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20

Activity Report

// AQUA PUBLICA EUROPEA



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION
OF PUBLIC WATER OPERATORS

AQUA PUBLICA EUROPEA

THE EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF PUBLIC WATER OPERATORS
BOULEVARD DE L'IMPERATRICE 17/19
1000 BRUSSELS, BELGIUM

OCTOBER 2021

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the challenging and unprecedented situation that was determined by the Covid-19 outbreak at the beginning of 2020, **Aqua Publica Europea** proved to be a vibrant community. Thanks to the commitment and dedication of its members, our network was able to promptly organise an intense exchange of information and experiences that, we are confident, helped each operator to fine-tune its response to the emergency.

In addition to facilitating exchanges among members, **Aqua Publica Europea** also worked on the “communication front”: a series of communication campaigns were launched to give visibility to the commitment of the public operators and their staff to ensure continuity of water services despite all the difficulties and uncertainties created by the lockdown.

It is therefore a source of great satisfaction the fact that the results of our joint work were then employed and praised by important institutions and stakeholders, including the Executive Director of UN-Habitat and renowned academics working on public services.

If the response to COVID's emergency absorbed a significant part of our efforts in 2020, **Aqua Publica Europea's** activity was certainly not limited to that. With regard to EU policies, the organisation of a seminar together with the European Commission on the joint implementation of the Water Framework Directive and Wastewater Treatment Directive was an important

opportunity to provide a contribution to the debate about the revision of these two key pieces of legislation. Drawing on the concrete experience of **APE's** members, we showed the importance of increasing the coherence of the policy framework at the EU level, if efficient and fair management of water resources is to be achieved.

This seminar offered a solid basis for a sustained engagement with the European Commission on their revision of the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive that continued in 2021. But our advocacy action touched upon also many other subjects at the European and international level, including sludge management, taxonomy, development cooperation with developing countries, the impact of common agriculture policy on water resources, and many others.

Last but not least, at the end of 2020, Bernard Van Nuffel (President of Vivaqua, Belgium) was appointed as the new President of **APE**, thus replacing Ms Célia Blauel who, after accompanying for 6 years the growth of our association and the consolidation of Eau de Paris, took up new responsibilities. The appointment of Mr Van Nuffel was also the occasion to launch the revision of **APE's** strategy, in light of the profound cultural and political changes that occurred in the last 5 years. This revision will be concluded in 2021.

HIGHLIGHTS OF 2020

THE ASSOCIATION

MEMBERS
+2

Aqua Publica
Europea gathers a
total of **65** members

COVID-19 RESPONSE

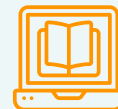


- Joint statement (March 2020)
- Video campaigns
- Brochure (May 2020)
- Publication (June 2020)
- Position Paper (July 2020)



3 Webinars

gathering more
than **100** participants



2 Resources Library

APE POLICY & ADVOCACY

4



Position
Papers

4



Press
Releases

3



Join
Statements

+70



Meetings with
stakeholder and
institutions
(in person & online)

APE PLATFORM



10

Working Groups
Meetings

4



Webinars on
COVID-19 responses



WATER ERASMUS
AQUA PUBLICA EUROPEA

1st Water Erasmus
initiative annual
call for interest

VISIBILITY & REACH

1



Publication



5

Contribution to
institutional events

4



Press
Mentions



+25%



+6%

+2k

Social Media
growth

2



Editorial
Contributions

A close-up photograph of a person in a white lab coat and white gloves. They are holding a graduated cylinder in their right hand and pouring a yellowish liquid into an Erlenmeyer flask held in their left hand. The background is blurred, showing green foliage. A semi-transparent blue rectangle is overlaid on the center of the image, containing white text.

