Water Europe
Technology & Innovation

Why invest in water: €300 Billion That Builds More Than Water Pipes

Bulgarian Water Association Annual Conference 2025

Who are we?

Recognized voice and promoter of water-related innovation, research, and technology development in Europe

Established by the European Commission as the European Technology Platform (ETP) for water

Mission:

- Improve **coordination and collaboration** in the water ecosystem in the EU and beyond;
- Enhance **performance and competitiveness** of the water ecosystem;
- Contribute to solving **global water challenges** through RTD&I.

Water Europe Strategy

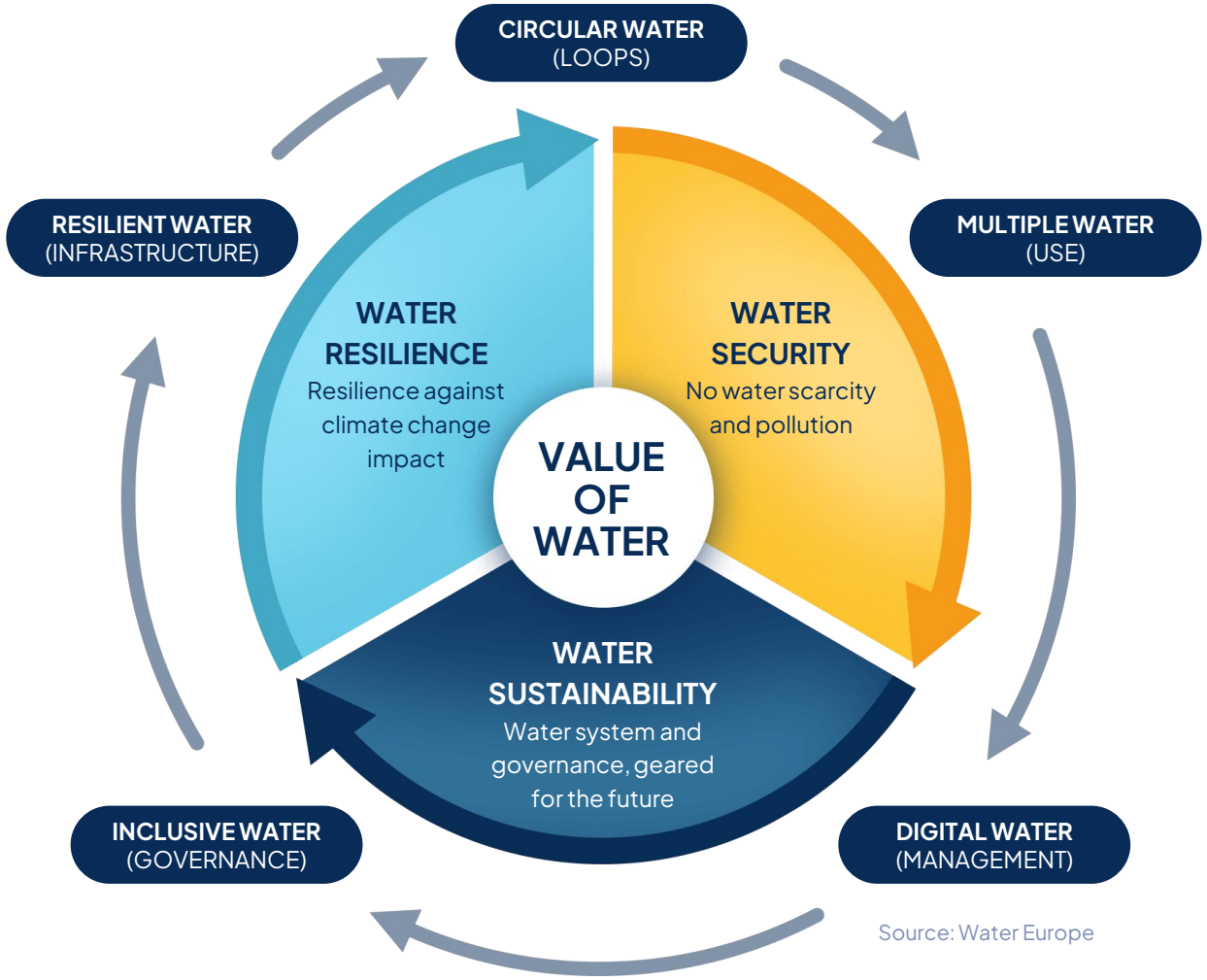
- **Multi-stakeholder association** representing the entire range of actors in the innovative water ecosystem
- **Purpose-driven** and **value-based association:** Water Smart Society & Economy, and organisational identity

