

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Lithuania fully aligns with the statement of the European Union delivered yesterday and would like to highlight a few aspects in its national capacity.

I would like to thank the UN community, and in particular, the Governments of Tajikistan and the Netherlands for co-hosting this important Conference.

The fact is that social, economic and environmental aspects of sustainable development are linked to water. Thus, water related issues must be addressed in all countries, at all levels and provide incentives and opportunities for improvement of water quality and its sustainable use.

Access to safe drinking water is a human right and we have to increase our efforts in realization of this right.

Resilience of societies to climatic events, such as rising sea levels, floods and droughts should also be increased. The initiative of the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres to provide Early Warning System for everyone is very timely in this regard.

I would like to highlight several measures that Lithuania is taking in order to have a more integrated approach of water management. The reform of the water sector management was started in 2022 and there are several aims of the new model.

Firstly, to restructure the national drinking water supply and wastewater treatment sector. Increase of operational efficiency allows to reduce operating costs, change the cost structure and implement the principle of cost recovery.

Secondly, we will implement national objectives by reducing price imbalances in centralized supply of drinking water, wastewater treatment services in municipalities and improving the quality and accessibility of services.

This transformation will foster restructuration of the sector from heavily subsidized to one that is self-sustaining from operating income.

Water is our most precious and vital natural resource. In Lithuania, we have an abundance of water and high-quality drinking water is supplied only from underground sources. Well-developed drinking water supply and wastewater treatment infrastructure and services make a significant contribution to the quality of life and the protection of the environment.

However, due to the expansion of urbanized areas we need additional measures to prevent of groundwater pollution and reduce illegal water use. That is why Lithuania has adopted the Law on the Legalisation of Wells for the Extraction of groundwater which encourages water users to enrol existing unregistered groundwater extraction wells within three years.

Lithuania believes that better water pollution prevention and management is a precondition for better future. Greater transparency and accountability between government institutions, private sector and civil society at all levels and in all policy sectors are needed to ensure adequate management and mitigation of water pollution and climate-related risks. Effective coordination mechanisms and partnerships between authorities and relevant stakeholders must be strengthened.

Policy commitments, which almost always have co-benefits with other development goals, need to attract appropriate public and private financial commitments. I would like to remind everyone that although we still have differences on some issues, we already have a fundamental consensus that clean water is the main source of life and must be accessible to all the world's population.

Illegal Russian war against Ukraine, however, significantly derails our progress in that regard, as over 18 million people need water, sanitation and hygiene assistance. Russian attacks on Ukrainian water infrastructure are deliberate attempts to cut Ukraine from water supplies and weaponize the water. The situation has been exacerbated by the fact that the conflict has made it difficult to repair and maintain water infrastructure. Moreover, the war has also a negative impact on the quality of water in the broader region. It has led to an increased pollution of water sources due to damage to industrial facilities and the release of hazardous chemicals into the environment.

It will definitely have a long-term consequences not only for local populations and ecosystems but also for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and water action. Russia must end the war in Ukraine by withdrawing all its forces as it is the most effective way to address the humanitarian crisis and additionally created water challenges.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I believe that the outcome of this Conference shall provide a useful impetus to other UN processes such as the 2023 SDG Summit, 2024 Summit of the Future and COP 28. Lithuania is ready to engage into constructive work and efforts in order to *achieve the main objective of WATER FOR ALL and SDG 6.*