

BLOG/ Comment by Women for Water (25 Nov. 2018)
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Water diplomacy conclusions by the EU – and why is that important?

J.F. Kennedy in 1962: *“Anyone who can solve the problems of water will be worthy of two Nobel prizes - one for peace and one for science.”*

On 19 November 2018 (World Toilet Day), the Council of Foreign Affairs of the European Union (EU) adopted new / updated conclusions on water diplomacy [Council Conclusions on Water Diplomacy](#)¹

Tensions and conflicts over access to water continue to rise, as the world’s water resources and ecosystems deteriorate, and the threat of water scarcity spreads. The latest UN Water synthesis report² warns that if we are not pro-active, we will not reach the all-important targets on water and sanitation.

The High levels Panel on Water, the global high level panel on water and Peace, the High level panel on water and disaster³ all called for action to prevent or solve the (potential) water crises. Globally important initiatives and actions on water are there: Sustainable Development Goal 6, more parties to the fresh water conventions, more participants in the Alliance for water stewardship.

It is welcome and “ needed” news, that the Council of the European Union adopted **updated Conclusions on Water Diplomacy**, strengthening European commitment to the use of diplomacy in resolving conflicts over shared water resources for the sake of cooperation, regional stability and peace. The Council acknowledged in 2013 that water had become a foreign policy issue. These conclusions are now expanded to encompass the rising tensions over access to water and increasing threat of water scarcity, and the need for climate diplomacy to include water diplomacy. It puts “ water” (higher) on the political agenda.

Women for Water and our partners in the European pact for Water welcome the EU council conclusions of 19th November 2018. After successful interventions of the European Pact and its contributors for the European Consensus⁴, the network again gave a lot of input to EEAS (facilitated by BORDA and Women for Water) in drafting this statement/ council conclusions over the last year and are pleased with so many suggestions having been taken on-board. **The conclusions give us confidence that it is possible to achieve more support for water-related activities by our members worldwide.**

Together with the European Consensus on development, which after years of silence on the topic incorporated water again as a real topic, the council conclusions and consensus will provide a basis for the work plans of the European Commission – to incorporate water-related issues - and gives a good starting point for financing decisions e.g. in the Multiannual Finance Framework on water-related issues in and by the EU.

¹ https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/53798/water-tool-peace_en

² (http://www.unwater.org/publication_categories/sdg-6-synthesis-report-2018-on-water-and-sanitation)

³ https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/17825HLPW_Outcome.pdf;
<https://www.genevawaterhub.org/resource/matter-survival>; <http://www.wateranddisaster.org>

⁴ (https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/european-consensus-on-development-final-20170626_en.pdf)

The Council recalls that **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.

The Council notes the **potential of water scarcity to affect peace and security**, as water related risks can have grave human and economic costs, all of which can have direct implications for the EU, including through migration flows. The Council intends to **enhance EU diplomatic engagement about water** as a tool for peace, security and stability, and firmly condemns the use of water as a weapon of war. The Council also underlines the EU's commitment to promoting transboundary and integrated water management as well as effective water governance. In this respect, the EU will continue to promote accession to and implementation of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Water Courses and International Lakes (Water Convention) and the Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses. (so far only 1/3 of the countries have signed up to the treaties; this is a very important invitation!)

The Council reaffirms the **EU's commitment to the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation**, as components of the right to an adequate standard of living. It underlines the EU's 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.

The Council is supporting the idea for a UN High Level intergovernmental (multi-stakeholder) Conference on water. **WfWP feels that this is highly necessary: water policies and cooperation are global issues, followed by actions on the ground.**

The Council acknowledges the crucial role of Women, girls and youth in achieving human development, inclusive and sustainable growth. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by the lack of access to water, sanitation and hygiene, with greater risks to their health and safety, and greater demands on their time and income generating activities and educational opportunity posed by the drudgery of fetching water and not a safe place to go for sanitation needs.

At the same time they have a lot of capabilities to positively influence actions on the ground to improve the situation. WfWP does feel that we urgently need direct investment in women and women organizations in relation to water. **On our wish list: active support for women and youth to be actors in this field in terms of (direct access to) finance, access to vocational training - and hence paid jobs - and governance (at the decision-making "table").**

Missing in action: support for nature-based solutions.

We thank all European Pact contributors for their inputs and are confident that these conclusions will help in securing more support (politically and financially) for the next years to come when it comes to investment in "water". **The big challenge now is to translate this into actions of the Member States and the Commission.**

Please do not hesitate to make suggestions for actions, comment, ask questions. And put this on your website!

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