

Intervention at “Call for an EU Blue Deal” - Pedro Arrojo Agudo, Special Rapporteur on the human rights to drinking water and sanitation

First of all, I want to thank you for the invitation and congratulate the European Economic and Social Committee for this initiative to put water in the place it deserves on the European Agenda.

Since I took office as UN Special Rapporteur for the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, I have been insisting on the need to address the global water crisis in the current perspectives of climate change, facing two main challenges:

- Making peace with our rivers and aquatic ecosystems, the subject of my report to this year's human rights council.
- Promote democratic governance of water, understood as a common good, which this year I focused on the governance of transboundary basins with the report presented last week to the UN General Assembly.

By the way, thank you very much for the support I received from the European Union in the interactive dialogue.

In both topics I develop the human rights approach that I promote as Rapporteur, based on guaranteeing the sustainability of ecosystems from a governance that promotes transparency, responsibility and accountability and from the principles of equality and non-discrimination.

Regarding the first challenge, the EU offers notable global leadership with the Water Framework Directive. Recovering the natural engineering that moves the natural water cycle on islands and continents not only allows for cost-efficient measures to be structured, but is also key to the adaptation strategies we need in the face of climate change. Transitioning from the traditional resource approach to the ecosystem approach allows us to face the challenges of the 21st century that climate change translates into increasing risks of droughts and floods, which do not recognize borders in transboundary basins. The Directive promotes the shared responsibility of States in these basins, also marking global leadership in the development of the principles and standards of the Water Convention and the 1999 Protocol on water and health. However, key challenges remain, such as applying this coherence to all European policies that have strong links with water management, such as the common agricultural policy.

On the other hand, the EU must decisively face the second challenge: that of democratic water governance, from a human rights approach. For this, it is essential to understand water as a common good, accessible to all but not appropriated by anyone, and water and sanitation services as public services of general interest, which must be of universal access to the extent that human rights depend on them. The Right2Water European Citizen Initiative, with almost 2 million signatures from all over Europe, put this challenge on the

Commission's table. I myself participated in the delivery of those signatures to the European Commission, receiving their promise that this first successful European citizen initiative would see their just demands reflected in the corresponding directives.

In fact, in 2018, the Commission promoted the reform of the Drinking Water Directive that Parliament adopted in 2020, always recognizing the starting impetus provided by the Right2Water Citizen Initiative. The Reform effectively included the essential contents of the human rights approach. However, the powerful shadow interests that oppose this approach managed to avoid the Directive's clear and explicit recognition of the human right to drinking water, leaving such recognition in the hands of the respective Governments and Parliaments of the Member States in their respective national processes of transposition of the Directive. In this regard, my recognition to Spain for this transposition in which the human right to drinking water is recognized, establishing the vital minimum to guarantee this right at 100 liters/person/day; my recognition also to the debate and approval process also in the French National Assembly; my recognition also goes to Slovenia, the first EU country to recognize this human right in its legislation... And my gratitude to Germany and Spain for the support they provide to this mandate at the UN. But, let us not forget, in Europe water is also cut off for tens of thousands of families who, being in poverty, have difficulties paying for their human right to drinking water. Regarding the Sanitation Directive, it is being processed. I encourage you for Europe to lead the way and show leadership by also recognizing the human right to sanitation in this directive.

Allow me, finally, a quick reflection on technology, as supposedly key to guaranteeing the human rights to drinking water and sanitation. Excellencies, friends, I, as a technologist, physicist, engineer and economist, want to insist that technology will not resolve the injustices or the bankruptcies of unsustainability that we have caused, if we do not previously guarantee, in terms of water in particular, good governance. democratic based on a sustainable and human rights approach, understanding water as a common good and not as a commodity. Don't forget, please, your excellencies. I remain at your disposal, looking ahead, if I can be useful in your efforts to open the necessary space for water and sanitation on the European agenda.