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EU Commission Forces Crisis-hit Countries to Privatise Water

Brussels – The European Commission is deliberately promoting privatization of water services as one of the conditions being imposed as part of bailouts, it acknowledged in a letter to civil society groups on 26 September 2012.[1] EU Commissioner Olli Rehn's directorate was responding to questions posed in an [open letter](#) concerning the European Commission's role in imposing privatisation through the Troika in Greece, Portugal and other countries.[2] The civil society groups have today written to Commissioner Rehn to demand that he stop "any further pressure to impose water privatisation conditionalities".[3]

The Commission's push for privatisation disregards the fact that water privatisation has failed to deliver results in Europe and around the world. Paris and many other cities have recently remunicipalised their water services due to negative experiences with privatisation. The Dutch government in 2004 passed a law banning private sector provision of water supply and the Italian Constitutional Court ruled that any future legislation attempting to privatise public services would be unconstitutional.

The Commission has not put forward any evidence to back its stance in its reply, even though research shows that public provision is often more effective than private. It also violates key articles of the EU Treaty that state the EU should be neutral on the question of water ownership.[4]

Members of the European Parliament have already tabled a question to the Commission asking for clarification on the contradiction between the Troika's recommendations and the required neutrality of the Commission.

"This really demonstrates how the Commission has lost touch with reality. Their ideological arguments are not based on substantiated facts and goes to the extreme of ignoring the democratic will of the people," said Gabriella Zanzanini, Director of European Affairs for Food & Water Europe.

"The Commission has a lot to explain. Not only is there is no evidence at all to support the view that the private sector is more efficient, but there is very strong public resistance to privatization. European citizens will not back down quietly on this," said Jan Willem Goudriaan of the European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU).

As movements around Europe are gathering momentum to fight the sale of public water, the first European Citizen's Initiative has been launched to promote the implementation of the right to water for all in Europe and the idea that water supply and management of water resources should not be subject to 'internal market rules,' and that water should be excluded from liberalisation.[5]

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Notes:

[1] <http://documents.foodandwaterwatch.org/doc/FoodWaterEuropeWaterPrivatization17Oct2012.pdf>

[2] <http://corporateeurope.org/open-letter-eu-commission-water-privatisation>

[3] <http://documents.foodandwaterwatch.org/doc/FoodWaterEuropeWaterPrivatization17Oct2012.pdf>

[4] The EU's supposed neutrality on the question of public or private ownership and management of collective water services is outlined in article 345 TFEU and Art. 171 of the Directive 2006/123/EC on services in the internal market.

[5] <http://www.right2water.eu>