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NOTE

from: General Secretariat
to: Delegations

Subject: Preparation for the World Water Forum (Marseilles, 12 to 17 March 2012)
- Information from the French delegation

Delegations will find attached a note from the French delegation on the above issue, which will be discussed under "Other business" at the Council meeting (Environment) on 10 October 2011.

Preparation for the World Water Forum (Marseilles, 12 to 17 March 2012)

- Information from the French delegation -

In 2012, European Year of Water, France will be hosting the 6th World Water Forum in Marseilles (from 12 to 17 March 2012). The Forum is the most important international event devoted to water and sanitation. It is held jointly by a host country and host city and by the World Water Council. The last one, in Istanbul in March 2009, was attended by 30 000 people representing governments, parliaments, international organisations, public bodies responsible for water management, companies, regional or local authorities, non-governmental organisations and scientists from around the world.

The Forum will mark a turning point, given the scale and gravity of the issues at stake – nearly two billion people live without access to safe water and decent sanitation facilities – and the recognition by the United Nations of the right to safe water and sanitation as a human right, also taking into account population and urban growth and the impact of climate change, which affect water resources.

France hopes that the Marseilles Forum will be the "Forum for solutions" and lead to practical recommendations and commitments on the part of all stakeholders that can secure progress on a number of major issues.

It is a matter of urgency to speed up the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and access to safe water and sanitation for all, in accordance with the right to safe water and sanitation, and to reduce health risks through a more integrated management of water, sanitation and public-health policies. There is a need to improve water governance at the various levels, with particular emphasis on the role of local and regional authorities and basin organisations, and to develop appropriate "innovative" and decentralised public or private financing mechanisms.

If access to essential services is to be improved and sustained, it will also be necessary to address the protection and sharing of water resources, the fight against water pollution, and the balance between types of use, since food security and energy security will not be possible without an integrated and unified management of water resources. This is a real challenge for the development of a green economy and green growth. As water resources often extend beyond the borders of any one State, the strengthening of cross-border cooperation is vital to ensure responsible and sustainable water management.

The 6th World Water Forum will be a unique opportunity to open the way for new partnerships and new forms of cooperation, increase the awareness of decision-makers and the broader public, put forward innovatory initiatives for the 21st century, and promote widespread political and civic commitment. We hope the results of the Forum will be well-publicised and that they can be presented to the relevant UN bodies and have an influence on decision-making procedures, especially with a view to the Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development in June 2012.

Holding the Forum in Marseilles will provide an exceptional opportunity for the countries and organisations directly or indirectly involved in water issues in Europe to present their policies, experiences, successes and problems and to discuss them with the rest of the world. The purpose of the Forum is to share ideas, experiences and practical solutions and to advance the consensus on water management; to secure commitments from all the players involved to put these solutions into effect; and, lastly, to follow up those commitments.

Maximum use should be made of European know-how in the preparatory process for the Forum, especially as it relates to the Europe region, and as regards Europe's priority topics, namely the implementation of the Framework Directive and the Flood Directive, adaptation to climate change, the preservation of aquatic eco-systems and bio-diversity, and the management of cross-border basins. On this last point, the experience of the international river commissions should be given due recognition, as it is of great interest for many countries in the world and an encouragement to cross-border cooperation. Other aims pursued elsewhere are also essential at European level, such as the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and the implementation of the right to water and sanitation (including fair access to water and sanitation for vulnerable or socially excluded people), which has made considerable progress at the international level.

As host to the event, France calls on its European partners to play an active part in the various processes of the 6th Forum, which will also be an important political occasion. The ministerial conference will take place on 13 March 2012: invitations to the Member States' governments will be sent out shortly. The ministerial declaration will be drawn up at two preparatory meetings (prepcoms) at UNESCO headquarters in Paris on 5 and 6 December 2011 and 2 and 3 February 2012. A number of other political events are planned during the week of the Forum. High-level round tables will be conducted by one or more volunteer governments to facilitate dialogue on a specific topic between policymakers and representatives of civil society. Regional dialogues will bring together ministers, local politicians and parliamentarians from the same region to discuss how best to implement the solutions that are identified.

Forum website: <http://www.worldwaterforum6.org/>

Website for the European Process: <http://www.world-water-forum-2012-europa.eu/>

