

Bulgaria

1. Chronological review of the decentralization in the water supply and sewage sector in Bulgaria

Until 1990 the water sector in the Republic of Bulgaria was managed by one centralized institution only – the Economic Directory “Water supply and sewage”.

The political, social and economic changes in 1990 resulted in restructures in this sector too. Two types of companies were founded – state and municipal. The bigger part of the whole water supply branch fell to the state-owned. The only one big municipal company was this one in the capital Sofia. In this period there were 29 companies with 100% state property and 11 ones with 100% municipal property.

In 1995 the Bulgarian Government signed with the World Bank an agreement for restructure, reconstruction and modernization of the water supply and sewage system. One of the key-stones of this agreement was to reduce the ownership of the state firms. The state had to transfer gratuitously a part of its ownership to the municipalities, which were served by the respective state Water Supply and Sewage companies.

In consequence of this restructure in Bulgaria started to function 16 companies with 100% state ownership; 15 ones with 100% municipal ownership and 13 companies with mixed ownership – 51% state and 49% municipal.

In 1999 the first and the only one (up to now) concession agreement was signed for the water supply and sewage of Sofia from the multinational company “International Water”. In 2004 the concession rights were transferred to the United Kingdom’s “United Utilities”. The term of this concession is 25 years.

Currently in the Water Supply and Sewage sector are employed 17 500 workers.

2. Brief information about our union

The Federation “Construction, Industry and Water Supply” – “Podkrepa” is established in February 1990 and it is an independent trade union, organizing the workers and employees in the building, construction industry, water supply and sewage. We have about 3 500 trade union members employed in the water supply and sewage sector.

The Federations are basic structures of the Confederation of Labour “Podkrepa” – the second largest trade union in Bulgaria.

The Federation is a member of two international unions – the IFBWW since 1992 and the PSI since 1997, and two European unions – the EFBWW since 2003 and the EPSU since 2002.

8 years so far we are publishing our own newspaper, which is distributing among all of our member-units.

With its experts the Federation assists all its members in defending their professional and employment rights and benefits.

We have developed a program for trade union education – we carry out seminars, courses and discussions on different topics – labour legislation, labour disputes solving, safety and health on the

working place, first pre-medical aid on the working site, gender equality, the leadership and other topics.

Since 1996 we have founded a National Strike Fond.

The Federation is a consortium partner in a professional qualification center for building workers.

3. Social partnership

The social partnership in the water supply and sewage sector is realized on tripartite and bipartite principals.

Tripartite cooperation

The tripartite cooperation in the water supply and sewage sector is carried out by the members of the Branch Council:

- representatives of the state – designated by the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works
- representatives of the trade unions – the Federation “Construction, Industry and Water Supply” – “Podkrepa” and National Branch Syndicate “Vodosnabditel” – CITUB
- representatives of the employers from the Union of the Employers in the “Water Supply and Sewage” System

The Branch Council for tripartite cooperation is dealing with issues of problems in the branch.

After the currency board implementation in Bulgaria (1997) through the medium of the Branch Council, every year is developing a regulation for increasing the labour remuneration for the water supply and sewage sector. For this purpose an agreement between the employers and the both trade unions is signed. Then the agreement is submitted to the Minister of the Labour and Social Policy and the Minister of the Regional Development and Public Works to sign it.

Since 2002 the Branch Council has defined and submitted to the Government for adoption a regulation for minimum assured income for each job category in the water supply and sewage sector.

There is an operative commission into the Branch Council which is dealing with issues of the problems of safe and healthy working conditions.

The Branch Council come out with statements and proposals on different topics – such as National strategy of branch developing, establishment of a state regulative authority for the services’ prices in the water supply and sewage; changes of the legislative matter regarding the branch.

After the last parliament elections in Bulgaria (June 2005) and after formation of the present Government (August 2005) the new Branch Council for Tripartite Cooperation is processing, because the new Minister of the Regional Development and Public Works should nominate his representatives in the council.

Bipartite cooperation

The Bipartite cooperation is realized by the collaboration between the Union of the employers in the “Water Supply and Sewage” System and the both syndicates – the Federation “Construction,

Industry and Water Supply” – “Podkrepa” and National Branch Syndicate “Vodosnabditel” – CITUB.

The first Branch Collective Agreement is signed in 1992. Such agreement is continuously in power thereafter. The term of each Branch Collective Agreement is up to two years.

With this agreement are achieved benefits as:

- a minimum labour remuneration for the branch – with 50% higher than the minimum salary for the country;
- a minimum labour remuneration for the different category of job – differentiation on the principle of the responsibilities and job performance;
- a longer paid annual leave;
- a higher amount of additional payments and compensations for pensions, labour accidents, child birth and other;
- trade union protection in case of dismissal;
- conditions for trade union activities.

The engagements in the signed Branch Collective Agreement are minimum and mandatory for the whole system of water supply and sewage, so through the agreement it could be achieved better and more benefits on the company level.

At this moment are in process negotiations for new Branch Collective Agreement, because the present one is in power due to February 18 2006.

The good cooperation on the bipartite level resulted in organizing of the National Workers’ Field-Day, which took place in a Black Sea resort this year.

The trade unions from the water supply and sewage sector are desired social partners for consultations from all state institutions.

Representatives and experts of the F “CIW” – “Podkrepa” take part in:

- sessions of the parliament commission on the environment and waters, in cases when draft legislations concerning the branch are discussed;
- sessions of the parliament commission on the local government, regional policy and public work, when there are discussions on draft legislations concerning the branch;
- public discussions of the State Commission of the Energy and Water Regulation about the implementation of the legislations – the price of services in the sector, the fees for water consumption and purification of waste water;
- expert commissions of the National Fond “Working conditions”;
- operative commissions in the Ministry of the Regional Development and Public Works – to develop rules and regulations for minimum requirements for safe work conditions, for terms and conditions for using the water supply and sewage systems and other.

As a trade union defending the interests of our members from the water supply and sewage sector on the one hand, and as a public organization with responsibility to all Bulgarian citizens on the other hand, we believe that it is extremely important to define the price of the water supply and sewage services. The price should be socially acceptable, but also the price should give opportunities for effective modernization of the water supply and sewage system and in this way to improve the payment of the employees in the branch and to make investments in order to increase the quality of the services and to decrease the technological losses.

Ioanis Parteniotis

President

F “CIW” – “Podkrepa”