

Tuesday, 30/10/2012

**Opening address by the Minister of Agriculture, Natural Resources
and Environment**

Mr. Sofoclis Aletraris

**at the 1st Pan-EU Drought Dialogue Forum at Hilton Park hotel,
in Nicosia**

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you all to this Forum, organized in the framework of the European Drought Project, and held under the auspices of the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

The convening of the Forum is considered very timely, as 2012 is a crucial year for European Union water policy. The European Commission is planning to present by mid-November, a “Blueprint to Safeguard Europe’s Water Resources”, which will be based on a wealth of information and analysis, including the Review of the Policy on Water Scarcity and Droughts. The Blueprint is aimed to be the Union’s policy response to the water management challenges that are threatening the achievement of the water policy goals across Europe. Its long-term objective is to ensure sufficient availability of good quality water for sustainable and equitable water use. It will also set the agenda for EU water policy for the years to come.

The Cyprus Presidency has fully supported the Commission's initiative to prepare and present the Blueprint, and will exert every effort to place before the December Council a proposal for relevant Council Conclusions. The Blueprint policy options were discussed during the Informal Meeting of Ministers for the Environment and Climate Change, which was held by the Cyprus Presidency in Nicosia, on the 7th and 8th of July 2012. Furthermore, following the official release of the Blueprint, the Cyprus Presidency is planning to co-organise a Conference together with the European Commission, with the aim to present the document's main outcome and recommendations. The Conference will take place in Nicosia, on the 26th and 27th of next month, and is organised back-to-back with the Informal Meeting of the European Union Water and Marine Directors, which is scheduled to take place in Limassol between the 27th and 29th of November.

The topics of the Forum are also vital for Cyprus, where water scarcity is a very serious problem. Throughout its history the island has suffered from long and often severe droughts. Furthermore, as illustrated by the recent 2008 water emergency in Cyprus, climate change and in particular water scarcity and droughts are expected to make matters worse, rendering the water availability issue even more critical.

There is, therefore, a need to intensify our efforts to prepare for and manage such water-related threats. Our primary objective is to secure enough quantities of potable water to cover at least the basic needs of the population, and to eliminate dependency on weather conditions by, inter alia, installing sea water desalination plants. Despite the construction of many surface water reservoirs since the establishment of the Republic of Cyprus, in 1960, the long and frequent periods of droughts have proved that storing rainwater into reservoirs only allows short-term planning and is not a sustainable long-term solution.

At the same time, attention is turned on other non-conventional water resources, such as recycled water. More and more quantities of tertiary treated recycled water are used for the irrigation of agricultural crops and recharge of aquifers, thus releasing an equal amount of good quality water for domestic use.

On the other hand, a fundamental condition for the exercise and application of a sustainable water policy is the management of the demand for water. In Cyprus, water demand management has always been an integral part of the water policy.

Measures such as raising awareness, metering of water consumption and water charges on a volumetric basis, programmes to reduce distribution losses, improvement on farm irrigation systems, measures to promote a water-saving culture and efficiency of water use, water rationing during periods of drought and many more, have been a tradition for the water authorities in Cyprus.

Let me conclude, by congratulating the organisers for their initiative to organize this Forum in Cyprus. I would also like to thank the guest speakers, the participants and all contributors for the hard work they have put for its preparation. We are looking forward to the conclusions and findings with great interest, particularly for the new ideas and proposals that will be presented and discussed. I am sure that the Forum will be a success and other similar ones will follow.

I wish you have a very fruitful Forum and a pleasant stay in Cyprus.