

REGIONAL AFFAIRS

EU

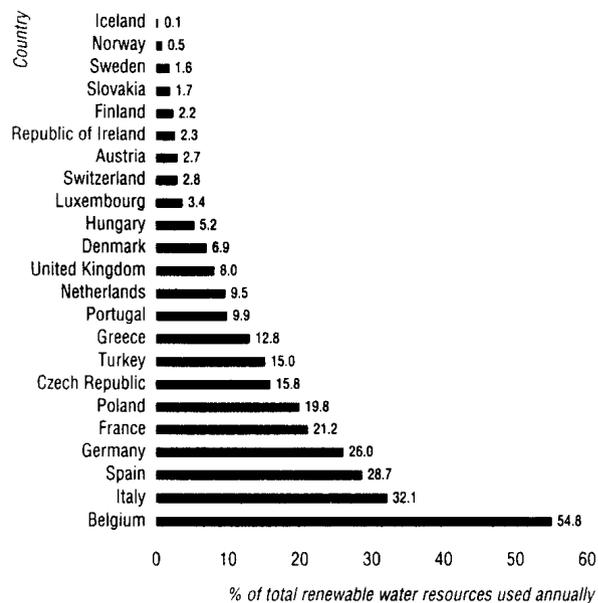
Proposed Water Directive

Meeting in Brussels on 11 March 1999, EU Environment Ministers reached a unanimous agreement on the text of a framework Directive on a Community water policy and a common position is expected to be adopted without a debate.

The common position will include those areas of agreement discussed with the European Parliament in the context of informal “pre-conciliation” talks. However, this has been described by the Environment Commissioner Ritt Bjerregaard, as “far from satisfactory and not ambitious enough.”

The proposal for a Directive aims to provide a framework within which Community, national and regional authorities can develop integrated and coherent policies on water. As a result, it should be possible to identify those areas not treated and take any necessary measures, establish firm bases for the collection and analysis of accurate and comparable information on the quality of the aquatic environment and on the threats it faces, and provide for the dissemination of information and public consultation.

In practice, the Directive will introduce the principle of management by hydrographic basin, requiring assessment of the characteristics of each basin. The draft



Amount of fresh water used as percentage of total renewable water resources in Europe
Courtesy: BMJ

also contains provisions introducing a mechanism applying the principle of recovery of the cost of water services, measures aimed at combating accidental pollution and a procedure for the development of co-ordinated strategies on pollution by isolated sources or groups of pollutants.

With regard to deadlines, the draft Directive sets a target for achieving good water quality by 2010, a first

six-year cycle running from the establishment of the Programme of Measures (to be fully implemented within ten years of the entry into force of the Directive). Subject to derogations, the process would then consist of three six-year cycles, making a total of eighteen years. The Environment Commissioner had sought unsuccessfully to reduce this additional eighteen-year timescale to twelve years. □