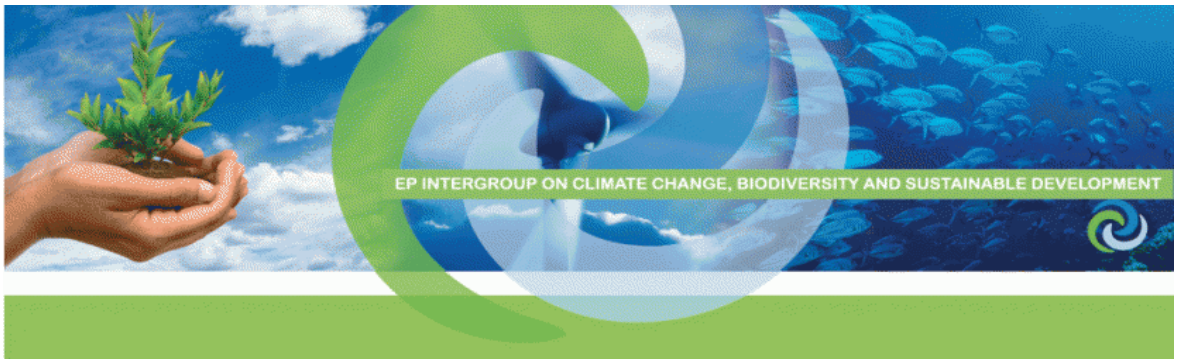

The role of water in the new EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change

20 November 2020, 10:00 – 12:00 CET

Online event

Hosted by MEP Tiemo Wölken

Co-chair of the ''Water Management'' Working Group of the European Parliament (EP) Intergroup on 'Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development'

Speakers:

- **MEP Tiemo Wölken**
- **Liviu Stirbat,** Deputy Head of Unit "Adaptation," DG Climate Action, European Commission
- **Thomas Stratenwerth,** Head of Division on General, European and International Water Management Issues, Federal Ministry of the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, Germany
- **Dr. Claudia Castell-Exner,** President, EurEau
- **Sasha Koo-Oshima,** Deputy Division Director of Land and Water, Natural Resources and Sustainable Production, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)
- **Piotr Całbecki (PL/EPP),** President of the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Region & European Committee of the Regions' Rapporteur on Water Framework directive and Floods directive
- **Sergiy Moroz,** Policy Manager for Water and Biodiversity, EEB
- **Dr. Maria-Helena Ramos,** President, Hydrological Sciences Division, European Geosciences Union
- **MEP Pär Holmgren**
- **MEP Petros Kokkalis**

Welcome Remarks

MEP Tiemo Wölken

> ***"If in any region we run the risk of water shortages, drinking water has to be our first priority, it is a human right."***

In his opening speech, Mr. Tiemo Wölken emphasized the importance of expanding Europe's Climate Change Adaptation Strategy to tackle water shortages and **prevent future water usage conflicts.** Mr. Wölken called for better **incorporation of water services in urban planning strategies**, notably by planning for more water-absorbing green spaces. Such initiatives should aim to reduce the intense stresses urban water systems currently face due to increased climate change-related flooding. For every 1-degree increase in global temperature, the water intake of the atmosphere will rise by 7%. This exponential correlation will generate severe droughts in some parts of the world, while other regions will experience extreme rainfalls, causing a significant imbalance in water supply globally. "***We might not have water in the places we used to have it or in the places we need it the most,***" Mr. Wölken asserted, addressing the social challenges an unequal water distribution could bring about. As with every crisis the climate crisis is profoundly unequal, meaning **that lower-income classes will have fewer possibilities to adapt to, or mitigate its consequences**. Stressing this particular point, hosting MEP Mr. Wölken expressed his satisfaction with the European Parliament's decision to adopt his proposal regarding the European Climate Law. The EU adaptation strategies mentioned in article 4 of the climate law shall **f**ocus in particular on the most vulnerable and impacted populations and economic sectors **by identifying shortcomings, engaging civil society and implementing remedies**. Mr. Wölken concluded by reiterating that if at any time the EU should run the risk of water shortages, ensuring access to drinking water should be its first priority.

