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Water as a central pillar of services of general interest

The planned EU water resilience strategy, which the EU Commission will present in the second quarter of 2025, represents a decisive political course for the coming years in order to make European water resources resilient and crisis-proof in the face of climate change, environmental pollution and rising demand. From a municipal perspective, it is crucial to take into account and maintain the already very efficient, functioning, local and public structures. The principle of subsidiarity must be respected.

The Bavarian and Baden-Württemberg associations of Local Authorities raise their voices for a total of around 3,000 towns and municipalities, 106 districts and 7 boroughs.

Access to water as the basis of life for people, the environment and the economy is an indispensable good and water supply is a central pillar of public services of general interest. In Germany, the local level is at the centre of water supply and management, as municipalities and cities are largely responsible for the provision of drinking water and wastewater disposal. Flood protection is a shared task between the state and local levels. The EU Commission's planned water resilience strategy must therefore take the municipal dimension into account, actively incorporate it and further strengthen it. We therefore call for this as a matter of principle:

1. Common good before profit:

Water must remain a public good: In order to guarantee access to clean drinking water and a functioning wastewater disposal system as part of local services of general interest and affordability for all, a clear commitment to and strengthening of the municipal role is necessary. Only the public sector, which is always orientated towards the common good, can that water management remains safe, accessible and sustainable for future generations. In order to ensure that the common good continues to take precedence over profit-making in the future, opening up the water sector to privatisation must therefore continue to be an option under no circumstances, even in the course of a possible reform of EU public procurement law (in particular the Concessions Directive 2014/23/EU). The European Citizens' Initiative Right2Water clearly shows that EU citizens are also demanding that water remains a public good and in public hands.

2. Guarantee of water resilience through localised structures:

Local and decentralised structures in the area of water management are useful for ensuring water resilience and security of supply due to the water resources, which in many places are fed by over 90 percent groundwater and spring water, and should therefore be preserved. Local Authorities play a central role here as organisers and coordinator on site municipal boundaries. In addition to the necessary replacement and emergency water supply, adapting

the infrastructure to climate change is one of the challenges of the future drinking water supply. A modern, state-of-the-art infrastructure with interconnected pipelines already serves to ensure the reliable distribution of available water resources between water-poor and water-rich areas at all times. It is important to plan ahead for the expansion of long-distance water and interconnected pipelines, as these also offer the possibility of ensuring a continued nationwide drinking water supply in the event of disruptions to the water supply due to drought, utilisation of treatment capacities or technical faults, attacks or disasters.

3. Consideration of region-specific characteristics:

Depending on the geographical location, the local conditions with regard to water vary due to challenges such as flooding or water scarcity. A one-size-fits-all solution therefore cannot work. The local level knows best what the local needs are for climate-friendly adaptation measures, especially through its role in coordinating measures. In particular, there is a need to be able to differentiate between the needs and options for action in urban and rural areas. In order to meet the challenges posed by climate change, measures relating to the water balance, measures to deal with extreme events such as heavy rainfall or drought and localised water resource management are all necessary. The inclusion of local expertise in EU water policy and the promotion of local and flexible framework conditions are essential for this.

4. Implement the polluter pays principle consistently:

Local authorities have always had the expertise to plan, coordinate and implement water related infrastructure projects and climate adaptation measures themselves at the highest level of quality within the framework of local self-government. In addition to the financial dimension, it will be necessary in future for the polluter-pays principle to be consistently integrated and implemented in European legislation, particularly in the form of extended producer responsibility.