Safe and clean drinking water: EU updates quality standards

The EU is ensuring that tap water across the EU is safe to drink. The Council today adopted its position on the proposal to revise the drinking water directive. The proposed new rules update the quality standards drinking water must meet and introduce a cost-effective risk-based approach to monitoring water quality. They also contain new provisions on materials in contact with drinking water and on improving access to water. The revision is a direct result of the first-ever successful European citizens’ initiative ‘Right2Water’.

I know that safe drinking water is an issue that is important for all of us, as the European citizens’ initiative ‘Right2Water’ has shown. This is why I am very pleased that today we reached an agreement on the Council's position on the drinking water directive. The message is clear: wherever you are in Europe, you can drink the water without worrying about your health.

Ioan Deneș, Minister of Waters and Forests of Romania

One of the main elements of the recast proposal is to update the water quality standards currently in force, which were determined over 20 years ago. The proposal also introduces a risk-based approach to the monitoring of water quality. This approach should in the long run decrease the costs of monitoring while at the same time guaranteeing the highest quality of drinking water.

In addition, the proposed revised directive introduces new obligations to improve access to water. Member states will also have to ensure that consumers can access information on the properties of their drinking water as well as other useful information. The Council is also proposing a new procedure to set hygienic requirements for materials in contact with water intended for human consumption. The aim is to improve the quality of such materials to ensure that human health is protected and no contamination takes place.

Background and next steps

The Commission adopted its recast proposal for the drinking water directive on 1 February 2018. The Environment Council of 25 June 2018 held a policy debate on the proposal. Substantive discussions continued at expert level during the Austrian and Romanian Presidencies.

The European Parliament proposed amendments to the Commission proposal at its plenary on 23 October 2018. Its position at first reading is foreseen for the second plenary in March. Inter-institutional negotiations will probably take place during the Finnish Presidency.