

World Water Day: right to water and sanitation can be secured by promoting Public-Public Partnerships



(22 March 2024) **One year after the successful [EESC European Blue Deal conference](#), EPSU urges the European Commission to intensify its actions in favor of an unalienable right to water and sanitation. Despite its promises, the Commission has yet to initiate the first steps towards a Water Resilience Directive, while poverty continues to spread, pollution scandals multiply and the water cycle is increasingly altered by climate change.**

Back in 2012, EPSU collected [1.9 million signatures](#) for the [right2water European Citizens' Initiative](#). This initiative was a key factor leading to legislation such as the [Drinking Water Directive](#) (2020) and in [blocking large-scale privatisation programs](#) at a time when the Commission was constantly pushing for the liberalisation of water and sanitation services.

In 2010 the UN General Assembly voted in favour of [a text](#) stating that "The human right to water is indispensable for leading a life in human dignity. It is a prerequisite for the realization of other human rights." Although the EU has adopted several directives imposing minimum sanitary standards and national regulatory tools on member states, [48 million people in Europe lack access to piped water at home, while 31 million lack access to basic sanitation](#).

EPSU is firmly opposed to the liberalisation of water, which is a common good. It is only through solid public services that it can be properly distributed in a just and ecological way. Primary access to water must be made free, while excessive misuse must be punished, to ensure that this central resource is used sustainably.

Reversing the liberalisation of water and all forms of Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) is even more necessary given the inability of the private sector to deal with climate issues. Firstly, profit too often motivates private companies to ignore health standards, for example by using illegal water purification techniques. Secondly, repeated rains and equally intense droughts call for a high level of coordination at European level.

The right to water is not purely a matter of hygiene. Of course, the European Commission is right to set minimum standards and should continue to do so. To this end, EPSU responded to the public [consultation](#) on the Nitrates Directive, which should be even more ambitious, and not minimised under the pretext of "reducing administrative burden". The Commission must hold companies much more accountable for water pollution, and must refrain entirely from [watering down the polluter-pays principle](#).

Joining [an open call](#) with civil society organisations, we call on the Commission to initiate a Water Resilience Directive, and to take comprehensive measures that address the social and environmental crisis. When referring to innovative finance, and blending of finance, in relation to water, the Commission is considering guaranteeing private sector investments by taking on the risks. EPSU is firmly opposed to this and urges the Commission to take a different perspective.

This World Water Day must be the start of a dynamic that places water as a European priority. To mark the day, EPSU participated in a protest in favour of saving the public company Vivaqua, against the full cost recovery principle and for universal public services.

Read EPSU's position on the EU Blue Deal [here](#).

Read more on the Right to Water European Citizens' Initiative [here](#).

Read our letter to Von der Leyen on the Water Resilience Initiative [here](#).

Read the European Economic and Social Committee's opinions on an EU Blue Deal and EU Water Agenda [here](#).

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