**2020,
AN
UNPRECEDENTED
YEAR**

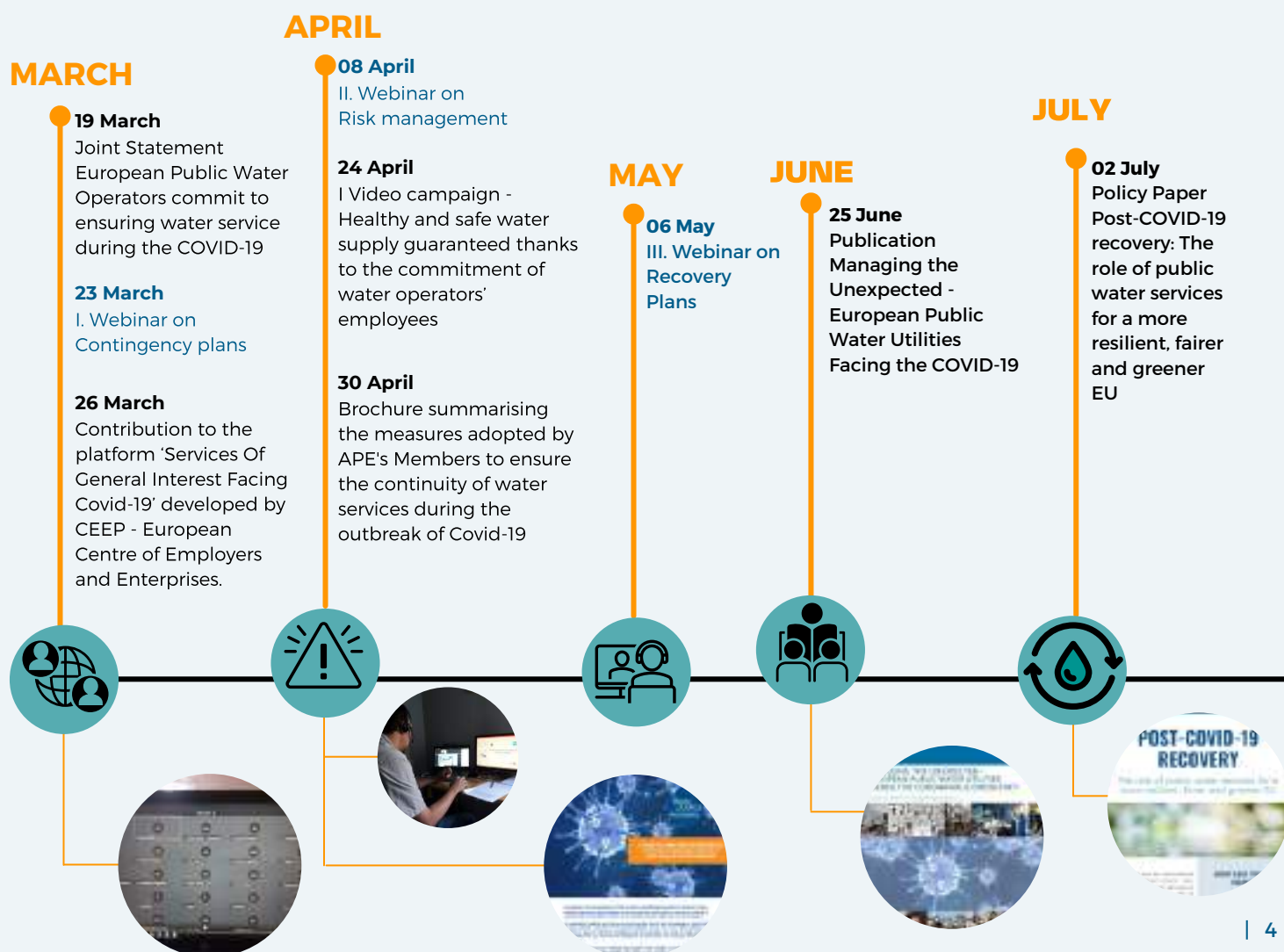
COVID-19: RESPONSE COOPERATION AND SOLIDARITY

In 2020, Europe and the rest of the world were affected by the unprecedented health crisis, which caused serious challenges to – among other things – the continuity of essential services including water and sanitation.

In this challenging time, **Aqua Publica Europea** confirmed the crucial role that the platform plays for its members by facilitating the sharing of experiences on approaches and lessons learnt on managing the crisis. Through a series of dedicated webinars, repositories and other

communication tools, members could learn from other members' experience and consequently adapt or confirm their response in terms of crisis management.

Overview of the initiatives launched by Aqua Publica to help members' response to the impact of Covid-19



