

# **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.

(613 words)