College A: Multinational corporations
College B: Research & Technology developers
College C: Utilities
College D: Suppliers & SMEs
College E: Large water users
College F: Public Authorities
College G: Civil Society Organisations

Water Vision

Water-Smart Society:

- A society in which the **value of water** is recognised and realised to ensure water security, sustainability, and resilience.
- all available water sources are managed so **that water scarcity and pollution** are avoided.
- water and resource loops are largely closed to foster **a circular economy and optimal resource efficiency**.
- the water system is resilient against the **impact of climate and demographic change**.
- all relevant stakeholders are engaged in guaranteeing sustainable **water governance**.



Source: Water Europe

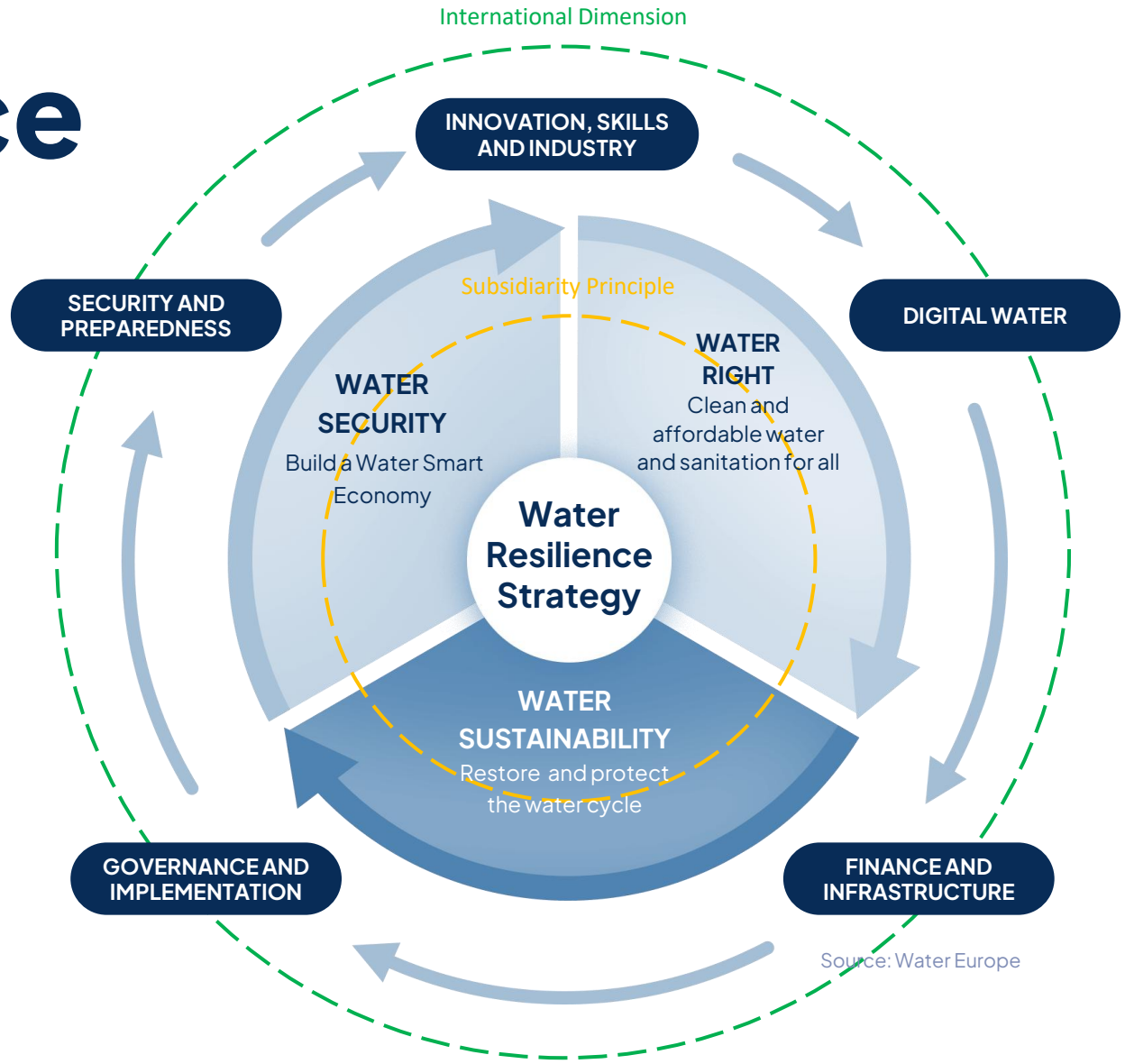
