The quality of drinking water in the EU – current state of affairs

Tap water in the EU is safe to drink, but it can still be safer.

The EU's drinking water directive dates from 1998.

The proposal for a revised drinking water directive to improve the quality of drinking water was adopted by the European Commission on 1 February 2018, as a direct follow-up to the "Right2Water" European Citizens' Initiative. This initiative had been launched in 2012 with the slogan "Water and sanitation are a human right" and aimed at ensuring that water remained a public service and a public good. Already within 1 year, it collected the required 1 million (and more) signatures.

The Council adopted its position on 5 March 2019. It agreed on the need for an update to the drinking water directive. In the words of the Romanian Minister of Waters and Forests: "The message is clear: wherever you are in Europe, you can drink the water without worrying about your health".


The Commission welcomed the agreement and declared, through the Commissioner for the Environment, Virginijus Sinkevičius, that the co-legislators have heard the call of the citizens and that the quality of drinking water has to be improved on the basis of the most recent standards.

One of the provisions of the revised directive would be related to materials used for drinking water pipes and taps. Only safe substances can be used for this purpose.

Another element would be about transparency and informing the public on the quality of the tap water they have access to in their living area.

The provisional agreement will now be subject to formal approval by the Council and the Parliament. Following approval, the Directive will be published in the EU's Official Journal and enter into force 20 days later.