



Protecting water as a public asset

The GUE/NGL is a confederal group in the European Parliament made up of 35 MEPs from 13 EU countries working for peace, solidarity, social justice, equality, democracy and human rights in Europe and beyond.

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A public good

Access to water and sanitation has been recognised as a universal right by the United Nations, yet today in Europe many citizens do not enjoy this right as a result of water privatisation and market liberalisation.

Troika-imposed bailout conditions have compounded this problem in EU countries worst-hit by the crisis, such as Ireland, Greece and Portugal.

The GUE/NGL believes that water and sanitation provision is more successful when it is in the hands of governments, not the private sector. The European Parliament must keep fighting for water to remain a public good, not a commodity!



Selling off social gains

The Commission believes that privatising public utilities such as water supply firms brings benefits to society through increased efficiency and competitiveness; however the reality is that liberalising the water sector allows private monopolies to dominate the sector and turns water into a commodity that the most deprived has diminishing access to.

Privatisation induces inequalities and exclusion, leads to steep price hikes, excessive leaks, water-service disruptions, deteriorating service quality, and unaccountable management. In short: more social injustice imposed on those hit hardest by the ongoing economic crisis.

Selling off water firms is also a blatant contradiction of the EU's supposed neutrality on the question of public or private ownership and management of collective water services, as set out in the EU treaties.

Challenges ahead

- The European Parliament must uphold its commitments to protecting the water sector from liberalisation, which have been set out through successive resolutions, most recently in July 2012, which state that access to water should be a fundamental and universal right.
- GUE/NGL MEPs supported the 'Right to Water' European Citizens' Initiative which led to Internal Market Commissioner Michel Barnier excluding water supply from plans for new legislation in the Concessions directive. Now the European Parliament must continue to bear pressure on the Commission and Council throughout negotiations to ensure that this commitment is upheld as an EU Concessions directive will effectively force municipal governments across Europe to further privatise public services. Therefore if water is not excluded water contracts could be put up for EU-wide bidding, giving multinationals the chance to swoop in and deny access to a public good essential to life itself.
- GUE/NGL MEPs also support the 'Right to Water' campaign's demands for EU legislation that requires governments to implement the human right to water and sanitation as recognised by the United Nations by ensuring all citizens have access to sufficient and clean drinking water and sanitation.
- GUE/NGL believes that management of water resources should not be subject to internal market rules and that the right to water and sanitation should be universally enjoyed. Water services must be excluded from liberalisation.