



President Oliver Röpke Speech on "A call for an EU Blue Deal"

[check against delivery]

- Water is a global challenge and it very much concerns Europe too.
- Droughts are becoming more and more severe. Regions in all parts of our continent are being affected.
- The European Economic and Social Committee strongly believes that water can no longer be addressed in a silo mode or as a sub-chapter of another political priority. Water is THE priority.
- To give you an example: De-carbonisation policies existed before the EU Green Deal. Yet, the current Commission decided to change their approach by adopting the EU Green Deal, 4 years ago.
- We need to take the same decision for water and adopt one, comprehensive, strategy that will guide our actions.
- This is why we decided to have a political Declaration, calling the EU for action. It is based on the opinions adopted by the EESC in the past months and captures in a nutshell what we think the fundamental principles of an EU water strategy should be.

- The Declaration has two parts: 15 principles that should guide future EU initiatives and a set of 21 concrete actions that we hope will be implemented in the course of the next mandate of the Commission.
- I will not take you through every detail of the Declaration that is available online and included in the folder distributed to you today. Yet, let me draw your attention to a few key messages that I would like to share with you.
- First, we believe that the current European Union's framework on water does not sufficiently address the challenges ahead. We need to learn from the mistakes that have been made with climate, energy and critical raw materials.
- We must be better prepared and aim for water resilience in all areas of society. We need better implementation, more funding, more political will and policy coherence to tackle these challenges.
- We also need to better anticipate our needs and manage water resources in the short, medium and long-term.
- But most importantly, we need to make sure that water is truly integrated in all EU policies.
- To this end, the EESC calls on the European institutions to consider water as a priority and to adopt an EU Blue Deal as a standalone strategic policy.
- We want a dedicated Commissioner who should be in charge of the water portfolio, to ensure that the EU Blue Deal is in sync with the EU Green Deal and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.
- Let me mention a few other points from the Declaration:
 - We need common EU guidelines on quality and affordable water and sanitation services – something that should not be a privilege but a basic right.
 - We need to help educate EU citizens, and in particular consumers, about the water footprint of the products they buy. This why we want to introduce a water



consumption label.

- A comprehensive EU water policy will only work if there is an equally ambitious financing plan. We call for a common EU approach to a fair water price and the establishment of a Blue Transition Fund. Water investments should be given special treatment within the Stability and Growth Pact.
 - Given the link between energy, water and critical raw materials, water should be seen as a fundamental element of the EU's industrial strategy. And, I insist on this, a tailor-made approach is needed as different industries have different water needs and opportunities when it comes to water efficiency.
 - I truly believe that Europe can transform our water challenges into new opportunities, but we need skilled and specialised workforce fit for the Blue Deal.
 - Concerning the international dimension, the EU should increase its efforts on blue diplomacy. Water should be part of the EU's foreign and trade policies. We propose to set up a European Water Centre to support Member States and countries in the European Neighbourhood and beyond to address water-related issues.
 - Last but not least, we call for the establishment of an EU advisory stakeholder platform. Such platform would be set up by the EESC and other EU institutions to share best practices, develop standards on water quality and use and contribute to a regular update of the EU Blue Deal
- Those are just a few actions from the Declaration, which I warmly encourage you to read through.
 - The next step will be to put our call on the agenda of the EU institutions. We are already working in partnership with the European Parliament and I also count on Member States to join forces.
 - The Commission mentioned a few days ago that they will nominate a Wise Persons Group to devise, in the coming months, the forthcoming water resilience initiative. I would like to officially offer the EESC's support to this initiative and to invite the Commission to nominate a representative of the EESC in the Wise Persons Group.



- Dear colleagues, I know that changing our mindsets, and our habits will not be easy. An EU Blue Deal will be demanding for all of us: farmers, households, industry.
- But water is our most precious resource on this planet – without water, there is no life.
- And we are lucky that we still have the time to act, but we must act now.
- Thank you all for your support. Together, we can make sure that water finds its place at the heart of the EU's agenda.

