



Press release **European River Parliament presents Youth Water Manifesto**

Young river ambassadors released their manifesto for water protection in the European Parliament. Following the release, water cocktails prepared from waters of 18 rivers were served.

Brussels, 13 July 2015

Following a performance focused on local water protection, young activists from the Big Jump Challenge, the European Youth campaign for water protection, presented their Youth Manifesto for Water Protection. The session, hosted by MEP Bas Eickhout, concluded with a serving of water cocktails prepared from river water. It was organized by the social-ecological research group GETIDOS in cooperation with the European Environmental Bureau, the European Rivers Network, Good Planet Belgium and further national partners. The event marked the conclusion of the Big Jump Challenge European youth campaign for water protection.

The Youth Manifesto for Water highlights key challenges for water protection in 2015. It also presents ideas for the better inclusion of youth in water protection. The difficulty of achieving the European water protection goals makes water protection an intergenerational task. The manifesto in the short term offers a youth perspective on the discussion of the second round of the European Water Management Plans. In the long term it contributes to a critical revision of the European Water Framework Directive, scheduled for 2018.

“Our freedom from seeing boundaries and limits allows us to tackle problems with creative and innovative approaches”, said river activist Neza Posnjak introducing the Manifesto. “Water is needed by all living beings”, said Mari Gigauri another youth activist. “We especially need to protect wild rivers and create no go areas.” This topic is so far not dealt with in the European Water Framework Directive. “We do not inherit water from our ancestors; we borrow it from future generations”, said Valentin Lechner concluding the Manifesto presentation.

Nicole Wanders-Wengler, from the Directorate General for the Environment, called the manifesto an extremely interesting awareness-raising tool. She pointed out the link to the Bathing Water Directive. Big Jumps are an indicator for possible new swimming places, the water quality of which can then be tested in accordance with the directive to ensure safe swimming. Alberto Parenti, from the Directorate General for the Environment, said that he takes a message of hope from the European Rivers Parliament to the Commission. He identified the

competitive advantage of youth in local action on the ground. However, in further discussion the point was made that there is also a need for a European level of action, where youth experience is shared and some decision-processes can be demystified. Pieter de Pous, from the European Environmental Bureau, said that in the current European climate, it is very important to be loud and to be coordinated so that joint European issues will be heard.

Under the European Water Framework Directive (WFD), all member states have committed to ensuring healthy aquatic ecosystems by 2015. Yet many countries are not on track to achieving this goal - less than 50% of European rivers and lakes are deemed to be in good ecological shape.

As part of the 'Big Jump Challenge', 60 young 'river ambassadors' - selected from over 120 youth campaign groups from 28 countries – brought their ideas and demands on water protection to the attention of policymakers in Brussels in a bid to highlight that 2015 is the deadline year for the WFD.

The Big Jump Challenge is the youth wing of the Big Jump campaign - an initiative of the European Rivers Network (ERN), also known as European River Swimming Day. It aims to both highlight the importance of the WFD to decision-makers and reconnect citizens with their rivers. Since 2005, over 2000 Big Jump events have been organised in 30 countries. The idea that water protection and youth involvement is not just a European matter, was testified by the presence of young water activist from Georgia, Israel, Jordan and Palestine at the European River Parliament.

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Also see:

www.bigjumpchallenge.net;

www.bigjump.org

Attachment: Water cocktails at the European Rivers Parliament, 13. July 2015; Youth Manifesto for Water 2015.

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