



Resolution 1693 (2009)¹

Water: a strategic challenge for the Mediterranean Basin

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Bearing in mind that 3 billion people in the world have no access to drinking water, the Parliamentary Assembly recalls that water is the major challenge of our century.
2. The Assembly stresses that access to water must be recognised as a fundamental human right because it is essential to life on earth and is a resource that must be shared by humankind.
3. It recalls, however, that water is also a source of “renewable” energy and of thermal energy, thanks to the permanent heat of the earth’s crust.
4. The Assembly observes that it is primarily drinking water resources that will become increasingly rare, at a time when needs are increasing, even though three quarters of the planet is under water.
5. The Assembly also stresses that climate change is likely to exacerbate desertification thus forcing people to move to areas where water is accessible.
6. The same is true of the over-exploitation of water resources, deforestation, intensive farming and extremely rapid urbanisation, which not only lead to water shortages but also seriously pollute rivers and groundwater.
7. According to a general perception, the growing water shortage, competitive demands on water sources and pollution are liable to aggravate the potential for conflict among the riparian countries, while cross-border water resources should actually provide a genuine opportunity for co-operation rather than be a source of conflict and an obstacle to development.
8. In the circumstances, the Assembly is convinced that the water shortage will create tensions – according to some experts, the wars of the future will be sparked off by the search for access not to oil but to water – and that measures should be taken to compel states to manage cross-border rivers and aquifers jointly. Lasting solutions should be obtained through confidence-building measures and genuine co-operation among the riparian countries. The Union for the Mediterranean offers a new opportunity to establish such co-operation through the development of specific projects.
9. The Assembly notes that water stress has become a reality in both northern and southern Europe and emphasises that the problem will become increasingly crucial in the regions of the Mediterranean Basin because the population is concentrated in coastal towns and water resources are being over-exploited as a result of the expansion of sectors such as agriculture, tourism and industry and rising household consumption.
10. The Assembly points out that the uncontrolled discharge of municipal and industrial waste water and polluted rainwater is affecting many people’s health and causing heavy economic losses, whether through loss of income or the costs to health.

1. *Assembly debate* on 2 October 2009 (35th Sitting) (see [Doc. 12004](#), report of the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs, rapporteur: Mr Marquet). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 2 October 2009 (35th Sitting).



11. The Assembly refers, in this connection, to the commitments entered into by the heads of state and government of the Council of Europe member states at the 3rd Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe in Warsaw on 17 May 2005 to fulfil “everyone’s entitlement to live in a balanced, healthy environment” and to improve “the quality of life for citizens” by developing integrated policies in the environment field “in a sustainable development perspective”.

12. The Assembly also refers to the proposals put forward by parliaments at the 5th World Water Forum in Istanbul on 19 March 2009, during which the participants highlighted the importance of the role of parliamentarians in drawing up rules concerning water management, water supply, generalisation of the principle of the right to water and the implementation of water policies with due regard for climate change.

13. However, the Assembly regrets that the Istanbul Ministerial Statement of 22 March 2009 does not recognise the right to water and sanitation as a human right.

14. In this connection, the Assembly welcomes the decision taken in Istanbul to hold a conference, under the auspices of the Parliamentary Assembly, on the follow-up to the 5th World Water Forum and the proposals made for themes for the next forum.

15. The Assembly welcomes the fact that world leaders and heads of developing countries agreed on the need to recognise as a human right the access by all the world’s populations to sources of water at the G8 meeting in L’Aquila (8-10 July 2009).

16. The Assembly therefore recommends that member and non-member states and, in particular, the countries of the Mediterranean Basin:

- 16.1. take the measures needed to ensure that everyone has access to water and sanitation;
- 16.2. urgently promote transregional and transboundary co-operation on water;
- 16.3. introduce a culture of water awareness and water education;
- 16.4. devise co-operation policies encouraging the transfer of technology to those countries which need it most, particularly in the area of seawater desalination and the recycling of waste water;
- 16.5. develop research programmes leading to the establishment of a European water resources database on the state of water resources;
- 16.6. develop the opportunities provided by water as a source of thermal and renewable energy;
- 16.7. draw up environmentally-friendly water resource management programmes;
- 16.8. decentralise water management systems to make them the responsibility of local and regional authorities, and give the latter the necessary legal powers and financial resources;
- 16.9. set up centres providing training in water trades and water technology;
- 16.10. inform and involve the public, in particular the young generations, by instilling in them a sense of responsibility for water resources;
- 16.11. take steps to make water sanitation techniques more generally available.

17. The Assembly also recommends that the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe:

- 17.1. ask local and regional authorities to carry out an accurate assessment of water needs in municipalities and regions and make arrangements to draw up a guide to good practice in this field;
- 17.2. encourage twinning or co-operation agreements between local authorities as a means of stepping up the exchange and sharing of knowledge concerning water.

18. The Assembly will continue to address this issue, and will pursue its reflexion on the possibility of drafting legislation on the right to water and sanitation as a human right, the role played by water in conflicts, the opportunities offered by water as a source of energy, new agricultural irrigation technologies and the consequences of climate change on water.