Water-Smart Society Vision

EU Water Resilience Strategy

Water Resilient Europe means a Europe with as little water stress as possible and a Europe that serves as an inspiration to the rest of the globe.

Objectives:

- Restoring and protecting the water cycle as the basis for water supply
- Building a water-smart economy together with citizens and economic actors in a way that supports EU competitiveness is attractive to investors and promotes the EU water industry.
- Securing clean and affordable water and sanitation for all and empowering consumers for water resilience.

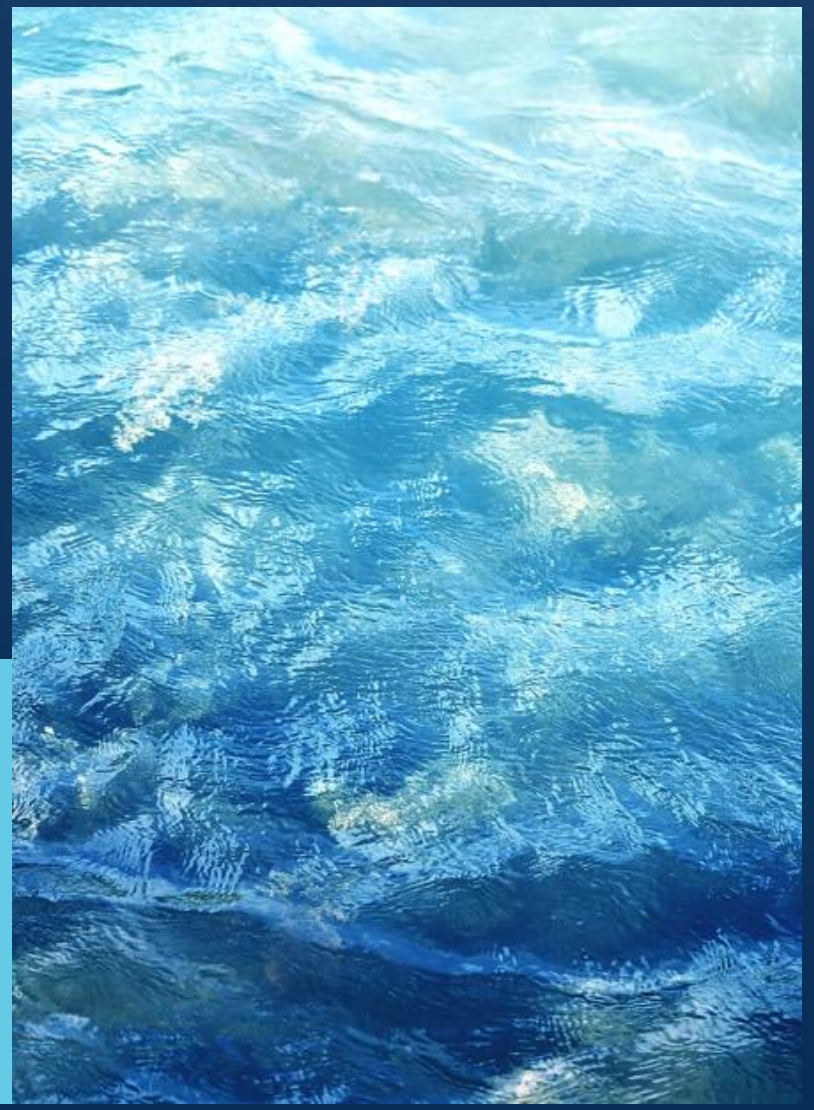


Restoring the Water Cycle

- Source-to-sea Approach
- Investment in infrastructure
- Implementation of water acquis
- Tackling nutrients pollution and pollutants of emerging concerns

