It's time for an EU Blue Deal: the European Economic and Social Committee launches works on water

**As water scarcity and pollution continue to pose global challenges, the current EU policy framework seems insufficient. To address this, top-level water experts gathered at the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) on 27 February to identify possible solutions. The hearing marks the beginning of the EESC's works on water. The EESC is preparing a set of own-initiative opinions examining the economic, social, environmental, and geopolitical aspects of water and in the autumn will share civil society's recommendations for the future of water in the EU.**

In the summer of 2022, droughts, forest fires, and floods were reported all over the continent, with the year seeing the most severe droughts in Europe in 500 years. While the EU Green Deal has a set of proposals tackling sectorial issues on water, these objectives are not well integrated across EU policies. Considering the challenges at stake, a change of scale is needed to avoid the mistakes previously made with energy policies.

EESC President **Christa Schweng** pointed out that "*[t]he EU has the opportunity to position itself as a frontrunner in the area of water. We must ensure that the water dimension is truly embedded in every policy area.* *The way forward can only be together, with joint and coordinated action at the regional, national, and European levels.*"

The European Parliament also recently called for an EU water strategy. **Pernille Weiss**, Member of the European Parliament and chair of the MEP Water Group, stressed the urgent need for close collaboration between the EESC and the European Parliament on this topic: "*We need to work together for a truly innovative Blue Deal in the European Union. Both the United States and China have water strategies. My hope is that Europe will step up and become a role model for how to take care of water resources.*"

**Pietro Francesco De Lotto**, President of the Consultative Commission on Industrial Change (CCMI), highlighted the industrial dimension of water: "*Water is a public resource that is both scarce and strategic. Many industrial sectors, such as the textile, chemical, steel, and energy production industries, simply cannot function without water.* *Water-efficient technologies are an important part of the solution we need, not just for industry, but for all of society.*"

The EESC will push for a comprehensive EU strategy on water with a series of own-initiative opinions, including proposals on the safeguarding of clean water resources; valuing water correctly for the benefit of citizens, industry, and society as a whole; anticipating and mitigating possible negative effects of international conflicts caused by water-related issues; and sustainable water management.

**Salla Saastamoinen**, Deputy Director-General for the Joint Research Centre (JRC), stated that "*[i]n March, the European Commission will participate in the 2023 UN Water Conference, which will finally put water back on the top of the global agenda, where it belongs. The JRC shares the EESC's ambition towards a holistic approach to water management. We must take into account interconnections* *and anticipate future crises."*

**Oliver Röpke**, President of the EESC Workers' Group, stressed the importance of water as a human right: "*Solidarity and sustainability must be at the heart of our solutions. The EESC is committed to ensuring that the EU delivers on this topic, which is so important to our citizens and to our common future.*"