

EPSU Circular LC N° 6 (2014)

To the EPSU affiliated unions in the
Energy, Water and Waste sectors;
To the members of the EPSU Standing
Committee on Public Utilities

Ref: JWG/cb
12 March 2014

Thessaloniki Water Company (EYATH) - referendum

Dear Colleagues,

We kindly ask for your support to make a success of the local referendum that the workers of the Thessaloniki Water Company (EYATH) are organising against the privatisation of their company, 18 May 2014.

Support can be provided in different ways:

- a financial contribution to help pay for media coverage in the local media
- volunteers that would assist in the final days of the campaign and help staff the polling stations on the day itself. This observance is important as the government and mass media will try to delegitimise the referendum.
- coverage of the struggle of the workers and Greek communities in your trade union magazine or other publications.
- participate in an international observer delegation on the day.

The struggle is symbolic for the resistance of many workers and our unions and communities against the austerity policies of the governments and the European Commission. It also links with the successful European Citizens' Initiative for the human right to water and sanitation services, and the work EPSU and member unions have been doing over the years as part of the European Water Movement. Your support even if small, can make a difference.

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- Financial contributions can be made to the EPSU bank account : IBAN BE62 4376 2009 4261 – BIC: KREDBEBB. Please use the reference: Thessaloniki. EPSU will provide the funds to our colleagues which will use them for running advertisements in the local newspapers, producing the ballots, and general media coverage.
- In case your unions can send volunteers to assist, please contact Pablo Sanchez in the EPSU office psanchez@epsu.org
- For interviews, please contact the President of the local water trade union directly Γ.Αρχοντοπουλος (George Argonopoulos) gewrgiosa@yahoo.com
- For more background information, please see the website of the local campaign platform with which the union works together <http://sostetonero.blogspot.be/> (the website is in Greek but Google Translate does assist in getting a good sense of the issues they seek to cover).

Many thanks for your contribution. Let's help our brothers and sisters win this fight.



Jan Willem Goudriaan
EPSU Deputy General Secretary

Background

As you know the Greek government is executing an austerity programme. This has been imposed by the Troika (European Commission, European Central Bank and IMF) That programme is having a disastrous effect on the Greek economy which has collapsed, pushing many workers into unemployment, many people into poverty and forces many young people into immigration. The Greek health system is in dire straits, municipalities have no funding (After 40 years malaria is back as the funds for municipalities to buy pesticides and spray fields are lacking). Collective bargaining and trade union rights have come under pressure and the nr. of civil servants has been reduced sharply. The government is also privatising many assets, often far below their value, and often only to a single bidder.

It has also decided to privatise the water companies of Athens and Thessaloniki. It is part of the austerity programme imposed by the Troika of the European Commission, European Central Bank and IMF. The workers, community groups and many others have now decided to organise a local referendum against the privatisation in Thessaloniki. It will take place 18 May, at the same time as the local elections. The referendum is non-binding but it is expected that the investors will respect the outcome of the referendum that they are not welcome.

The union and local supporters have mobilised in many different ways and opinion polls have indicated that more then 3/4 of the people questions are against and this includes close to 60% of all the people that would vote for the conservative party in government. The majors of the municipalities of Thessaloniki have declared themselves against but the national government has ruled that their opinion does not count. This also under pressure of the Eurozone group of ministers of finance. The President has come out in support of the privatisation of the water companies. Both in Athens and Thessaloniki the unions were influential in collecting enough signatures for the European Citizens Initiative to propel Greece past the minimum threshold needed.

EPSU has supported the union in different ways and together with the organisations participating in the European Water Movement we have written to the European Commission asking to stop the privatisation. The Commission replied it has no competence in the matter (national affair) but also has defended the privatisation on ideological grounds in its response. EPSU has also questioned European Commissioners Malmstrom and Rehn regarding the possible corruption that could be involved as no serious evaluations have been published why these companies should be privatised. The consortia which has shown an interest are linked with Greek business interests close to the Samaras government.

After a local consortium composed of a citizens' initiative and supported by the unions (The initiative 136) was excluded to bid, there are two consortia left. One is around the French multinational Suez Environment and includes the Greek construction company EI-Aktor and the other is based on the Israeli water company (Mekorot). For a briefing:

<http://epsu.org/a/9665>