



Organised by: Volonteurpe, EEB and EESC Consultative Commission on Industrial Change

Report

In the context of the overarching theme of the first ever Civil Society Week, “Rise up for Democracy”, the workshop emphasised that a key process and success factor of a well-functioning democracy lies in enabling people to act as aware, engaged citizens of Europe. Pro-active citizens contribute to creating an essential fabric of a democratic, inclusive society. Even more, empowered, engaged and interested citizens are crucial when it comes to addressing major challenges that we humans and all other living species face: changes in our climate and water ecosystems.

In the workshop, moderated by **Piotr Sadowski**, Secretary General of Volonteurpe, the panel took the participants through a discussion on the role and importance of active citizenship, stewardship and youth engagement in ensuring a sustainable and just Blue Deal for Europe and beyond.

The panel was made up of a diversity of speakers: **Annelies Mertens**, FLOW (Future Lives with Oceans and Waters) Youth Advisory Board Member; **Furkan Sorkuncuk**, Project Coordinator and Youth Leader, Volonteurpe; **Maxi Leuchters**, Member, Group II, Consultative Commission on Industrial Change (CCMI), EESC; **Sara Johansson**, Senior Policy Officer for Water Pollution Prevention, European Environmental Bureau; **Hasmik Barseghyan**, President of the European Youth Parliament for Water (EYPW); and **Max Priebe**, Project Manager and Research Associate, Fraunhofer Institute for Systems and Innovations.

The panel considered how we can foster a more sustainable and empathetic relationship with water and engage particularly with young people more effectively in creating opportunities for stewardship over this precarious resource. The panellists considered how the EU Blue Deal can act as an effective mechanism for citizenship and engagement, as well as what is already working, what is missing, and what needs to be strengthened.

The workshop came up with three steps forward:

- Water has been taken for granted for too long, resulting in water scarcity and pollution. In fact, freshwater ecosystems are the most susceptible to biodiversity loss. It must be treated as a resource for all, and access to safe drinking water and sanitation must be seen as a human right, as explicitly recognised by the UN General Assembly in 2010.
- The frequency of water stress is expanding across Europe: on average, 20% of European territory and 30% of the total population are affected by water stress. To drive change, we need water development programmes which are sustainable because they are based on equity, partnerships, collaborations, education and co-creation across all age groups, but especially among Europe's youth.
- We must understand that we live in planetary boundaries regarding access to water. For the EU Blue Deal to be successful will require robust governance of freshwater resources, including groundwater, and we require EU Institutions and Member States to consider water as a priority, and place the EU Blue Deal on an equal footing and view it as fully complementary with the EU Green Deal and the UN SDGs. Constructing hope is about giving pro-active citizens access to represent their rights and to devise and implement the EU Blue Deal.

We were clear that the involvement of civil society organisations, especially of youth representatives, in the blue transition from the outset, is crucial, as broad support by all actors in our society is needed for substantial change. It is also vital to tackle the need for new skills for this transition. This can be done by investing in a new educational agenda, which will provide the necessary skills and knowledge to foster sustainable water management and water resilience in different areas of our society, including innovations and new water-efficient approaches to be adopted by businesses and industries.

It is also necessary to dovetail the Blue Deal and local action: every day, active citizens across Europe fight the effects of eutrophication, pollution and biodiversity loss in aquatic environments (people (re)discover resilient agricultural practices, advocate for nature rights, restoration and rewilding, enable blue innovation and increase awareness in their communities). The Blue Deal connects to and learns from local action.

Our vision for the Blue Deal: the Blue Deal invites relevant stakeholders to imagine a collectively shared and desirable future that shows how the Blue Deal will make a difference. In line with a mission-oriented approach, the vision helps to develop impact pathways and monitoring criteria for reaching the Blue Deal's objectives.