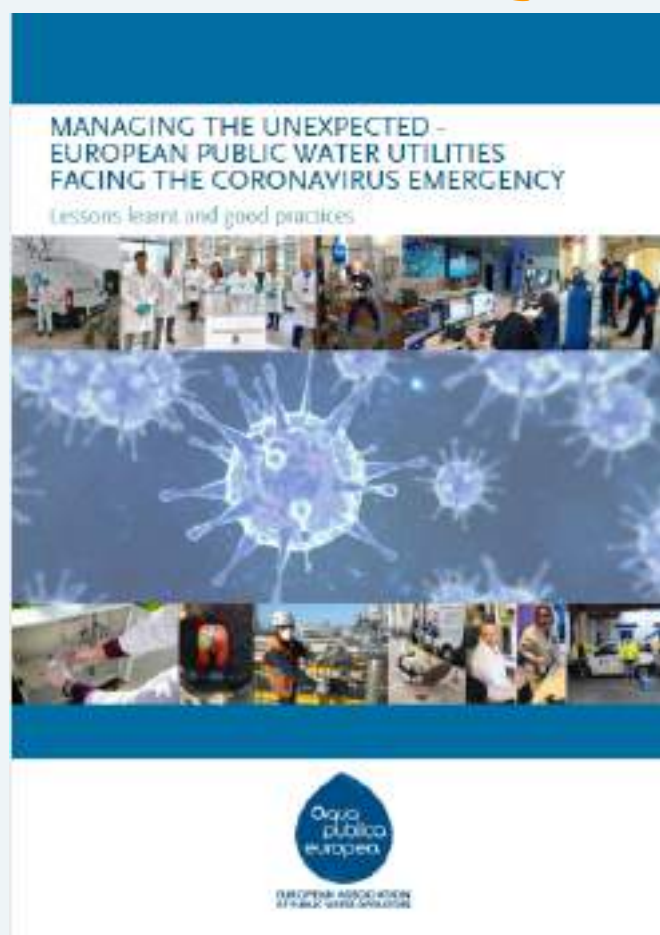
PUBLICATION

MANAGING THE UNEXPECTED - EUROPEAN PUBLIC WATER UTILITIES FACING THE COVID-19 - LESSONS LEARNT AND GOOD PRACTICES

In March 2020 **Aqua Publica Europea** published *Managing the Unexpected - European Public Water Utilities Facing the COVID-19 - Lessons learnt and good practices*. The publication provides an overview of the responses and strategies developed by the members of Aqua Publica Europea — to ensure the continuity of water services during the COVID-19 emergency.

Managing the Unexpected aims to give an account of experiences and lessons learnt during the first months of the health crisis with the hope that, as the UN-Habitat Executive Director **Maimunah Mohd Sharif** states in her preface, **“by sharing what has been tried and tested, these cases can contribute to the ongoing learning and support operators to help them respond to their specific situations”**.

Building on a series of virtual meetings and dialogues organised by **Aqua Publica Europea** during the first months of 2020, the publication is therefore the result of concrete collaboration and solidarity in the public sector at the European level.



In collaboration with:



EXCHANGING ON RESPONSES TO COVID-19

MAIN INITIATIVES

ONLINE EXCHANGES

In response to the COVID-19 health crisis, **Aqua Publica Europea** organised three online meetings to help members exchange on the measures adopted and approaches to tackle the consequences of the pandemic in their local territories.

1

CONTINGENCY PLANS, March 2020

Participants presented an overview of their earliest response to the COVID-19 crisis and its contingency plans.

2

OPERATIONAL ISSUES, April 2020

Participants illustrated the measures adopted to ensure business continuity during the emergency and how they were assessing the incoming risks.

3

RECOVERY PLANS, May 2020

Dedicated to discussing the measures adopted by water operators in view of the recovery phase.

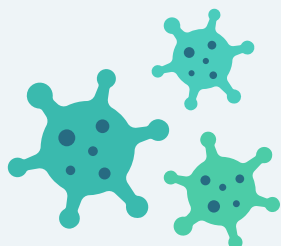
**MORE THAN
100
PARTICIPANTS**



INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY



Aqua Publica Europea also cooperated with international organisations such as *UN-Habitat/Global Water Operators' Partnerships Alliance (GWOPA)* in the organisation of exchanges with water utilities from all over the world in the framework of the webinar series "Utilities fight COVID-19", (see more in the 'Beyond Europe' chapter)





A close-up photograph of a person's hands cupping water. The hands are positioned in the center, with water splashing and bubbling around them. A semi-transparent rectangular box is overlaid on the image, containing the text "APE'S COMMUNITY" in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters. The background is dark and out of focus, emphasizing the water and hands.

