

European Blue Deal / Water Resilience

Brief description and main aims:

Over the years, the EU has adopted several pieces of legislation in the field of water protection and quality. The EU's main objective is to ensure that all Europeans have access to good quality and sufficient water, and to guarantee the good status of all water bodies throughout Europe. EU legislation aims to ensure that water is managed sustainably in the long term, that water pollution is reduced and that aquatic ecosystems are protected. Since 2000, the EU's *Water Framework Directive* (WFD) has been the main piece of water legislation in Europe.

The WFD has been complemented by other legislation such as the EU Groundwater Directive, the Drinking Water Directive, the Floods Directive, etc. While these policies have primarily focused on water quality, pollutants, etc., water quantity management, scarcity, droughts and other extreme weather events are now receiving more attention but lack a comprehensive strategy and vision to address them. In 2023, the CCMI (Consultative Committee for Industrial Changes), one of the bodies of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), published plans and a declaration for an "*EU Blue Deal*" to make the water crisis a policy priority for the next Commission (2024-2029).

The President of the European Commission von der Leyen indicated that "Water Resilience" will be among the priorities of the new Commission during the period 2024-2029.

Why FIEC is dealing with this topic:

FIEC has supported the call for an *EU Blue Deal* for several reasons:

- Water stress (i.e. a situation in which the demand for water exceeds the amount available during a given period) has become an urgent problem, especially in Southern and Western Europe, and will become more frequent with climate change. A major factor contributing to water scarcity and loss is leakage from water networks: On average, 25% of treated water is lost in public water supplies in Member States. The 6.5 billion m³ lost annually at EU level is equivalent to the combined consumption of entire Member States such as France and Germany. This is why FIEC has called for the urgent treatment of water leakage and for increased investment in the repair and maintenance of water supply networks, a service offered by many construction companies.
- Extreme weather events such as heavy rainfall and flooding are also becoming more frequent, posing huge challenges to the built environment and resulting in incredible damage and high insurance costs. Flood defenses and other flood management systems are needed to deal with these extreme events. Contractors are also heavily involved in the construction of this type of infrastructure.
- Water challenges (water stress and floods) are a direct threat to society, economy and industry. Investing in Europe's old water infrastructure is therefore seen as an investment in Europe's overall prosperity.

Construction sites use a limited amount of water compared to other sectors. Manufacturing and sectors such as agriculture consume much more. To better tackle this problem, FIEC has called for a sectoral approach, with milestones and roadmaps for each sector. Construction companies offer a wide range of services in the water sector: Construction of water treatment plants, distribution networks, desalination plants, sluice gates, etc. For this reason, the *EU Blue Deal* would also be a huge business opportunity for the sector.