Flagship Actions

- Establish implementation priorities of the WFD, focusing on quality and quantity.
- Enhance cooperation with MS on water scarcity (Technical guidance and indicators).
- Launch a public-private partnership to support PFAS Clean-up.
- Launch an Assistance toolbox for MS on reducing nutrients pollution.
- Revise the Marine Strategy Framework.



Building a Water-Smart Economy

- Balancing water demand and supply via water efficiency
- Better control of the resources (data collection)
- Segments approach: leakage reduction, industrial water saving, agri transition packages, water-smart energy
- Promote alternative water sources (desalination)
- Implementation of the Industrial Emissions Directive

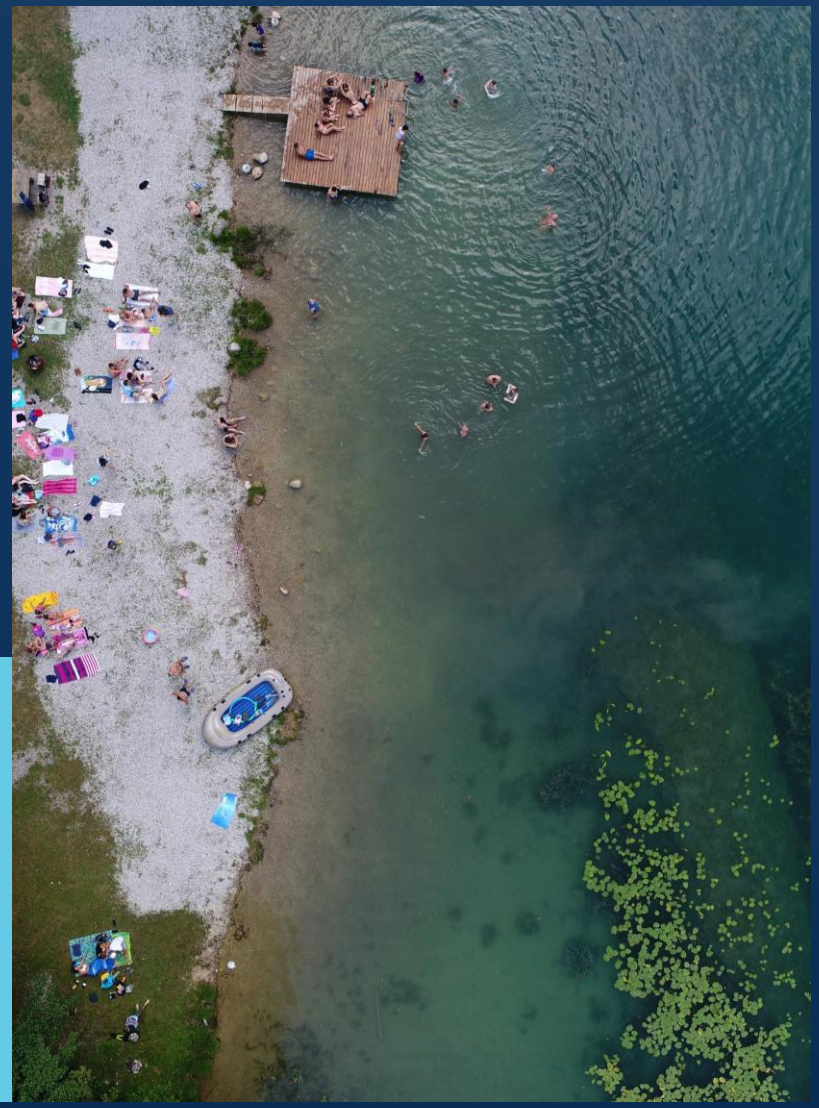
Flagship Actions

- Aspirational EU Target: The strategy proposes to reduce water abstraction by at least 10% of water savings by 2023
- Support the uptake of the recommendation on the **Water Efficiency First principle:**

