

Council of Europe

EUROPEAN WATER CHARTER



PREFACE

by

His Royal Highness Prince Albert of Belgium
President of the Board of Patrons of the
European Water Conservation Campaign

Our Society of the 20th century is progressing very rapidly. In all fields. In the year 2000, the population of the globe will have doubled. Towns will have become like huge ant-hills. Industries will attain gigantic dimensions. Consumption of raw materials will increase faster and faster, eating up mountains of limestone, iron and coal mines, oil-fields...

With booming industries — often developing in a disorderly way — which are the mark of our times, Nature's water resources are also being drawn on more and more.

At the same time, alas, polluted waters are being poured into our rivers and streams, fouling the countryside and destroying life.

It is high time we became aware of the danger and wrote into our laws the respect for all aquatic and plant life which is essential to our own existence.

The solution is a matter of discipline, of organization, of warranted financial efforts.

The Charter is perhaps a call to order but it is above all a doctrine which henceforth must inspire our attitude towards the incomparable element of life and civilization that is water.

Our hope is that all should be inspired by it.

Albert of Belgium

The European Water Charter and the European Water Conservation Campaign, which it introduces, constitute an achievement of which the Council of Europe may rightly be proud.

By a co-operative effort of the Committee of Ministers — the executive body of the Council of Europe, of the Consultative Assembly — its parliamentary body, of its international civil service, the Secretariat General, and of its eighteen member Governments, a problem vital to the future well-being of all our countries is brought to the attention of millions of Europeans, and prepared for effective international action.

But the real significance of this event is even greater than the importance of the subject. It is that the grave technical problems which we face today in European society are not national but international and require an international effort for their solution.

Peter Smithers
Secretary General of the
Council of Europe

The pledge has been taken by the whole of Europe.

To safeguard the very possibility of maintaining human life on this vast promontory stretching out of Asia and which is her homeland, Europe is uniting to protect her fresh waters.

The principles contained in the Charter have already been embodied in several national laws.

They will be enshrined tomorrow in a convention mustering all our nations.

May this text, which will be posted up across Europe, from the schools in Iceland to the walls of those cities which recognize in Ankara their capital and in Byzantium their great ancestor, become law common to all our peoples.

Georges Housiaux
Belgian Senator
Chairman of the Organizing
Committee for the launching ceremony
of the Water Charter and for the
Water Conservation Campaign

EUROPEAN WATER CHARTER

of the Council of Europe

Proclaimed in Strasbourg, 6 May 1968

PREAMBLE

The Committee of Ministers,

Having regard to Recommendation 436 (1965) of the Consultative Assembly on fresh water pollution control in Europe ;

Taking into account Resolution N° 10 (XXI) (1965) of the Economic Commission for Europe of the United Nations containing the ECE Declaration of Policy on Water Pollution Control in Europe, and the International Standards for Drinking Water of the World Health Organisation, and in particular the European Standards ;

Persuaded that the advance of modern civilisation leads in certain cases to an increasing deterioration in our natural heritage ;

Conscious that water holds a place of prime importance in that natural heritage ;

Considering that the demand for water is increasing, largely because of the rapid development of industrialisation in the main urban centres of Europe, and that steps must be taken for the qualitative and quantitative conservation of water resources ;

Considering, furthermore, that collective action on a European scale on water problems is necessary and that a Water Charter constitutes an effective instrument to create a better understanding of these problems ;

Adopts and proclaims the principles of the present European Water Charter, prepared by the European Committee for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources of the Council of Europe, as set forth hereunder :

I. There is no life without water. It is a treasure indispensable to all human activity

Water falls from the atmosphere to the earth mainly in the form of rain and snow. Streams, rivers, glaciers and lakes are the principal

channels of drainage towards the oceans. During its cycle, water is retained by the soil, vegetation and animals. It returns to the atmosphere principally by means of evaporation and plant transpiration. Water is the first need of man, animal and plants.

Water constitutes nearly two-thirds of man's weight and about nine-tenths of that of plants.

