SPEECH

BY COMMISSIONER NEVEN MIMICA

at the high-level conference on
water for sustainable development

Dushanbe, 21 June 2018
Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin by thanking the Government of Tajikistan for once again hosting this conference on the potential of water to bring life, hope and development to communities across the globe. Standing at the meeting of two great rivers – Dushanbe is an ideal backdrop for our discussions.

As we all know, water is essential for all aspects of human development – economic, social and environmental. This is why it plays such an important role in the 2030 Agenda – not only with the standalone Sustainable Development Goal – but also underpinning so many of our other efforts on decent health, nutrition, economic growth, the sustainable use of resources, and even for peaceful societies.

With 40 percent of the world’s population living next to shared water sources, which do not respect national boundaries, it is only natural that we need an integrated international approach.

The global demand for energy and water could increase by up to 50 percent by 2030, and up to 60 percent for food. These increasing pressures – from rapid population growth, migration, climate change, energy demand, urbanisation and agriculture – make it even more important to find innovative and effective ways to manage this precious finite resource.
Under our European Consensus on Development, the European Union institutions and our Member States commit to supporting universal access to safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene as an essential condition for health, well-being, growth and productivity. Centred around the famous 5 Ps, the Consensus underlines the importance of water to our people, planet, peace, prosperity and partnerships.

Over the last decade, the European Union has provided more than 2.5 billion euros to improve water and sanitation in 62 countries mainly in the Africa, Caribbean, Pacific and European neighbourhood regions. Our blended finance initiatives triggered a further 4 billion euros in loans for 44 water and sanitation projects.

Here in Tajikistan, for example, we are providing 100 million euros of support for rural development - which includes improving irrigating and water basin management, in line with the Government’s ongoing reform of the water sector.

We are also preparing a new strategy for the European Union and Central Asia for 2019. From our discussions with partners on future priorities, it is clear that increasing regional cooperation in sensitive areas such as water will be key.

We are also working to improve transboundary water cooperation at both the European and global level – including through important international agreements in this area. As you know, the European Union is an ardent supporter of sustainable development, through a global rules-based system and stronger regional cooperation.
To meet the growing demand for water, energy and food we need to think and act differently. We can no longer address these challenges in silos, but need a coordinated cross-sector approach.

We need to strengthen policy-making and actions at the global level in these interconnecting areas, based on best practice and lessons learned from those regions most heavily affected.

Finally, I am personally very proud of the European Union’s efforts to promote access to water and sanitation for women and girls in particular - who are often the furthest left behind due to biological, cultural and social reasons.

We know, for example, from our successful efforts in the Arsi Negele district of Ethiopia that improving access for women and girls can reduce the burden of household chores, increase education opportunities, and generate income and innovation for the whole community.

Many centuries ago, Leonardo da Vinci described water as the driving force of all nature, the lifeblood of societies. Together, let’s make sure it truly becomes a driving force for sustainable development and our efforts to leave no-one behind.

Thank you very much.