



Mr. Stavros DIMAS  
European Commissioner for the  
Environment  
European Commission  
Rue de la Loi 200  
1049 Brussels

REF. JWG/lr 296.02

Contact person: Jan Willem Goudriaan

Brussels, 3 February 2009

Dear Commissioner Dimas,

EPSU is the European Federation of Public Service Unions. EPSU organises workers in public services including in the European water and waste water services. EPSU is a recognised social partner, member of ETUC. EPSU members are also citizens and understand the importance of affordable, clean drinking water and safe sanitation services for workers, their families and the communities in which they live.

#### **European input in the World Water Forum, Istanbul 2009**

We were surprised to learn that you endorsed the initiative of the European Water Partnership, regarding the Water Manifesto, and which they promote as Europe's input into the World Water Forum, during a conference on Saving Europe's Water (5 November 2008), organised by Friends of Europe, Coca-Cola, Dow Chemical and Veolia Environment.

Please note that this initiative is not endorsed by a large group of civil society organisations, including the trade unions. Please note further that the World Water Forum itself is highly controversial and will be even more so in Istanbul. One of the reasons for this is that it is organised by a self-appointed World Water Council (WWC) which is influenced, and even dominated, by private sector companies, and this while 90% of the world's water companies are publicly owned (they hardly have representation in the WWC). Trade unions are not part of the WWC, and neither are many civil society groups in Europe.

#### **Role of the World Water Council**

EPSU and many other groups have for several years argued that such an important Forum should be organised by the UN. The European Commission plays an important role in the sector and is one of the world's largest donors regarding water projects and infrastructure. We ask you to use your influence to ensure a more democratic set up under the UN of the World Water forum.

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### **Water pricing**

We have also noticed that the European Commission is fully supporting pricing policies. While producing water has a price, this can be accounted for in many different ways, including through taxation. It is important for the European Commission not to push water pricing policies that do not take account of a democratic process, the social effects and comprehensive consultation with all in society. The Water Framework Directive and resolutions of the European Parliament have underlined that water is not a commodity and the European Commission should respect this.

### **The alternative: Public - Public Partnerships.**

The Commission will be aware that one of the most controversial issues is the privatisation of water services directly or through forms of public-private partnerships. This is not just in Europe but across the world. As well, it is well known that the private water companies are withdrawing from investing in developing countries as risks are high and profits too low.

Referring to the above point that most of the world's water utilities are publicly owned, and that private operation is highly controversial, the UN Secretary General Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation (chaired by the Dutch Crown Prince) has developed the concept of Global Water Operators Partnership, designed to facilitate cooperation principally among public water operators. It is the most important concrete development to reach the MDG Water targets, and very broadly supported including by the trade unions, NGOs and water-activists, such as the European Network for Public Water. The European Commission should approve and support this in its preparation for the World Water Forum, and make funds available to stimulate these public-public partnerships.

Dear Commissioner,

The European Commission can make an extremely important contribution to the World Water Forum. We request the Commission:

- to support initiatives to have the World Water Forum organised by the UN rather than the World Water Council;
- to support the public-public partnership approach as the most promising and consensual way forward to reach the Millennium Development Goals and to refrain from support to the PPP approach.

We look forward to your answer and the European Commission's proposals for a reformed World Water Council. EPSU is fully prepared to consider with you how trade unions can play a role in promoting public-public partnerships.

Yours sincerely,



Jan Willem Goudriaan  
EPSU Deputy General Secretary