Reduce demand → Enhance efficiency → Reuse → Increase supply

Clean & Affordable Water for all

- Access to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation
- Align with the One health approach
- Stimulate consumers' demand for water-smart products



Flagship Actions

- Implementation of the new Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive
- Increased security and preparedness
- Empower consumers (e.g. Improve water pricing thanks to smart meters, which enable real-time data on consumption)
- Address water footprint of products (e.g. under ESPR and the EU ecolabel)
- Launch pilot projects to test the impact of smart metering on water saving in critical regions

Financial Tools

The WRS does not include a position on the next MFF but mentions a list of financial tools already available:

- **EIB Water Sector 15€ billion Lending**: Promotes expanded use of the European Investment Bank to co-finance water-smart projects.
- **Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP):** Encourages Member States to prioritise water in this industrial competitiveness instrument.
- **Cohesion Policy & Recovery Funds**: Invites regions to allocate EU funds toward leakage reduction, reuse, and water infrastructure.
- **Horizon Europe**: support research and innovation, including Digital tools, NbS and remediation solutions
- **EFSD+ and Global Gateway**: Used externally for blended finance and private capital mobilization (esp. for SDG6 in the Global South).

Financial Area	
Overall Investment Gap	Recognizes €23B/year EU-wide gap
Dedicated Water Fund	No new fund proposed, but EIB water sector lending
EU Budget Tools (MFF)	Suggests use of STEP, Cohesion Funds, Horizon Europe, New European Bauhaus, etc.
Private Sector Mobilisation	Promotes EIB, EFSD+
Conditionality / Performance	Not directly proposed
Finance for Innovation & R&D	Encourages use of Horizon Europe & national funding
Access for SMEs & Living Labs	Not specifically mentioned

Funding water resilience

- **Secure dedicated funds in the main segments of the European Budget of up to €300 billion:**
  - ✓ €255 billion in the "EU economic, territorial, social, rural, and maritime sustainable prosperity and security fund"
  - ✓ €35 billion in the ECF to support research & innovation and build water efficient industrial supply chains
  - ✓ €10 billion in the "Union Civil Protection Mechanism and Global Europe" funds
- Set up **performance criteria** also for quantitative aspects.
- Ensure the **prioritisation of water-related targets** into single national plans.
- Support **horizontal water-related objectives**, which will stimulate synergies with other relevant strategies.

€255 billion in the "EU economic, territorial, social, rural, and maritime sustainable prosperity and security fund

Wastewater

Compliance requires major infrastructure funding

- Full compliance with the UWWTD could prevent about 490,000 tons of organic pollution annually
- The OECD projects that around €255 billion in additional investment between 2020 and 2030 are needed to reach and maintain full compliance with the UWWTD

Drinking Water

Modernisation & efficiency needs

- Investment in cost-effective technologies for real-time monitoring and removal of micropollutants (e.g. DBPs) > Cleaner water = health benefits
- On average 23% of treated drinking water is lost via leaks before ever reaching consumer, which can cost nearly €90 million each year in lost supply

Agriculture

A water dependent sector

- 28% of water abstraction in the EU comes from agriculture
- Savings of €14 billion through water-smart practices and improved irrigation systems
- Treated wastewater for irrigation could reduce water stress across the EU by 10%

€35 billion in the ECF to support research & innovation and build water efficient industrial supply chains

Semiconductors

A growing EU market

- 45 million m³ of water consumed per month in the EU
- Water demand to rise 60-140% by 2030 to meet EU goals
- Water recycling can reduce intake by 216 million m³ by 2030

Data Centres

A major contributor to EU's digital economy

- 60 million m³ of water used annually
- Water consumption projected to increase by 52% by 2030
- Shifts in cooling processes can save 18 to 74 million m³ of water annually

Renewable energy

A water-intensive sector

- Uses 9 L of water per kg of hydrogen
- Growth forecast of +176% by 2030
- Water usage is expected to triple by 2040, reaching an annual total of 459 million m³

