



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION
OF PUBLIC WATER OPERATORS

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Commissioner Nicholas Schmit
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Access to water and sanitation must be a priority in the Commission action plan to implement the Pillar of Social Rights

Dear Commissioner Sinkevičius, Dear Commissioner Schmit,

The European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR), proclaimed by EU institutions in 2017, is a set of rights aimed at ensuring equal opportunities, fair working conditions and social protection for citizens. Among its 20 key principles, the Pillar should provide everyone with access to good quality essential services, including water and sanitation. An action plan to implement the Pillar of Social Rights is expected 3 March. This is an opportunity to outline stronger action which is needed to ensure access to water and sanitation.

For more than ten years, a wide range of organisations and citizen movements have been advocating for the formal recognition of the right to water (as defined by the UN) in EU legislation, and for bold policy measures to make it a reality in the daily lives of European inhabitants. In 2012, the European Water Movement successfully launched a European Citizens Initiative to mobilize around these issues and draw them to the attention of European decision-makers. The revised Drinking Water Directive, adopted last year, is clearly a step in the right direction with ambitious initiatives to improve access to good quality water. Nonetheless, this is not enough and much more still needs to be done, especially regarding access to sanitation, which is also an essential element of adequate housing. This was underlined by the European Parliament in its recent resolution calling for the EU to recognise decent and affordable housing as an enforceable human right. We continue to campaign for further engagement to promote the human right to water and sanitation and to ensure that no users who cannot afford to pay have their water supply disconnected. The Pillar of Social Rights, especially Principle 20 on access to essential services, provides a new opportunity to make the crucial step to guarantee the human right to water.

We believe that water is a common good, and access to it is a fundamental human right. Water needs to be managed in a socially responsible way to ensure everyone has a fair share, and to secure its conservation for the benefit of future generations. We urge the European commission to publish an ambitious action plan to implement Principle 20 of the EPSR.

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Also, access to water and sanitation are public service missions and should be recognised as such in the EU regulatory framework. Using a right-based approach, we need to develop a set of policy measures to make the right to water a reality. Public services operators and companies are best placed to deliver it, prioritising universality, affordably and inclusiveness over profit-making.

The economic downturn due to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the climate emergency will make access to water and sanitation even more difficult for the disadvantaged in the EU. We expect concrete proposals from the European Commission in its action plan. Everyone has the right to water and sanitation and the Commission should put on the table a set of concrete initiatives that sets out how to realise these objectives.

Yours



Jan Willem Goudriaan
EPSU General Secretary



Bernard Van Nuffel
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