

(English version)

Question for written answer E-001675/24
to the Commission
Elena Kountoura (The Left)
(11 September 2024)

Subject: Measures to address water scarcity — need for EU initiatives and new financial instruments to assist Greece and other southern European countries

In recent years, water scarcity has been a threat to the Mediterranean region,⁽¹⁾ with unforeseen environmental and socioeconomic consequences.

Greece faces an acute problem because of prolonged drought and water scarcity. Lakes have dried up, and a fair number of mainland areas and islands are in a state of emergency. Primary production is shrinking; arable and livestock farmers,⁽²⁾ professionals in the processing and tourism industries and local communities as a whole are already affected, as water requirements expand exponentially during the summer season.

Taking into account: (a) the European Commission President's Political Guidelines for the European Commission 2024-2029, which refer to the need for steps to be taken to combat water scarcity in the Member States;⁽³⁾ (b) the need for new initiatives for wide-ranging implementation of innovative and sustainable practices in water resource management (such as desalination, reuse of waste water for irrigation in agricultural production, recycling in the use of water resources in agriculture); and (c) the need to support innovation and digitalisation in the production of agrifood products in order to bring about more effective use of water as an instrument in adapting the farming sector to the climate crisis,

1. What financial instruments are currently available to Member States for the purpose of addressing water scarcity?
2. Is the Commission planning to propose new financial instruments for countries disproportionately affected by the climate crisis in the forthcoming 'Climate Adaptation Plan' and the new 'European Water Resilience Strategy'?
3. Is it preparing new initiatives to assist professionals in the primary sector and in the processing and tourism industries?

Submitted: 11.9.2024

Answer given by Ms Ferreira on behalf of the European Commission
(23 October 2024)

The EU provides significant financial support to address water management and scarcity. Between 2021 and 2027, EUR 13.2 billion of Cohesion Policy funds⁽¹⁾ are earmarked for sustainable water management.

The Recovery and Resilience Facility⁽²⁾, and several missions and partnerships under Horizon Europe⁽³⁾ also provide support for water resilience⁽⁴⁾.

The Common Agricultural Policy⁽⁵⁾ offers *inter alia* support⁽⁶⁾ for water efficiency and water reuse in the agricultural sector, climate smart agriculture and innovation, and risk and crisis management tools.

The EU programme for the environment and climate action⁽⁷⁾ co-finances innovative projects in the environmental sector, including recovery of resources from water.

Preparatory work and reflections are ongoing for the next multi-annual financial framework.

¹ Drought is a serious challenge for many European Union countries, particularly in southern Europe and the Mediterranean regions, where climate change is exacerbating extreme weather conditions. Some Member States, such as Greece, Cyprus, Italy, Spain, Malta and Portugal, have been disproportionately hard-hit by drought.

² Heatwave conditions in Greece have led to heavier demands from farmers, and the protracted drought has drastically reduced the volume of water available in irrigation networks.

³ https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/e6cd4328-673c-4e7a-8683-f63ffb2cf648_en?filename=Political%20Guidelines%202024-2029_EN.pdf

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

⁽²⁾ https://next-generation-eu.europa.eu/index_en

⁽³⁾ https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe_en

⁽⁴⁾ 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) (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) (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) and a 'Soil Deal for Europe' (<https://mission-soil-platform.ec.europa.eu/>).

⁽⁵⁾ https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/common-agricultural-policy_en

⁽⁶⁾ Different types of support include area-based support, grants and financial instruments for investments.

⁽⁷⁾ LIFE: https://cinea.ec.europa.eu/programmes/life_en

Supporting Member States on climate risk preparedness will be part of a European Climate Adaptation Plan ⁽⁸⁾.

Moreover, the European Water Resilience strategy ⁽⁹⁾ will aim to ensure water resources are properly managed, scarcity is addressed, and that the water industry's innovation is enhanced and takes a circular economy approach.

It will build on ongoing efforts on water scarcity and drought management in the context of the implementation of the Water Framework Directive ⁽¹⁰⁾, including through the Ad Hoc Task group for Water Scarcity and Droughts ⁽¹¹⁾, and the EU Climate Adaptation Strategy ⁽¹²⁾.

The Commission will also continue supporting the tourism ecosystem under the Tourism transition pathway ⁽¹³⁾ to increase water efficiency, reducing water stress and pollution, and improving sanitation, as well as consider how to best support tourism businesses and destinations in the next EU budget.

⁽⁸⁾ https://commission.europa.eu/about-european-commission/president-elect-ursula-von-der-leyen_en

⁽⁹⁾ https://commission.europa.eu/about-european-commission/president-elect-ursula-von-der-leyen_en

⁽¹⁰⁾ Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy, OJ L 327, 22.12.2000, p. 1-73, as amended by Commission Directive 2014/101/EU of 30 October 2014, OJ L 311, 31.10.2014, p. 32-35.

⁽¹¹⁾ In this context, the Commission has been assessing the impact of droughts and future drought risks: https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/water/water-scarcity-and-droughts_en

⁽¹²⁾ https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/adaptation-climate-change/eu-adaptation-strategy_en

⁽¹³⁾ https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/sectors/tourism/eu-tourism-transition/tourism-transition-pathway_en