Keynote address

Liviu Stirbat, Deputy Head of Unit on "Adaptation," DG Climate Action, European Commission

> ***"From an adaptation perspective all [EU Green Deal] initiatives are in harmony with the EU's goal to reach climate neutrality and resilience by 2050".***

Mr. Liviu Stirbat gave a brief overview of the European Commission's new Climate Change Adaptation Strategy. Mr. Stirbat welcomed the excellent work done by the European Parliament on the Commission's blueprint of the strategy, as well as the **more than 1000 reactions** from stakeholders, experts, Member States and citizens gathered during open public consultations. Since the adoption of the first EU strategy in

2013, all Member States have embraced adaptation policies, plans and strategies which are also **trickling down at regional and local level, thus allowing for full governance integration**. Mr. Stirbat further commented on the **European Green Deal,** highlighting the Climate Pact's **multi-stakeholder perspective**, which focuses on **civil society, business and citizens and aims to empower individual and collective actions**. "From an adaptation perspective, all [EU Green Deal] initiatives are in harmony with the EU's goal to reach climate neutrality and resilience by 2050," stated Mr. Stirbat. The ongoing revision of the **Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)**, the imminent adoption of the Delegated Act for the **Sustainable Finance Taxonomy** as well as the newly-reviewed **climate-proofing guidelines** are all important outlets, through which the **EU Adaptation Strategy would be made more concrete.** In light of the current pandemic, Mr. Stirbat further stressed the importance of such adaptation strategies, notably in terms of **resilience and build back better**. The pandemic has shown that we can no longer rely solely on one type of strategy but that we need to **invest more time and economic resources on both adaptation and mitigation policies**. Mr. Stirbat reiterated Mr. Wölken's previous statement on the importance of **ensuring a fair allocation of water resources and planning of more resilient and green urban spaces**. Pointing out the important human vulnerability to climate change, especially in terms of **health**, Mr. Stirbat concluded by explaining that greener cities could, among other benefits, be able to regulate the water cycle by absorbing larger water quantities, notably allowing for reliable access to good quality water even during droughts and heat waves.

Panel Discussion

Thomas Stratenwerth, Head of Division on General, European and International Water Management Issues, Federal Ministry of the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, Germany

> ***"To efficiently tackle the climate change issue we need to enhance resilience in Europe's most vulnerable regions but also of our main trade partners."***

Mr. Thomas Stratenwerth promptly raised his concerns about the **limited amount of water management strategies,** such as increasing storage capacities of urban rainwater drainage systems, **to effectively build climate-related water resilience**. Mr. Stratenwerth suggested the development of more **systemic and transformative approaches**, which would address urban planning through a broader perspective and involve innovative **technological solutions** as well as revisited **governance and financing mechanisms**. According to Mr. Stratenwerth, these could also offer important **technological, economic and human well-being opportunities**. Mr. Stratenwerth proceeded by presenting the **outcomes of the Climate Change and European Water Dimensions: Enhancing Resilience conference**, co-organized by Germany, Slovenia, Portugal and the European Commission. The conference discussed the findings of a policy paper which identified three main streams the **new EU Adaptation Strategy** should focus on, namely **(1)** mainstreaming water-related climate resilience into EU policies and international frameworks, **(2)** highlighting water-

relevant issues in the new adaptation strategy and **(3)** supporting Member States in building better resilience. The policy proposal further calls for the **CAP** to include water resilience in its priorities as well as to integrate water sustainability issues into the **National Energy and Climate Plans**. The conference outcomes further concluded that more **appropriate adaptation financing for water resilience** need to be provided at EU level and **cross-border cooperation strengthened**.

Dr. Claudia Castell-Exner - President, EurEau

> ***"It is crucial to protect water resources and to make sure that the costs of water are fairly distributed amongst its users, especially in the industrial, energy and agricultural sectors."***

Within her intervention, Dr. Castell-Exner called for the need to **increase political leadership and multi-level governance on water use issues.** "Building resilient and robust water infrastructures is EurEau's main priority," she declared on the federation's behalf, arguing that **stronger support at EU and national level** would be necessary to achieve that ambition. Additionally, Dr. Castell-Exner also addressed the EU's new adaptation strategy, calling for **better protection of water resources**, the promotion of **water reuse** and a more **adequate application of the EU's cost recovery principle**. Additionally, she echoed MEP Mr. Wölken's statement on promoting **nature-based solutions**, notably to prevent sewers' overflows during heavy rainfalls. The main point Dr. Castell-Exner got across was the **need for clearer governance structures and better-defined roles and responsibility at all authority levels**. Hopeful about the new Adaptation Strategy's important focus on water dimensions, Dr. Castell-Exner concluded her remarks by welcoming the European Parliament's Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety's (ENVI) work on the new strategy.

