



## Declaration 10<sup>th</sup> European Youth Parliament for Water

The declaration of the 10<sup>th</sup> EYPW consists of five parts:

Introduction

- 1. Youth participation**
- 2. Climate change**
- 3. Water management and pollution**

Conclusion

Final declaration of the 10<sup>th</sup> European Youth Parliament for Water, held in the Netherlands in March 2011.

We, members of the 10<sup>th</sup> European Youth Parliament for Water, coming from 16 European countries: Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Germany, Greece, Kosovo, Latvia, Moldova, the Netherlands, Poland, Russia, Switzerland and Turkey adopted the following declaration, which is addressed to:

European Commissioner of Climate Action, Mrs. Connie Hedegaard.

European Commissioner of Environment and Water, Mr. Janez Potocnik.

Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Mr. Thorbjørn Jagland.

European Commissioner for Youth, Mrs. Androulla Vassiliou.

Chair of Committee for the Environment of the Council of Europe.

Chair of Intergroup on water of the EU Parliament, Mr. R. Seeber.

EC Director General of Environment, Mr. Peter Gammeltoft (head of water unit).

EC Director General of Climate.

We, the youth group, feel that we should be more involved in the decision-making process concerning water management in the broadest sense, at all levels (local, national and international). Because we will eventually be confronted with the consequences of the decisions that are made today, we have to look beyond tomorrow and face the future. We want to be proactive instead of reactive.

Recognizing the idea of sustainable development, we think youth participation in water management has to be based on the following principles:

1. Knowledge and experience - educate young people on the urgency of water related problems and their connection with climate change;
2. Cooperation between youth and decision makers - ensure that youngsters are informed and aware of sustainable water management and so are able to share in the responsibility for resolving water problems;
3. Regular evaluation of the present situation - re-think, and adopt new combinations of traditional and modern technologies;
4. Worldwide cooperation - consider the problems of each country individually (based on international reports on climate change), take into account their specific features and try to find common solutions.

During this week we discovered and investigated several problems relating to current policy on water management and youth involvement:

1. Paragraph 14 in the Water Framework Directive<sup>1</sup> is about cooperating with the population, however, there is much room for improvement in this area particularly as regards youth involvement;
2. There is an absence of good and modern water management in some countries, a lack of measures to control droughts, floods and temperature increase and a lack of attention paid by governments to these pressing problems;
3. There are governments who have not submitted plans for existing river basin districts in Europe;
4. There is a lack of shared information between organizations, or countries concerning water and openness of Government;
5. Climate change and water-related issues and discussions do not have a place in the education of youngsters;
6. Contrary to what most people believe, Europe has or is going to have big problems with sanitation, waste water, droughts and flood management;
7. The European Union is committed to the Waste Water Directive, but there are great problems of implementation and non-compliance, particularly on the part of countries in Eastern Europe. Governments do not monitor the level of water pollution closely enough.

Analyzing national and world practice on the aforementioned points, we came up with the following suggestions:

## **1. Youth participation**

What we have experienced in the 10<sup>th</sup> EYPW is that informal meetings between young people and experts are extremely fruitful. Therefore we suggest open debates supervised by experts at every level: municipal, regional, national and European. As a result of these open debates, independent youth bodies should be formed to play an advisory role in the decision-making process and tasks should be delegated to youth committees.

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<sup>1</sup>The success of this Directive relies on close cooperation and coherent action at Community, Member State and local level as well as on information, consultation and involvement of the public, including users.

By presenting the facts and details of climate change in schools all over Europe, we can stimulate youth participation. An active volunteer can visit primary schools and secondary schools to get children interested at a young age. Active organizations (regional, national or European, such as the EYPW for example) can educate young people and get them involved by organizing workshops on matters they can relate to in their own environment and daily life. Children react to competition; these organizations can teach children using interactive games and play activities and they can organize science fairs for new ideas. Competition is a huge motivation.

To appeal to young adults, we suggest that organizations present themselves at music festivals, etc.

We suggest that surveys be carried out by members of the public, on how climate change has affected the local situation. Investigation into local issues will make the public feel involved. Also projects like World Water Monitoring Day should be promoted and extended.

## **2. Climate change**

Climate change is in progress. We do not seem able to stop it, but we can work to protect ourselves against the effects. Climate change has been ignored during the past years and it is the time to take the next step. We have to switch from short term solutions to sustainable long term solutions.

While some face increased flooding, other countries are experiencing droughts. We propose building facilities for desalination of the seawater to produce drinking water for household use and water which can be used for agriculture, combined with a system for collecting rainwater for every household. This water may not be immediately drinkable, but can be used for other purposes in the household. This way, every household will have access to fresh water.

However, the building and maintaining of a desalination installation is a very expensive and difficult process. The main issue is that the process of desalination uses a lot of energy and is not 'green', which means it is not an option for all countries. Therefore, we strongly advise more research into this field and the use of alternative energies for possible desalination processes.

Climate change destroys or modifies the ecosystem. This in turn affects the economy and society of the countries.

These problems are not limited to one aspect, but they ripple through the entire society including all interest groups.

Measures should be taken. Our society is interlinked; what affects the environment and ecosystem, undeniably also affects our economy and society.

We think that the following measures are necessary:

- Stimulating research concerning desalination of seawater, as this seems to have a lot of potential;
- Recommendation for the European Union to create more water collection basins to store water when levels are high for dryer periods;
- European and national Institutions should introduce a policy based on the "Re-use (use a second time) - recycle (back to system) - reduce (use less)" principle in order to see things holistically.

## **3. Water management and pollution**

We suggest:

- Updating safety standards in accordance with released calculations;
- Pressing the governments that have not submitted plans for existing river basin districts in Europe to do so;
- Implementing low groynes in rivers to prevent erosion of sandbanks and sedimentation of estuaries;
- Creating ecological spreading of rivers in order to store the excess water, for example in a larger network of smaller ditches, regulated by (hand operated or automatic) sluices;
- Creating artificial polders and using natural depressions and valleys for storage of excess water from the river. This way, in dry periods these polders can function as grazing meadows for livestock and in wet periods, will naturally overflow;
- A delta approach for areas that are in risk of flooding. For example a system modeled on that used by the Dutch Water Boards;
- Alternatives to traditional approaches of water management, for example giving more room for the river;
- Diverting a portion of the funds for European agriculture to water management. In this way, cooperation is improved between agriculture and water management and potential problems are easier to determine and solve;
- Supporting organizations which conduct events like World Water Monitoring Day;
- Governments should be pressed to monitor water pollution levels more actively to honor the waste water agreement.

In conclusion, we strongly advise you to consider our recommendations for policies concerning youth participation, climate change and water management and to act according to European directives.

As the saying goes; we do not inherit the world from our ancestors, we only borrow it from our children.

10<sup>th</sup> European Youth Parliament for Water  
March 18, 2011