Man depends on it for drinking, food supplies and washing, as a source of energy, as an essential material for production, as a medium for transport, and as an outlet for recreation which modern life increasingly demands.

II. Fresh water resources are not inexhaustible. It is essential to conserve, control, and wherever possible, to increase them

The population explosion and the rapidly expanding needs of modern industry and agriculture are making increasing demands on water resources. It will be impossible to meet these demands and to achieve rising standards of living, unless each one of us regards water as a precious commodity to be preserved and used wisely.

III. To pollute water is to harm man and other living creatures which are dependent on water

Water in nature is a medium containing beneficial organisms which help to keep it clean. If we pollute the water, we risk destroying those organisms, disrupting this self-purification process, and perhaps modifying the living medium unfavourably and irrevocably.

Surface and underground waters should be preserved from pollution.

Any important reduction of quantity and deterioration of quality of water, whether running or still, may do harm to man and other living creatures.

IV. The quality of water must be maintained at levels suitable for the use to be made of it and, in particular, must meet appropriate public health standards

These quality levels may vary according to the different uses of water, namely food supplies, domestic, agricultural and industrial needs, fisheries and recreation. Nevertheless, since all life on earth in its infinite variety depends upon the manifold qualities of water, arrangements should be made to ensure as far as possible that water retains its natural properties.

- V. **When used water is returned to a common source it must not impair the further uses, both public and private, to which the common source will be put**

Pollution is a change, generally man-made, in the quality of water which makes it unusable or dangerous for human consumption, industry, agriculture, fishing, recreation, domestic animals and wildlife.

The discharge of residue (wastage) or of used water which causes physical, chemical, organic, thermal or radioactive pollution, must not endanger public health and must take into account the capacity of the receiving waters to assimilate (by dilution or self-purification) any waste matter discharged. The social and economic aspects of water-treatment methods are of great importance in this connection.

- VI. **The maintenance of an adequate vegetation cover, preferably forest land, is imperative for the conservation of water resources**

It is necessary to conserve vegetation cover, preferably forests, and wherever it has disappeared to reconstitute it as quickly as possible.

The conservation of forests is a factor of major importance for the stabilisation of drainage basins and their water regime. As well as their economic value, forests provide opportunities for recreation.

- VII. **Water resources must be assessed**

Fresh water that can be put to good use represents less than one per cent of the water on our planet and it is distributed in very unequal fashion.

It is essential to know surface and underground water resources, bearing in mind the water cycle, the quality of water and its utilisation.

Assessment, in this context, involves the survey, recording and appraisal of water resources.

- VIII. **The wise husbandry of water resources must be planned by the appropriate authorities**

Water is a precious resource requiring planning which combines short- and long-term needs.

A viable water policy is needed, which should include various measures for the conservation, flow-control and distribution of water resources. Furthermore, maintenance of quality and quantity calls for development and improvement of utilisation, recycling and purification techniques.

- IX. **Conservation of water calls for intensified scientific research, training of specialists and public information services**

Research with regard to water in general and waste water in particular should be encouraged in every way possible. Means of providing information should be increased and international exchanges facilitated; at the same time, the technical and biological training of qualified personnel is necessary in the various fields of activity involved.

- X. **Water is a common heritage, the value of which must be recognised by all. Everyone has the duty to use water carefully and economically**

Each human being is a consumer and user of water and is therefore responsible to other users. To use water thoughtlessly is to misuse our natural heritage.

- XI. **The management of water resources should be based on their natural basins rather than on political and administrative boundaries**

Surface waters flow away down the steepest slopes, converging to form watercourses. A river and its tributaries are like a many-branched tree, and they serve an area known as a watershed or drainage basin.

Within a drainage basin, all uses of surface and underground waters are interdependent and should be managed bearing in mind their interrelationship.

- XII. **Water knows no frontiers; as a common resource it demands international co-operation**

International problems arising from the use of water should be settled by mutual agreement between the States concerned, to conserve the quality and quantity of water.

Overleaf, the tree, symbolising nature, surrounded by the circle of twelve stars of the European Flag, is the emblem adopted for the Council of Europe's Nature Conservation activities.

