European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU)

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Commission lacks ambition in replying to first European Citizens' Initiative

The European Commission (EC) published a Communication today that gives its official response to the first successful European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) which called on the EC "to implement the human right to water and sanitation in European law." In the Communication, the European Commission does recall the importance of the human right to water and sanitation and states the importance of water as a public good and fundamental value and that "*water is not a commercial product*". However, that's as far as it goes.

"The reaction of the European Commission lacks any real ambition to respond appropriately to the expectations of 1.9 million people" says **Jan Willem Goudriaan**, vice-president of the ECI Right2Water. "*I regret that there is no proposal for legislation recognising the human right to water*."

The ECI also asked for a legal commitment that there would be no EU initiatives to liberalise water and sanitation services. But there is nothing in the Communication on this. We certainly welcome the fact that the support of people for our ECI led to the exclusion of water and sanitation services from the concessions directive. However, the Commission's Communication makes no commitment to explicitly exclude these services from trade negotiations such as the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP).

Nevertheless, there are aspects of the European Commission response that we do consider to be positive. For example, the recognition that the provision of water services is generally the responsibility of local authorities which are closest to citizens. This confirms the trend towards remunicipalisation across Europe which according to the communication is the safest way for water to be kept out of the internal market rules, one of the main demands of the ECI.

We also welcome the commitment of the Commission to promote universal access to water and sanitation in its development policies and to promote public-public partnerships.

We expect that the review of the Water Framework Directive (WFD) and the Drinking Water Directive will be an opportunity to realise the human right to water and sanitation in the EU. The Citizens' Committee expects to be considered as a major stakeholder.

We will be asking the political parties and their candidates for President of the EC to commit to proposing legislation to implement the human right to water and sanitation and not to liberalise water and sanitation services in the EU and beyond. This will be important for the European elections in May 2014.

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EPSU is the European Federation of Public Service Unions. It is the largest federation of the ETUC and comprises 8 million public service workers from over 265 trade unions; EPSU organizes workers in the energy, water and waste sectors, health and social services and local and national administration, in all European countries including in the EU's Eastern Neighborhood. EPSU is the recognized regional organization of Public Services International (PSI).