nd meeting of the Council on 19 November 2018.

COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS ON WATER DIPLOMACY

THE COUNCIL adopted the following Conclusions:

INTRODUCTION

1. Water is a prerequisite for human survival and dignity and a fundamental basis for the resilience of both societies and the environment. Water is vital for human nutrition and health, and essential for ecosystem management, agriculture, energy and overall planetary security. Ensuring sustainable access to safe water and sanitation, achieving sustainable water management, and preventing scarcity and reducing flooding events are key global challenges of the 21st century, when the world is faced with a growing population, and increasingly affected by climate change. With the majority of global freshwater resources crossing borders, their sustainable and effective management is an international issue, be it at sub-national, bilateral, regional or multilateral level.
2. Tensions and conflicts over access to and use of water continue to rise, including cross border effects of water related conflicts within countries, as the availability and quality of the world's water resources and ecosystems deteriorate, and the threat of water scarcity spreads. Water scarcity has the potential to affect peace and security, water related risks can have grave human and economic costs – all of which can have direct implications for the EU, including through migration flows.
3. Cooperation on water at all levels is ever more important in this context. In line with the EU Global Strategy and the report of the High-Level Panel on Water and the Global High-Level Panel on Water and Peace, high level political engagement is required to prevent and alleviate the conflict potential of shared waters and to promote peace and stability.

4. There is a need to address the water-related consequences of climate change, including through building synergies between water diplomacy and climate diplomacy, as set out in the Council conclusions on Climate Diplomacy of 26 February 2018.

WATER AND SECURITY, STABILITY AND CONFLICT PREVENTION

5. The Council resolves to enhance EU diplomatic engagement on water, as a tool for peace, security and stability. EU water diplomacy must aim at facilitating the prevention, containment and resolution of conflicts, contributing to the equitable, sustainable and integrated management of water resources from source to sea, and promoting resilience to climate change impacts on water. Cooperation on water must be harnessed to promote regional integration, and address political instability.
6. The EU firmly condemns the use of water as a weapon of war: in this context, destroying water infrastructures, polluting water or diverting watercourses in order to limit or prevent access to water could constitute violations of international law.
7. The EU has a long-standing tradition and positive experience of cooperation on water, and will pursue initiatives to share its experience and knowledge with partner countries, in particular in fragile settings.
8. In much of the Middle East and North Africa, the combination of recurrent droughts cycles, physical water scarcity and poor water quality, armed conflict, forced displacement, poor water governance and weak institutional performance is contributing to a growing water crisis. In other cases, such as the Lake Chad basin or the Aral Sea, water sources have been dramatically shrinking and are expected to come under even more pressure due to unsustainable use or climate change impacts. Construction of large dams in international rivers such as the Nile or Mekong can contribute to tensions among riparian States and the wider affected areas. The EU is ready to support efforts to address these challenges, at the request of all the parties.

9. The High Representative, the Commission and EU Member States are invited to ensure that conflict prevention early warning systems take into account the security challenges linked to water and strengthen the link between early warning and early action across policy areas.
10. The Commission and Member States are also encouraged to continue deploying assistance to enable access to water and sanitation including in humanitarian crises in order to increase preparedness and prevention capabilities to save lives, improve livelihoods and living conditions and contribute to the resilience of disaster or conflict affected populations.

TRANSBOUNDARY WATER COOPERATION, INSTITUTIONS AND GOVERNANCE

11. A key objective of EU water diplomacy is to engage for the long term in fostering cooperative approaches to address the transboundary challenges of water. The EU stands ready to work in partnership with others to promote collaborative and sustainable water management, encouraging and supporting regional and international cooperation. Good examples of such cooperation already exist in the Mediterranean basin and in Latin America. The EU encourages all relevant parties and stakeholders to develop and maintain transboundary arrangements, including dedicated institutions and commissions, to maximise their effectiveness at all levels, in order to avoid political and economic tensions between and within states. Governance, adaptive capacity and institutional frameworks play a key role in preventing social tensions and conflict. Cooperation on shared water resources is vital to securing lasting peace and sustainable development.

12. Effective transboundary arrangements and agreements, whether global, regional or bilateral, require the commitment and participation of all riparian and upstream countries. The EU is also ready to support constructive dialogue between concerned parties deriving from major infrastructure projects with transboundary impacts whether related to water quantity or quality. The EU reiterates the need for full compliance with international environmental and nuclear safety standards while developing projects in EU neighbouring countries having impact on transboundary water resources. The EU welcomes the constructive dialogue on water and energy issues in Central Asia, which has already led to initial agreements, as well as the EU-Central Asia Platform for Environment and Water Cooperation.
13. The EU will continue to promote accession to and implementation of international agreements on water cooperation, in particular the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Water Courses and International Lakes (Helsinki Water Convention 1992) and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses (New York 1997), and other relevant international agreements. The EU welcomes the global opening of the Helsinki Water Convention to countries outside the pan-European region and will continue to build on the positive outreach conducted in 2018 by further promoting and supporting new accessions to this Convention.
14. The EU is committed to promoting integrated Water Resources Management and effective sustainable and integrated water governance. Strengthened water governance at all levels is essential for long term stability. It requires appropriate institutions, reliable data, capacity building, awareness raising and funding. It should foster sustainable, durable, climate resilient water management as well as the consideration of interlinkages between water, energy, food security and ecosystems. The EU will engage further with regional institutions and organisations, national and local authorities, communities and civil society to this end, including by drawing on existing best practice and initiatives, including from existing international centres co-funded by the EU.

LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND - WATER IN THE 2030 AGENDA, THE PARIS AGREEMENT ON CLIMATE CHANGE: WORKING MULTILATERALLY

15. Both the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change highlight the cross-sectoral role of water and the strong interlinkages between water and many policies: security, human rights, gender equality, climate change, health, food security, energy, inland navigation, pollution control, biodiversity, desertification, land degradation and the overarching need for less resource intensive growth. Harnessing synergies and minimizing trade-offs will facilitate the efficient and coherent implementation of both agendas. The EU supports the call of the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction for more resilience of new and existing critical water infrastructure and the importance of raising awareness and improving understanding of water-related disaster risks and their impact on society.

16. The EU is committed to the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, as components of the right to an adequate standard of living. The EU recognises that the human right to safe drinking water entitles everyone, without discrimination, to have access to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic use. The EU further recognises that the human right to sanitation entitles everyone, without discrimination, to have physical and affordable access to sanitation, in all spheres of life, that is safe, hygienic, secure, socially and culturally acceptable and that provides privacy and ensures dignity. As part of this commitment, the EU will continue to support and protect human rights defenders addressing environmental issues.

17. The EU reaffirms its strong commitment to the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda and highlights that progress on Goal 6 (“Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all”) is essential for the achievement of other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). With current progress insufficient, as the 2018 Synthesis Report on Water and Sanitation has highlighted, the EU is committed to increase this effort through its development cooperation efforts and calls on all partners and stakeholders to take the necessary further steps to implement Goal 6, its targets, and the other water-related SDGs. All stakeholders should play their role in realising integrated water resources management (IWRM) objectives, including at transboundary level. Updated and reliable indicators and data, are required not only to monitor progress, but also for accountability and transparency.
18. Women, girls and youth play a crucial role in achieving human development, inclusive and sustainable growth. Women are particularly affected by lack of access to water and sanitation, experiencing wide-ranging effects, including long and sometimes unsafe journeys to fetch water or use sanitation and hygiene facilities. The Council reaffirms the importance of integrating a gender perspective into water diplomacy.
19. The EU stresses the significant contribution of the Circular Economy to water savings including by re-use, underlines the role of digital, technology-based and other innovative solutions, notably nature based solutions, and encourages the Commission and EU Member States to finance and incentivise research and partnerships on water innovation, involving public and private stakeholders.
20. There is an essential link between water and climate change. Adaptation Communications pursuant to the Paris Agreement offer a good opportunity to inform on implementation actions on sustainable and integrated water management in line with the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda. The UNSG Climate Summit 2019 will be an important event to raise awareness on the need for enhanced climate action both on mitigation and adaptation.

21. The EU and its Member States will contribute to concerted international efforts to address the multiple and cross-cutting dimensions of water in a comprehensive manner. In this regard, the EU welcomes recent discussions at the United Nations Security Council, and in other fora, linking water, climate, peace and security, and encourages EU Member States to continue including these issues in the consultations and debates of the Security Council and other relevant fora. Firmly supporting work at the multilateral level, the EU welcomes the High Level Political Forum Summit in 2019 and underlines the importance of effective coordination of the UN's work on water and sanitation, notably through UN Water, to improve coherence, increase knowledge and facilitate system-wide strategic discussions and the need for a High Level UN meeting on water. It welcomes the launching of the UN Decade on Water 2018-2028, as a contribution to accelerating progress towards the achievement of SDG 6 and the other water related targets of the 2030 Agenda.

MOVING TO ENHANCED ACTION

22. The EU confirms its continued commitment to address water challenges around the world. In line with the EU Global Strategy and the New Consensus on Development, the EU recognises the need for concrete steps to enhance sound water policies, and better coordinate international efforts, interests and strategies. The Council invites the High Representative, the Commission and Member States, to deploy all available tools to ensure that integrated water policies and actions address the full range of challenges - political and security, developmental, humanitarian and environmental.
23. The Council encourages the High Representative, the Commission and Member States to give the necessary consideration to the importance of water and sanitation in the programming of future financial and technical cooperation with partner countries, including under the next Multiannual Financial Framework, and encouraging private sector investment and partnerships in water infrastructure and capacity-building, in order to fill the investment gaps which cannot be covered by public finance alone.