Research and Innovation

A driver of change

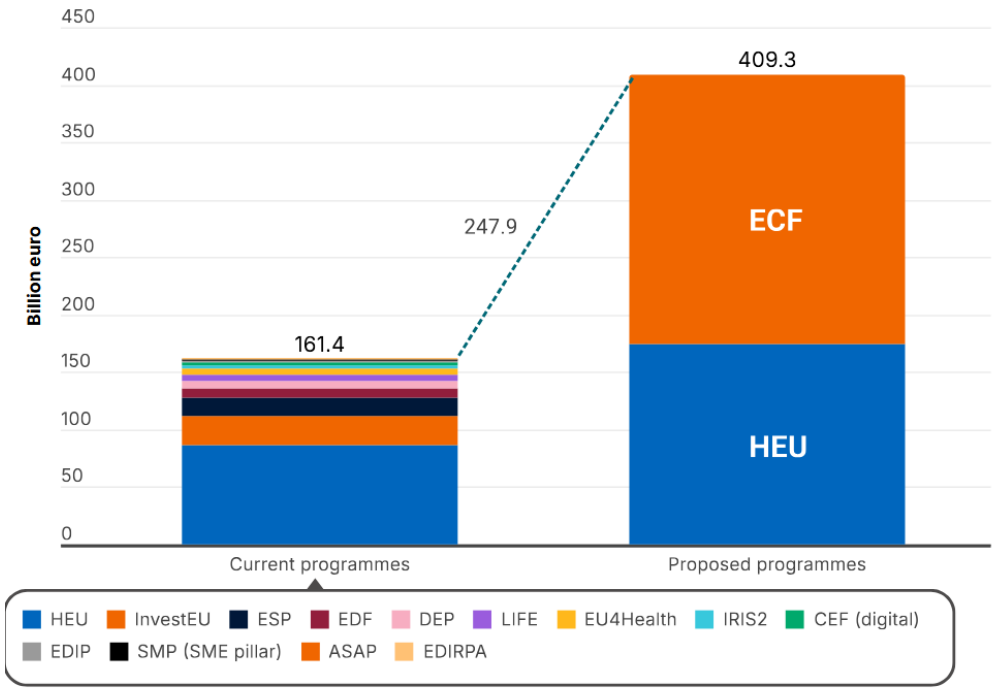
- Investment in water saving or water reuse technologies can bring water savings up to 17%
- WRS recognises the need to invest in R&I (€1 in Horizon funding may contribute up to €11 in EU GDP by 2045)
- Costs of removing PFAS from European waters between €10 - €18 billion per year

€35 billion in the ECF to support research & innovation and build water efficient industrial supply chains

How to mobilise the €35 billion in the ECF:

- **Align the ECF to the Water Resilience Strategy** to foster the implementation of the latter
- Ensure compliance with the **future FP10 and R&I agenda** for water, to maintain EU leadership
- Promote **cross-sectoral cooperation** between DGs to integrate water in all policy levels, to maximise spillover effects of the merging of several funds under the ECF

Figure 1. **A huge increase in funding (besides consolidation)**



Note: The bar "current programmes" is based on table 1 and shows total allocations for the period 2021–2027. The bar "proposed programmes" is based on ECF art. 4 and HEU art. 6 and shows proposed total allocations for the period 2028–2034.

Source: Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies

€10 billion in the "Union Civil Protection Mechanism and Global Europe" funds

Climate Change

Mediterranean Area

- Flash-floods infrastructure resilience: economic losses caused by floods amounted to €20 billion in 2023
- Drought and wildfires monitoring and rapid onset response
- An investment of €10 billion in preparedness could have a significant multiplier effect

Dual-use tools

Water in security

- Usage of water resources by the military (a soldier needs 8-9 litres of water per day)
- Water dependency of the military industry, namely, high-tech weapons
- Use of water infrastructure as a defensive tool (e.g. wetlands restoration by Estonia)

Weaponisation of water

Ukrainian case

- Invasion from the Crimea Peninsula to the Kherson region for water resources
- Dnieper River as a defence frontline
- Water infrastructure as a weapon and a target (39,700 kilometres of water pipelines have been damaged)

Thank you!

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