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Gorbachev launches 'Peace with Water' initiative

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The former Soviet leader launched a high-profile water initiative in the European Parliament yesterday (12 February), calling for water issues to be included in UN negotiations over a successor to the Kyoto Protocol on climate change, due to be agreed in Copenhagen in December.

Background:

With water supplies under growing strain due to intensive use and climate change, the EU has introduced pricing policies to persuade users – farmers, industries and households – to save the precious resource. Meanwhile, pressure is growing to recognise access to safe drinking water and sanitation as a basic human right.

A [Peace with Water](#) international conference organised by the World Political Forum (WPF) took place in the European Parliament on 12-13 February. It aimed to contribute to ongoing international negotiations on a post-Kyoto agreement on climate change for 2013 by proposing a Memorandum for a World Water Protocol.

Launching a **Memorandum for a World Water Protocol** in the European Parliament in Brussels, Mikhail Gorbachev said the inclusion of water in global climate talks should be a high priority.

"Water is without no doubt a political problem, and a crisis of development that is unsustainable. It is part of a global political crisis," Gorbachev said. Meanwhile, the current global economic crisis may even act as a catalyst for a new order to help overcome "our old unsustainable model of development," he said.

Gorbachev called for clear political leadership on water, demanding that all nations help the United Nations to "enshrine the right to water as the most important human right".

As international organisations are "not really dealing with global governance," the issue should be addressed by the upcoming G20 meeting in April, he argued. "The world needs a new model of development and a new political structure," he concluded.

The memorandum, published yesterday, argues that the global water crisis is such that profound structural changes to the economic system and lifestyles are needed.

It calls for a global political paradigm shift regarding water, and the establishment of a **world water plan** featuring:

- The universal right to water and sanitation, and;
- acknowledging the universal individual and collective responsibility regarding safeguarding water for future generations.

"We cannot save the water without political institutional engineering and promoting the global shared responsibility towards our common source of life," reads the memorandum, pledging for the water protocol to be integrated into the UN's post-Kyoto agenda and future agreement.

The final aim of the protocol is to pave the way towards a **new world political architecture** capable of responding to

the global challenges of the 21st century.

Positions:

Alexander Likhotal, CEO of **Green Cross International**, an organisation working on the prevention and resolution of water conflicts, was sceptical about the chances of the Copenhagen negotiations being able to take the issue on board, given that the agenda is already so tight that addressing another issue might "sink the whole boat". For concrete progress to be made quickly, water issues should be dealt with in forums like the upcoming G20 meeting in April, Likhotal added.

Maude Barlow, special advisor on water issues to the president of the **UN general assembly**, said that while water is "half of the climate change equation," the chances of getting water added to the Copenhagen agenda are "slim". "Copenhagen is already so contentious. There are so many issues, and we are late in trying to get it in there. However, I think we should try. And even if we don't succeed in getting it officially recognised in Copenhagen, it can be there as part of the round of post-Copenhagen talks".

Karl Falkenberg, director general of the **European Commission's** environment directorate, noted that water is a "key issue" in the Commission's green paper on adaptation to climate change.

The EU executive is currently preparing a White Paper for publication next month to "boost the EU's internal debate and propose concrete actions to deliver water security". "Water management will be a key issue" in the paper, which is about adapting to climate change, he said.

Citing UN secretary General Ban Ki-moon, Falkenberg said "there is still enough water for all, but we need to keep it clean, use it wisely and share it widely". He added that while €1bn of EU money goes to water assistance in developing countries each year, the true needs of these countries amount to something like €200 billion. "While governments have the responsibility to guarantee access to water to all, private funds need to be mobilised to this effect as well," he added.

Guido Sacconi, a former president of the **European Parliament's** temporary committee on climate change, acknowledged that the Copenhagen discussions would only include energy and forests, while water had so far been treated as an environmental problem and issue for the EU to address instead. In fact, it is a "cross-cutting" matter, he said. He also argued that "developing and developed countries need to give poor countries the minimum financial and technological means to start clean development".

Tony Allan, a professor at **King's College London**, argued that there is enough water for everybody, but that "poverty is the reason why people lack water, and addressing poverty is about addressing access to water".

Sekou Diarra, president of the **Malian Coalition for the Defence of Water**, representing the **African Water Network**, said "there is lots of water in sub-Saharan Africa, but no access to it for political reasons," deploring the "enforced impoverishment of Africa, despite all the resources the continent has".

Next steps:

- **16-22 March 2009:** [5th World Water Forum](#) in Istanbul.
- **By end of March 2009:** Commission to publish a White Paper on adaptation to climate change.
- **2-3 April 2009:** [2nd European Water Conference](#) focusing on river basin management planning.
- **Jan. 2010:** EU member states to introduce water pricing policies.

Links

European Union

- Commission: [Water](#)

International Organisations

- UNESCO: [Water \[FR\]](#)

Think-Tanks

- European Institute of Research on Water Policy (IERPE): [Peace with water](#) (12-13 February 2009)
- European Water news: ["Peace with Water" to Establish a World Water Protocol](#) (15 January 2009)

NGOs

- Green Cross International: [Water for Peace](#)