

Water Event Speech 25/09/2012

The challenges that water security creates in terms of economic viability and the challenges of peace and security are enormous. I think we have to step up our engagement on water security. And this meeting, I hope is a real contribution in that direction.

From the European Union we have had a long and substantive commitment through the development cooperation assistance that we have. We've spent about €2 billion in sixty countries since 2008 on issues to do with water and sanitation. We have got a long standing cooperation with many of the partners who are represented here. Can I say that we are determined to remain engaged and committed and we are very pleased that water got proper attention to the Rio+20 summit ; an extremely important meeting, from which we now need to move to implementation, as we've just been discussing..

We know that the issues of water security are often across regions. The need the issue of trans-boundary management of resources and where there is an issue of cooperation, it is also an area of potential risk of conflict. When the foreign ministers of the European Union met in Cyprus, we had a really good and very important consultation on water security. I was trying to make sure that within the European Union we seriously thought about how this issue, and every aspect of it, was covered in the foreign policy work we do, and in my work as Vice President of the Commission, what we do across the Commission. And I have to say it is very obvious from our discussions with foreign ministers that this is a real key preoccupation as we think about the challenges in different regions of the world and the potential for conflict or for other forms of difficulty created.

We need to promote the collaborative management of this resource. It is going to be very important for sustainable development, it's going to be extremely important to tackle climate change issues and it's going to be enormously important for stability in many parts of the world. And in some senses, we in the European Union are inspired by our own experiences on having to develop regional cooperation and collaborative arrangements in our own continent; an obvious example is around the Danube. So we would also suggest that we have great experience and some expertise to offer in this sphere. And that's partly why we are already engaged in many areas around the world where we are promoting the trans-boundary and regional cooperation on water resources. For example in our work in Central Asia, and our Special Representative for that part of the world is with us today. I'll be visiting the region shortly and that will be one important part of our discussions today when we have the EU - Central Asia Ministerial meeting.

And finally all of these efforts can be complimented by supporting what we already have internationally; we have the 1992 and 1997 water conventions, which we fully support. And it is important to build on that work that is ongoing through those conventions in everything that we do.

So Chairman, we are convinced that water security is one of the major security challenges of our time. I hope that in the course of this meeting there will be an opportunity to indentify some of the priorities and some of the next steps that we need to take and how we can work together. So I hope you won't mind if I say that I see this meeting as just the beginning and I certainly want to personally engage on this issue both with all of you through the European Union; in looking at what further we can do together.

So let's hope that from this meeting we can explore more of the political awareness we need to have, how we can enhance our partnerships and how we, more than anything, promote sustainable solutions to enhancing water security across the world.

Thank you