

9 September 2015

Adoption by the European Parliament of an initiative report on the follow-up to the European Citizen's Initiative Right2Water (2014/2239(INI))

Convergence in Europe on the Human right to water and sanitation: all players must act now

On 8th September 2015, the EU parliament adopted its own initiative report following-up the European Citizen's Initiative Right2Water. During the debate, the Parliament converged on the fact that “EU member states have a duty to ensure that access to water is guaranteed for all, regardless of the supplier and that suppliers provide safe drinking water and improve sanitation”¹.

In 2013, AquaFed drew attention to the need for action, calling for inclusion of the Human right to water and sanitation in the European charter of Fundamental Rights.

AquaFed welcomes the Parliament's recognition of the paramount importance of implementing the Human right to water and sanitation, and of involving all actors to the best of their capacities.

AquaFed looks forward to dialogue and to contributing to implementing this Right both in and outside Europe.

On 8th September 2015, the EU parliament adopted its own initiative report on the follow-up to the European Citizen's Initiative Right2Water. The implementation of the human right to water and sanitation is of paramount importance to improve health, dignity and living standards of European citizens and of many people in countries supported by the European Union.

AquaFed drew attention to this in 2013 by calling for the inclusion of the right to water and sanitation in the European charter of Fundamental Rights. AquaFed and its members have supported the right to water and sanitation for many years and are pleased to see that the current European Parliamentary debate is converging on the essential principles. This underlines the importance for governments to exercise informed choices on how to implement the right. This includes recognition of the need for accountability and transparency in decision-making and efficiency and effectiveness in execution, irrespective of who operates.

Human rights holders are people who require water to be delivered and wastewater to be collected and treated in ways that meet the standards set out by the government in each country to satisfy the progressive implementation of the human right.

The need for investment in water infrastructures and services is huge, and all actors must be involved to the best of their capacities. Public authorities must reinforce their leadership and control over water and sanitation services. They need to explore new avenues for implementing and enforcing the objectives of progress in coverage, access for the poorest (including with appropriate tariffs), environmental protection, adaptation to climate and demographic changes, economic sustainability, and fair contribution to the development of their countries.

¹ European Parliament's press release: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/content/20150903IPR91525/html/Right2water-citizens%E2%80%99-initiative-Commission-must-act-say-MEPs>

The **principle of subsidiarity** is particularly important in deciding on how to deliver water and sanitation services, and it is the responsibility of governments at appropriate level to make these choices and to remain accountable for the results.

Safeguarding this freedom of choice and the neutrality of the EU institutions is beyond discussion, as was recalled by both the Commission and the Parliament.

The choice of the “technical” operator must be made by the public authority that remains in control. The private sector is an open resource which may be involved following to the public tendering procedures in force in the EU.

While some intended to exclude the choice of the private sector option from the range of solutions, the Parliament recognised the positive contribution of all operators including the private sector. Those who promote a contrary position are in practice hindering the people they say they want to help.

The contribution of private service providers is substantial in a number of EU countries, either operating alone as in England, or in parallel with in-house operators as in France, Spain, Portugal, Czech Republic, Estonia or Italy²... Private service providers bring the flexibility and innovation, which many authorities are not in position to guarantee with the sole use of in-house services. Important dimensions are effective control and regulation by public authorities, the reversibility of any choice, and the transparency over results.

AquaFed welcomes the contributions of the Commission and the European Parliament, and calls on the EU institutions to raise their ambitions by **grounding the Human Right to Water and Sanitation to concrete actions**:

1. Europe should include the Human Right to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation in the European Charter of Fundamental Rights
2. The Commission should propose a reporting system on the Human Right to water, Sanitation and Hygiene, in line with the soon to-be adopted indicators supporting the Sustainable Development Goals at Global level
3. The Commission should elaborate a framework for a mandatory, transparent, on-line publication process for key environmental, social and economic performance of all EU water and wastewater services, making the best of existing systems at national level.

AquaFed and its members look forward to dialogue and working with the institutions and all stakeholders who are committed to advancing the implementation of the Human Right to Water and Sanitation both in Europe and outside Europe.

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AquaFed is the International Federation of Private Water Operators. Open to companies and associations of companies of all sizes and from all countries, it aims to contribute to solving water challenges by making Private Sector know-how and experience available to the international community. It brings together more than 400 water companies that serve hundreds of millions of people in 40 countries. Members of the Federation participate actively in the improvement of water and sanitation services, thus contributing to make the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation effective for people.

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² Private operators contribute to the services of about 70 million Europeans.