Sasha Koo-Oshima, Deputy Division Director of Land and Water, Natural Resources and Sustainable Production, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

> ***"We need to combine adaptation and mitigation strategies when looking at the agricultural sector."***

Ms. Sasha Koo-Oshima's speech mainly focused on water management and climate adaptation strategies in the **agricultural sector.** Global water use has increased by **six-fold over the past 100 years** and will continue to do mostly due to **rising population growth and more intense consumption patterns**. Ms. Koo-Oshima laid out some of the FAO's most innovative instruments to tackle this issue and render agricultural water use more efficient. Specifically, Ms. Koo-Oshima mentioned **precision agriculture techniques**, which rely on **digital information** such as big data from FAO's data labs to help small farmers optimize their **decision-making processes and maximize their yields.** In this regard, Ms. Koo-Oshima, proceeded by eluding on **WaPOR, one of FAO's instruments to improve water productivity**. Launched in June 2019 the technology used **near-real-time satellite-based remote sensing to gather data on water consumption and biomass**. Small family farms located in remote regions of the world especially benefit from this technology as it is smartphone-friendly and also offers a **platform for farmers** to exchange on pests, diseases or other crop

issues. Ms. Koo-Oshima described this technology as a powerful indicator of agricultural water consumption. She concluded by praising the benefits of **modular farming models of integrated agri-aquaculture** which by **recycling and reusing water** from one agricultural system to another should perform better under climate change conditions. By using **lower quality water for food crops irrigation,** the model allows for the best available quality of water to be used for drinking purposes, and thus represents a crucial adaptation strategy for the agricultural and water sectors.

Piotr Całbecki (PL/EPP), President of the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Region & European Committee of the Regions' Rapporteur on Water Framework Directive and Floods Directive

> ***"Water resources management is key for climate adaptation. We need greater coordination between countries and cross-border cooperation as water flows do not stop at national and regional borders."***

Mr. Piotr Calbecki began his statement by underlining that already **40% of European cities have implemented adaptation strategies** in order to face the upcoming climate issues and stressed the importance to **accommodate such urban areas**, with **tailored solutions and support from the EU and its Member States**. In this regard, the **Green Deal Going Local Group**, created by the European Committee of the Regions earlier this year will put climate adaptation and water management among its priorities. Mr. Calbecki asserted the Committee's strong political support in the implementation of the climate pact and like practices. Mr. Calbecki also called for a **stronger system of governance at all scales and greater coherence of EU legislation** to ensure that climate resilient water management is streamlined into other policies and that the new EU Adaptation Strategy will be both bold and ambitious. Furthermore, Mr. Calbecki asked for adequate financing of adaptation structures, such as a **new long-term budget** focused on a greener and a carbon-free EU moreover provided at all governance levels, or ensuring direct access to the **Green Recovery Funds for local and regional levels**. Mr. Calbecki additionally stressed the need for **more data, research and digital solutions**, such as the AMBER project, which democratize decision-making and contribute to a stronger collaboration between authorities, NGOs and the public.

Sergiy Moroz, Policy Manager for Water and Biodiversity, EEB

> ***"The mitigation of the climate crisis is a priority, but adaptation should also be a focal point."***

Mr. Sergiy Moroz, started by reiterating the **importance of rendering the climate crisis' mitigation a priority, moreover highlighting that adaptation needs to be a focal point of the EU strategy as well**. Mr. Moroz also emphasized how fundamental water is when it comes to climate change adaptation and mitigation, by further underlining that **a number of tools and legislations, like the Water Framework Directive, were already put in place to help us move towards adaptation to climate change.** As a result, it is important to update and implement those tools and legislations, ensuring their better function. In that

aspect, he mentioned how revising CAP, which has been in place for seven years and is not in line with the green and sustainable ambitions of the EU, is capital. With reference to the latter, it is important that it is made more progressive, and more in line with the issues at hand.

