European Commission - Speech
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Press conference by Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevičius at the informal Environment Council, on 23 April 2021

Brussels, 23 April 2021

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, and thank you for tuning in.

My thanks to the Portuguese presidency for hosting this very useful meeting today, and for putting the spotlight on a very important European issue this morning.

There was a time when water scarcity and droughts were issues for southern Europe. That's no longer the case. Today, even countries in the north are more and more feeling the effects of climate change.

That means that A better water management is a hot topic for the whole of Europe. We all need to adapt, and today we looked at how Europe can help in that context.

These questions affect all areas of society. I reminded ministers that we need to see different approaches in many sectors, from agriculture and transport to heavy industry and energy production. So we looked in particular at ways to improve the coordination between these sectors, looking for multiple wins in the spirit of the European Green Deal. This goes to the heart of effective, sustainable and climate-resilient water management.

The Commission is making water a priority in many Green Deal deliverables. I am thinking in particular of the new EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change, our strategies for Biodiversity and Circular Economy, and the coming Zero Pollution Action Plan, which will soon be adopted.

Moreover, the EU already has a long tradition of solid water legislation, but laws are only as good as their implementation. So I spoke of the need to ensure that the legislation is applied in practice. Implementation is really key in this regard!

That means, for example, wider use of drought management plans, and more integrated water management planning, to ensure a better balance between water supply and demand. It also means a solid water efficiency agenda for all economic sectors, and economic measures, or pricing measures where they are needed.

Water infrastructure is expensive. But it's also essential. So we also looked at financing, and in particular the new funds available under the EU Recovery Plan. Between now and 2027, Europe is making available some EUR 1.8 trillion through the EU budget and NextGenerationEU.

I noted how these co-funding opportunities should be used to promote investments that enhance nature restoration and water efficiency measures, in line with needs for climate adaptation.

And once more I want to stress that it is a unique opportunity to transform the water landscape in the EU all together and in each Member State. And we should use it.

Thank you and now I am looking forward to your questions.

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Press contacts:

Vivian LOONELA (+32 2 296 67 12)
Daniela STOYCHEVA (+32 2 295 36 64)

General public inquiries: Europe Direct by phone 00 800 67 89 10 11 or by email