

# IS RIGHT TO WATER A REALITY IN THE EU?

## An explainer

### Did you know?

Only 20% of Europeans found drinking water outside of their home country acceptable

52 billion liters of water are bottled and drunk by European in one year. This is equivalent to 994 430 tonnes of plastic.

The Paris Agreement objectives on climate change: Reducing the consumption of bottled water, estimated to go down from 100 to 88 litres per year by 2050, can reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 1.2 million tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>

Source: European Commission

### Citizens demand the right to water

The first-ever European Citizens' Initiative, on Right2Water, gathered 1.6 million signatures from citizens across the EU. In a loud and clear voice, the petition demanded that water must remain a public service and public good.

Validated signatures were submitted to the European Commission in 2013 at a time it was driving an aggressive privatisation push that threatened to turn public services, like water, into means for profit for corporations.

Under the terms of the Initiative, the Commission was obliged to hear and respond to the demands of the petitioners. These are:

- The EU institutions and Member States be obliged to ensure that all inhabitants enjoy the right to water and sanitation.
- Water supply and management of water resources not be subject to 'internal market rules' and that water services are excluded from liberalisation.
- The EU increases its efforts to achieve universal access to water and sanitation.

Finally, in February 2018 the Commission presented a proposal to revise the Drinking Water Directive (DWD), which is 20 years-old and strived to address some of the demands.



**SAFE  
DRINKING WATER  
FOR ALL EUROPEANS**

Water scarcity affects at least

**11%**  
of the European population

Nearly

**2%** of the population  
lacks access  
to sanitation

More than

**1 million**  
people still lack access to a safe  
and clean drinking water supply



### Did you know?

*A World Bank study comparing the performance of more than 1,200 water and energy utilities in 71 developing and transition economies does not find conclusive evidence of superior private sector efficiency.*

*In 2009/10, water bills represented around 2.3% of average household spending in 2013, rising to more than 5% for the poorest 10% of households in England and Wales*

Source: Right2Water

### What has been the Commission's response?

The DWD showed to be a relevant tool in ensuring the high quality of the water consumed in the EU but it still uses parameters set over 20 years ago. The proposal aims to update those parameters, correct shortcomings and partially respond to demands of the European Citizens' Initiative.

While the Commission's proposal strengthens water quality parameters, in line with World Health Organization (WHO) standards, it is ironically weak in respecting the demands of the Right2Water petition. Crucially, it does not recognise the right to water as a fundamental right for all people.

The European Parliament is currently debating changes to the Commission's proposal before it is adopted into law. There were some mild improvements and disappointingly some aspects that were even weakened. Overall the Parliament's proposal does not radically change the content of what the Commission proposed, which is not good enough for us.

### GUE/NGL stands firm with the people's demands

Left MEPs put forward proposals to strengthen water quality standards, which we consider not being sufficiently strict in the current draft such as concentration levels of polyfluoroalkyl substances (a group of man-made chemicals present in consumer products like cookware and clothing) and we argued for closer monitoring of micro-plastics in water.

We strongly disagree with both the Commission and right-wing MEPs on their disregard for the European Citizens' Initiative petition. We therefore opposed and voted against attempts to weaken key elements of the Right to Water and saw this as an insult to the democratic process.

In particular, we are pushing back against attempts to water down obligations on the right to water for member states. We want to make access to water for all an obligation for member states.

### What our MEPs say?

**Lynn Boylan (Sinn Féin, Ireland)** "The Drinking Water Directive is supposed to be the Commission's response to the European Citizen's Initiative, Right2Water, which made important demands on access to water. What we have ended up with is a Parliament position that does an injustice to this citizen's petition. GUE/NGL are making efforts to enshrine the right to water with solid obligations on Member States."



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