

Interview: The water sector's view on the EU resilience plans

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The European Water Association's secretary general Arthur Guischet speaks to ENDS Europe about the promising aspects of the European Commission's recent communication on water resilience – as well as areas where uncertainties remain.



Arthur Guischet: "We are pleased to see our other long standing priorities reflected in the strategy." Photo: EWA



The Water Resilience Strategy, formally presented by executive vice-president Teresa Ribera and environment commissioner Jessika Roswall last month, set out three goals – to restore and protect the water cycle, build a water-smart economy, and secure clean and affordable water sanitation for all – as well as a raft of non-legislative measures, such as support and financing, to help achieve them.

So what does the water sector make of the plans?

For Arthur Guischet, general secretary of the European Water Association (EWA), which brings together a number of national drinking water and wastewater operators, several elements of the communication are promising.

“For the EWA, we are promoting a holistic approach for water policy, better consideration for water policies among other EU policies, and better visibility for water,” he tells ENDS Europe. “So we are pleased, of course, to see this and our other long standing priorities reflected in the strategy.”

One element that Guischet particularly welcomes is the further development of the [Water Reuse Regulation](#), which entered into force in June 2023 and covers the reuse of treated urban wastewater in agricultural irrigation.

In the communication, the European Commission pledged to evaluate the regulation by June 2028, and “subsequently consider extending its scope pending evaluation results”, potentially for energy production and industrial processes.

“We have always been pushing for that regulation and water reuse to be picked up as an option by the member states,” Guischet says. “And we will welcome, of course, a potential scope extension of the current regulation.”

Guischet is also “really pleased” to see plans to set up a European ‘water academy’ mentioned in the strategy – adding that issues around skills and the sector’s aging workforce “potentially... have been underestimated”.

Non-legislative plans

The lack of concrete legislative plans in the communication was not a surprise for Guischet “It’s a strategy, so we knew from the beginning that it would not be a regulation or directive,” he says. “We need to see what will be picked up by the member states, but we believe that overall, there are enough things that are interesting from the member states to pick up and to really support the water resilience strategy.”

He adds that, since the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive was so recently amended, “do we want to redo something else on top of it? I’m not sure”.

In addition, the strategy stresses the need to implement the current rules. “We have a good framework, but the implementation could be different within member states, so we believe this will also push and engage the member state to tackle those issues without making extra obligations.”

Open questions

According to Guischet, some uncertainties remain, such as around pollutants, as negotiations continue on the water pollutants lists – with a final trilogue pushed back to September – and as the European Chemicals Agency draws up its expert opinions on the PFAS restriction proposal.

“We’ll need to see what will come out of [the discussion],” he says, but added that the focus should not just be on the cleaning aspect, but on potentially reducing the emission of PFAS pollutants at source, by researching alternatives, among other things.

It also remains unclear how effective the strategy’s plan will be to channel funding through the European Investment Bank, says Guischet, since it is up to member states to proactively access it. “It’s fully outside the Commission,” he says. “Speaking plainly, they can just say the money is on a table, and then it’s up to the member state to pick it up or not.”

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