Dr. Maria-Helena Ramos, President, Hydrological Sciences Division, European Geosciences Union

> ***"Activities taking place at a global scale are affecting local and regional climate and water resources."***

In her intervention, **Dr. Maria-Helena Ramos** began by stating that water in geosciences is a very broad subject, as scientists in the field are dealing with water in multiple ways: groundwater resources, remote sensing, etc. Then, Dr. Ramos reiterated that climate change - when it comes to water - is very visible, especially concerning the **changes in the amplitude of precipitation all over the world**. A significant fraction of the current and future changes in precipitation are due to circulation regimes: **activities taking place at a global scale are affecting local and regional climate and water**. Dr. Ramos highlighted how **the use of multi-usage reservoirs for hydropower production is increasing, thus also growing the use of water, while climate change remains an on-going issue.** The availability of water changes differently over time periods and places; therefore it is important that we adapt and extend our knowledge accordingly. **A multi-sectoral responsibility approach is needed for solving challenges related to water: versatile tools and practices need to be put in place for more efficient water management, but also for risk assessment (e.g for floods and droughts)**. Dr. Ramos also highlighted the contrasting views of decision-makers and stakeholders on how they can affect the decision-making process when it comes to adaptation strategies. All in all, Dr. Ramos emphasized **how important it is to collaborate with scientists and scientific unions' and take their data and opinions into account in the decision-making process**, as they can transform their knowledge into practical solutions, both on a local and global level.

Reactions by MEPs

MEP Pär Holmgren

> ***"It is crucial to further connect climate adaptation efforts with mitigation ones."***

Within his reaction, **MEP Mr. Pär Holmgren** stressed the importance of connecting adaptation and mitigation since adaptation alone cannot solve the current climate crisis. **The effects of climate change on the hydrological cycle will be very severe**, and certain areas will end up with an abundance of water, while others will face water scarcity. **The changes on the hydrological cycle will of course affect multiple other connected sectors.** With every tenth of a degree of global temperature increase, our chances of reversing climate change greatly diminish. Thus, it is important that we prioritize mitigation of climate change by limiting global warming and emissions of greenhouse gases. Moreover, it is essential to include the topics of

mitigation and adaptation in every discussion and decision-making process, whether they are financial, political or regarding other sectors like agriculture and food production. **A systemic perspective needs to be adopted as water is a core component of life and ecosystems' functions**. **The adaptation strategy can be successful, but it requires consequent investments in the restoration of nature and biodiversity.** Finally, Mr. Holmgren concluded his intervention stating that the revision of CAP could be a big turning point and it could positively impact EU strategies on climate change.

MEP Petros Kokkalis

> ***"The economic and social aspects of adaptation should be prioritized and further discussed in the decision-making processes."***

MEP Mr. Petros Kokkalis stressed how important adaptation to climate change will be in the near future, as global warming is progressing and **we have already reached a global temperature increase of 1.1°C.** This entails significant changes in life as we know it, while we will be living in a world different from the one we once knew and the one we currently know. **Therefore, adaptation to climate change, especially building resilience and recovery should be our main goals.** To do so, the economic and social aspects of adaptation should be prioritized and further discussed in the decision-making processes.

Discussion with the audience, moderated by MEP Tiemo Wölken

During the Q&A session with the audience, multiple questions regarding the inclusion of science in the EU adaptation strategy were addressed to panellists. Dr. Maria-Helena Ramos explained how scientists have had a more multidisciplinary approach in the last few years and that makes it easier to create intersectoral initiatives when it comes to water management. The audience also mentioned how important the revision of CAP is when it comes to adaptation, and that including water efficiency within CAP would be crucial. Mr. Sergiy Moroz agreed with the comment, but highlighted that it would be best to put efficiency in the context of allocations instead of subsidies, to avoid paying for damaging activities. Ms. Sasha Koo-Oshima argued that solving groundwater depletion with a multisectoral approach is moreover key, while also Mr. Liviu Stirbat addressed revising the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive (UWWTD) to make cities more sustainable by helping wastewater operators work with local communities and create climate-proof infrastructure while increasing their capacity and resilience.

Closing remarks

MEP Tiemo Wölken

In his closing remarks, MEP Mr. Tiemo Wölken stated how the inclusion of water in the EU Adaptation Strategy is clearly a cross-cutting issue that will be discussed by the European Commission, as strong

measures are to be expected from the EC's proposal, including clear and measurable targets. Last but not least, Mr. Wölken underlined that from the EP's point of view, adaptation will be mentioned as well within the relevant resolution that will be voted on the 30th of November 30th by ENVI Committee.