

## Declaration of the XVI Alpine Conference on integrated and sustainable water management in the Alps

- (1) Considering the Alpine Convention, whose article 2(2)(e) has set the objective “to preserve or re-establish healthy water systems, in particular by keeping lakes and rivers free of pollution, by applying natural hydraulic engineering techniques and by using water power which serves the interests of both the indigenous population and the environment alike”;
- (2) Referring to the results achieved by the Platform Water Management in the Alps from 2009 to 2019, as well as on the outcomes of the conference “Water resources and alpine rivers: adaptation to the challenges of climate change” held in Annecy on 18-19 February 2020 and the seven editions of the Alpine Water Conference<sup>1</sup>;
- (3) Building on the second Report on the State of the Alps (RSA 2) dedicated to water and water management issues as well as the 7<sup>th</sup> Report on the State of the Alps (RSA 7) on Natural Hazards Risk Governance;
- (4) Recalling the Alpine Climate Targets to 2050 of the Alpine Convention on water, especially the implementation pathways on water, natural hazards as well as ecosystems and biodiversity;
- (5) Considering the potential of hydroelectricity as a renewable energy resource as well as the provisions of article 7 of the Energy Protocol of the Alpine Convention regulating its sustainable use, and at the same time the importance of ecosystems and landscapes in the Alpine region, calling for a precautionary approach when considering new hydropower projects, aiming at the prevention of hydropeaking and thermopeaking phenomena and at the preservation of river continuity, hydromorphology and healthy ecosystems;
- (6) Recalling the outcomes of the activities of the Action Group 6 of EUSALP – sub-group “Integrated and sustainable water management”, in particular about drought management as well as green and blue infrastructures in the riverine environments;

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<sup>1</sup> Referring -mainly- to: the report “Facing droughts in the Alpine region (2019) and the outcomes of the VII Water Conference (Breitenwang, 2018) as for drought management; the Second Report on the State of the Alps (RSA 2, 2009), the Seventh Report on the State of the Alps (2019) as well as the report Floods Directive and Water Framework Directive in the Alpine context (2014) for flood management; hydropower is specifically addressed by the RSA 2, the Situation Report on Small Hydropower in the Alps (2011), the Common Guidelines for the use of Small Hydropower (2011), the report Application of the Common Guidelines for the use of Small Hydropower (2019) as well as the outcomes of the III (Venice, 2010), IV (Munich, 2012) and VII (Breitenwang, 2018) Water Conference; a common alpine understanding of hydro-morphological processes is also built on the outcomes of the reports “Links between the Water Framework Directive and - the Flood Directive” (2014), “Fluvial Geomorphology and the Interactions with Sediment Transport” (2016) and “Management of hydro-morphological processes and good practice in the field in the Alpine context” (2017); the “Guidelines for Climate Change Adaptation at the local level in the Alps” (2013) and the V Water Conference (Trento, 2014) have also drawn the way for the Alpine Climate Targets to 2050 of the Alpine Convention on water.

- (7) Recalling the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and in particular the SDG6 “Clean water and sanitation”; the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention), considering the relevant transboundary basins crossing the Alps; the relevant legislation in force on the management of surface and groundwater resources, drinking water and flood risk management, as well as on connected sectors, such as in particular energy, biodiversity and agriculture in the Parties to the Alpine Convention ; the European Green Deal and the new EU Biodiversity Strategy, which underline the key role healthy aquatic ecosystems play in improving the biodiversity of the region;

**The Contracting Parties to the Alpine Convention commit themselves to:**

1. Protect the remaining naturally preserved river courses of the Alps, in due consideration of the part they play in the necessary conservation of a favourable quality and quantity of water in these sensitive mountain areas;
2. Foster improvement (“requalification”) and restoration of the natural water courses conditions based on the appropriate approaches available (including hydromorphology, hydrobiology, sediment transport, as well as hydraulic features of the river bodies), with the objective of securing closest to natural functioning, favourable to the preservation of water resources, biodiversity and associated ecosystem services, including at transboundary level;
3. Foster adaptation to climate change in the Alpine watersheds for water-related natural hazards, especially floods, and increase the resilience of alpine valleys to extreme weather phenomena, through:
  - Reducing – or at least avoiding any increase in – human lives and goods exposure to natural hazards, e.g. flood hazard;
  - Giving where possible priority to the deployment of green and blue infrastructures e.g. for flood risk management (natural water retention measures), including at transboundary level;
  - Taking appropriate consideration of the importance of the high vulnerability of the Alps to the impacts of climate change, such as higher temperature increases and more frequent weather events;
  - Raising awareness among decision makers and local communities for the active and conscious maintenance of territory, slopes and torrents;
4. Consider the Alpine region as increasingly becoming a drought-prone area and needing management of water scarcity as an adaptation measure to climate change and an issue ideally to be tackled at each of the river basins designed to ensure the continuity of the environmental services produced by the water courses concerned, also by enhancing preparedness through:
  - enhanced upstream-downstream coordination, ideally at basin level – including at a transboundary level;
  - fair and economical use of water resources (connecting different networks, finding alternative sources, using water-efficient and water-saving techniques) -

including a sustainable use of water for artificial snowmaking in ski resorts - , the implementation of appropriate strategies and plans to address conflicts regarding water uses, and the inclusion of this theme in the working plan of the next biennium;

- promoting water savings, water reuse and striving for a more sustainable economic development, including by avoiding as much as possible water-consuming infrastructures;
  - the improvement of natural water filtration and groundwater recharge thanks to river restoration and measures of green and blue infrastructure;
5. Implement in a coordinated and synergetic way the legislation related to water and floods, aiming at avoiding further deterioration of water resources and riverine environments, and at mitigating the flood risk, especially giving priority to the use of green and blue infrastructure;
  6. Take into consideration the protection of the landscape and the ecosystems, and the relevant interests of local communities and communities downstream, as well as the necessity to protect remaining naturally preserved river courses and river stretches of the Alps in case of a further development of hydropower plants, which shall not entail any deterioration in water quality, water quantity, hydromorphology and ecosystem, nor compromise the achievement of good status of the water bodies they relate to;
  7. Promote the common guidelines for the use of small hydropower in the Alpine Region:
    - considering the refurbishment of old facilities before building new ones and removing unused small hydropower stations;
    - considering small hydropower plants mainly as a localized solution to tackle local and specific energy needs rather than a means to achieve broader renewable energy targets;
    - identifying already from the planning phase the sites to be considered as potentially most favourable at an environmental and technical level, in order to avoid an unplanned proliferation of new plants;
  8. Foster the further development of monitoring networks at the higher altitudes (water quality, water quantity, flow of water courses, sediment transport, ice and permafrost, nivo-meteo monitoring) and complement them with remote sensing where applicable;
  9. Enhance bottom up governance tools aimed at improving voluntary cooperation, public participation and acceptance of measures, such as river contracts, river dialogues, river fora, including at a transboundary level;
  10. Continue the dialogue and the transnational cooperation on water management issues, particularly when it comes to transboundary waters and pursuant to the Water Convention, as well as to the relevant legislation in force in the Parties to the Alpine Convention;
  11. Acknowledge that local and transnational cooperation helps to increase territorial cohesion, building trust across borders and institutions, sharing experiences and knowledge, tackling common challenges, and that the Alpine Convention is a relevant instrument to facilitate dialogue and cooperation in the water sector.

