

## **PRESS RELEASE**

# **European contractors jointly call for a “European Blue Deal”**

*Brussels/Berlin, 27 February 2024. The European Construction Industry Federation (FIEC) and the European International Contractors (EIC) today published a [joint position paper](#) on the European Economic and Social Committee’s (EESC) “[EU Blue Deal](#)” plans.*

*In this paper, the two federations, which together represent more than 30 national construction associations from 28 European countries (24 EU + Norway, Switzerland, Ukraine and Turkey), call on the next European Commission and the Member States to make water resilience and water security, the fight against water scarcity and against extreme weather events<sup>1</sup> a top priority of the 2024-2029 mandate, alongside strengthening the industrial competitiveness of European contractors, continuing the policy of reducing emissions and focusing on adaptation to climate change.*

Water scarcity, heavy rainfall and flooding have become serious problems in many EU countries and are already having a huge impact on societies, economies and industries, with the situation set to worsen in the coming years. FIEC and EIC members report that water is increasingly becoming a vulnerable resource in their countries and that more decisive and forward-looking action on water resilience is urgently needed.

FIEC and EIC believe that the current EU legislative framework is to some extent ill-prepared to adequately address climate change and protect the EU’s society and economy from physical damage and economic losses.

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<sup>1</sup> Water resilience and security, water scarcity and stress could be summarised under the term “water challenges”, a term used by the MEP Water Group of the European Parliament in its joint letter with the Economic and Social Committee in 2023.

That is why the two European federations **today present 5 key messages and proposals for a pan-European, holistic and long-term approach** to water scarcity/security and natural disasters such as droughts and floods.

Such a strategy should include, among other elements, better monitoring and anticipation of current and future water needs. Most importantly, FIEC and the EIC recommend focusing on the implementation of existing measures (Water Framework Directive, Drinking Water Directive, Floods Directive...) and closing the 'implementation gap' in water policy. Targeted revisions of existing water legislation and new legislative proposals should be considered where appropriate.

An EU water policy programme should go beyond a single Communication from the European Commission as announced for 2024 and must be embedded in a broader strategy for adaptation to climate change.

The two federations are also calling for water to become an integral part of the EU's industrial strategy and for sectoral roadmaps to help industries, including construction, to access water more easily, but also to progressively reduce their water footprint and become water-circular.

The initial focus of the EU Blue Deal should be on repairing and maintaining Europe's old and leaky water pipes - a service offered by many contractors - which could help save large amounts of water, as in some countries, 40% or more of the water flowing through the network is lost in transit due to leaks. FIEC and the EIC believe that the fight against water leaks must be at the heart of the Blue Deal and that leaks must be treated as an emergency. In this context, they call on the Member States to properly implement the 2020 Drinking Water Directive.

Finally, the two federations call for adequate financial support to upgrade Europe's water infrastructure, and for the Blue Deal to be given strong political weight through the appointment of an Executive Vice President/European Commissioner or Special Envoy for Water.

Commenting on the joint paper, **Philip Crampton, President of FIEC**, states:

*"The EU cannot stumble into another crisis unprepared. We support the European Economic and Social Committee's plans and its declaration for a Blue Deal. We are part of the solution: Construction companies are heavily involved in many water-related activities and are already leading the way in efficient water management."*

*The next European Commission must treat the 'water crisis' as a priority and we sincerely hope that we will see a mandate for 2024-2029 dedicated to a European Blue Deal, alongside efforts to further reduce greenhouse gas emissions and strengthen Europe's competitiveness.*

**Domenico Campogrande, FIEC Director General**, states:

*"A growing number of stakeholders are calling for a European Blue Deal to complement the Green Deal, and we are one of them. Water must be managed intelligently and treated as a vital asset for our survival and economic strength.*

*Contractors have a key role to play in building and repairing infrastructure to secure water supplies and deal with natural disasters. We need better preparedness for future water crises and strong cooperation and coordination between governments, municipalities, water agencies, research and technology developers, civil society and industry".*

**Benoît Chauvin, President of the EIC** and **Vice President Business Development of the Colas Group**, states:

*"Our companies have a long history of building, repairing and maintaining transport networks, water treatment and desalination plants, or floodgates and maritime infrastructure. We are enablers of the European Blue Deal, just as we are enablers of the Green Deal.*

*But let's make no mistake: The whole of society and the economy has a stake in becoming water resilient, because the costs of inaction and the economic losses from leakages, droughts and floods are already high today and would be much higher tomorrow. We are ready to play our part in expanding the EU's arsenal in the fight against water stress, but we need the right incentives to do so. That is why we are calling for a European Blue Deal".*

**Frank Kehlenbach, EIC Director**, states:

*"Driven by population growth, industrial expansion and climate change, the global demand for water has been steadily increasing over the last 40 years, exacerbating water scarcity worldwide. European international contractors are ready and able to meet this global challenge by offering their innovative*

*and technical potential to provide solutions to water scarcity, sanitation problems, access to this vital resource and increased demand.*

*A guiding principle of the Blue Deal should be that our industrial base should remain internationally competitive as we move towards water circularity. We cannot afford to see economic activity relocated outside the EU as a result of too strong environmental policies at a time of weak economic growth and high geopolitical tensions.*

*A Blue Deal must be ambitious but backed up by adequate public and private investment, for example through a dedicated Blue Deal Transition Fund”.*

**For more details on FIEC and EIC’s demands, please read the [full position](#).**



**FIEC** represents – through its 32 national member federations in 27 European countries (24 EU + Norway, Switzerland, Ukraine) – construction companies of all sizes, i.e. small and medium-sized enterprises as well as global players, carrying out all types of building and civil engineering activities. FIEC is also the officially recognised social partner representing employers in the EU sectoral social dialogue for construction.

**EIC** has its main member associations in 15 European countries and represents the interests of the European construction industry in all matters relating to its international construction activities, in particular regarding the political, legal, economic and financial framework condition for international business. The total international turnover of EIC member companies in 2022 was more than US\$ 215 bn.

