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Answer given by Ms Ferreira
on behalf of the European Commission
(28.10.2024)

The EU provides significant financial support for water related investments: In 2021-2027, EUR 13.2 billion of Cohesion Policy funds¹ is earmarked for water management in the EU, including in drinking water supply with a preference for demand side options before investing in additional supply. This includes efficiency measures such as leakage reduction of water networks to reduce water losses. Investment in desalination infrastructure must comply with the Do No Significant Harm Principle and could be considered for regions (e.g. islands) in the framework of integrated water management after demand side options have been exploited and if there is no alternative for drinking water supply.

EU Cohesion Policy in Greece already supports desalination plants to address water scarcity and the need for increased quality standards. In 2014-2020, EUR 49 million for more than 25 desalination projects in insular Greece were funded.² In 2021-2027, EUR 20 million have been earmarked³ for investments in sustainable water desalination through an integrated implementation model from the source to citizen's tap.

Within Greece's Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP)⁴, a water regulatory authority has been established with the aim to strengthen the institutional framework, supervise the water sector and ensure the sustainability of water services, while Greece benefits from RRP funding for water supply and water saving infrastructure⁵.

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)⁶, the EU programme for the environment and climate action⁷ and several European Missions and Partnerships under Horizon Europe⁸ also

¹ <https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/stories/s/21-27-Sustainable-water-management/ehce-gj6d>

² <https://anaptyxi.gov.gr/el-gr/>

³ Under the 'Environment and Climate Change' programme.

⁴ Greece's Recovery and Resilience Plan https://commission.europa.eu/business-economy-euro/economic-recovery/recovery-and-resilience-facility/country-pages/greeces-recovery-and-resilience-plan_en; https://next-generation-eu.europa.eu/index_en

⁵ https://next-generation-eu.europa.eu/index_en

⁶ Support under the CAP covers inter alia investments in rainwater harvesting and storage or the use of recycled water for irrigation. https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/common-agricultural-policy_en

⁷ LIFE Programme:

https://cinea.ec.europa.eu/programmes/life_en#:~:text=The%20LIFE%20programme%20is%20the%20EU's%20funding

⁸ Of particular relevance are the partnerships 'Water Security for the Planet' (<https://www.water4all-partnership.eu/>), the Partnership on Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area (PRIMA, <https://prima-med.org/>) together with the Missions 'Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030' (https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe/eu-missions-horizon-europe/restore-our-ocean-and-waters_en), 'Adaptation to Climate Change' (https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe/eu-missions-horizon-europe/adaptation-climate-change_en) and 'A Soil Deal for Europe' (<https://mission-soil-platform.ec.europa.eu/>)

support water resilience, including EU funded research,⁹ to minimise negative environmental effects of the current generation of desalination plants.

⁹ Illustrative is the EU-funded H2020 Wave2O project producing clean water with reduced carbon emissions by using wave-driven desalination systems. Beyond energy consumption/carbon footprint, another area of research focuses on the environmental impact from desalination plants' discharged brine on marine ecosystems.