APE'S COMMUNITY

2020 STRUCTURE & MILESTONES



General Meeting 2021

Video-conference
03 September 2020



Management Board

Members



CELIA BLAUDEL
PRESIDENT
(Jan-Sept 2020)
Eau de Paris
President
FRANCE



BERNARD VAN NUFFEL
PRESIDENT
(Nov 2020 - today)
VIVAQUA
President
BELGIUM



PAOLO ROMANO
VICE PRESIDENT
SMAT
President
ITALY



STEFANO CETTI
MM
Director General
ITALY



NICOLA DE SANCTIS
Acquedotto Pugliese
General Manager
ITALY



GERRY GALVIN
Irish Water
Chief Technical Officer
IRELAND



JOAKIM GIACOMONI
SIAAP
Head of International Relations
FRANCE



HANS GOOSSENS
Aquaflanders
Director General
De Watergroep
BELGIUM



FERENC KESZLER
Budapest Waterworks
CEO
HUNGARY



MIGUEL LEMOS RODRIGUES
Águas de Gaia
CEO
PORTUGAL



NATHALIE LEROY
HAMBURG WASSER
Managing Director
GERMANY



GÉRARD LUYET
SIG Genève
Director-Water Services
SWITZERLAND



DANIELLE MAMETZ
FNCCR/FEP
Member of the Board
FRANCE



ROBERTO MANTOVANI
Viveracqua
President
ITALY



JAIME MORELL
AEOPAS
Secretary General
SPAIN



JON RATHJEN
Scottish Government
Water Industry
Team Leader
UNITED KINGDOM



JEAN-MARC RIEBEL
SDEA
Vice-President
FRANCE



ERIC SMIT
Aquawal
President
BELGIUM

Meetings

- Brussels, Belgium - 03 March 2020
- Online - 10 June 2020
- Online - 16 November 2020



Working Groups

- WG 1 Financing and Economic Aspects
- WG 2 Performance
- WG 3 Communication
- WG 4 Innovation
- WG 5 Sludge and Circular Economy
- WG 6 User-Centred public services

Secretariat



**BRUSSELS
OFFICE**



MILO FIASCONARO
Executive
Director



JOVANA GOJKOVIC
Senior Officer,
External Relations



ALICIA GABÁN BARRIO
Communications
Officer

NEW TEAM MEMBER
SINCE
FEBRUARY 2020

GENERAL MEETING

VIDEO-CONFERENCE 03 SEPTEMBER 2020

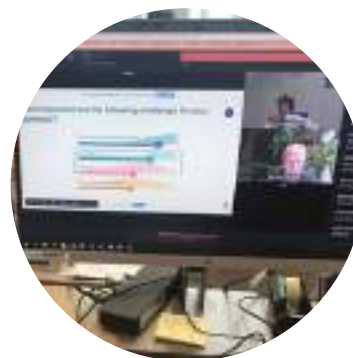
On 3 September 2020, more than 60 **Aqua Publica Europea's** delegates participated in the online General Meeting. The meeting was chaired for the last time by Ms Célia Baluel, who subsequently stepped down as President of **APE** and of Eau de Paris. Vice-President Mr Paolo Romano (SMAT, Italy) took over as acting President.

Despite the limitations of the online format, delegates had the opportunity to interact and express their views on a range of topics from the mission of public water operators to priorities on the circular economy.

In this context, new thematic priorities for future work were discussed and adopted:

- **water: a public service**
- **a blue-green horizon**
- **water operator: a sensitive societal actor.**

These three lines of work reflect the crucial challenges and strategic objectives that water operators and Aqua Publica must address in the coming years.



In addition, to express gratitude to Ms Blauel for her fundamental contribution to the development of the association over the last 6 years, the General Meeting was also the occasion to welcome two new members Como Acqua (Italy) and the Catalan Association of municipalities for public water management (Spain).

The General Meeting was followed by an interactive session on Water Erasmus with the special participation of the European Commission.

NEW PRESIDENT APPOINTED

MR BERNARD VAN NUFFEL

In November 2020 the Board of Directors of Aqua Publica Europea appointed Mr Bernard Van Nuffel, President of VIVAQUA (Brussels' water operator), as the new Chairman of the Association and confirmed Mr Romano (SMAT, Italy) as Vice-President.

After studying architecture, Mr Van Nuffel began his career as a civil servant in Brussels' administration in 1997. Subsequently, he was elected Deputy-Mayor in charge of infrastructures, water policy and climate of one of the municipalities of the Brussels Region in 2018, and then appointed President of VIVAQUA in 2019.

In his acceptance speech, Mr Van Nuffel highlighted four priorities for the public water sector in Europe:



My priorities:

- **Promoting public water management**
- **Fighting against climate change**
- **Accelerating decarbonisation**
- **Promoting shared management and equitable access to transboundary water resources**

NEW MEMBERS

Aqua Publica Europea welcomed two new operators, bringing the total number of

members to 65 and extending the representation of the association to 13 countries.

COMO ACQUA, ITALY



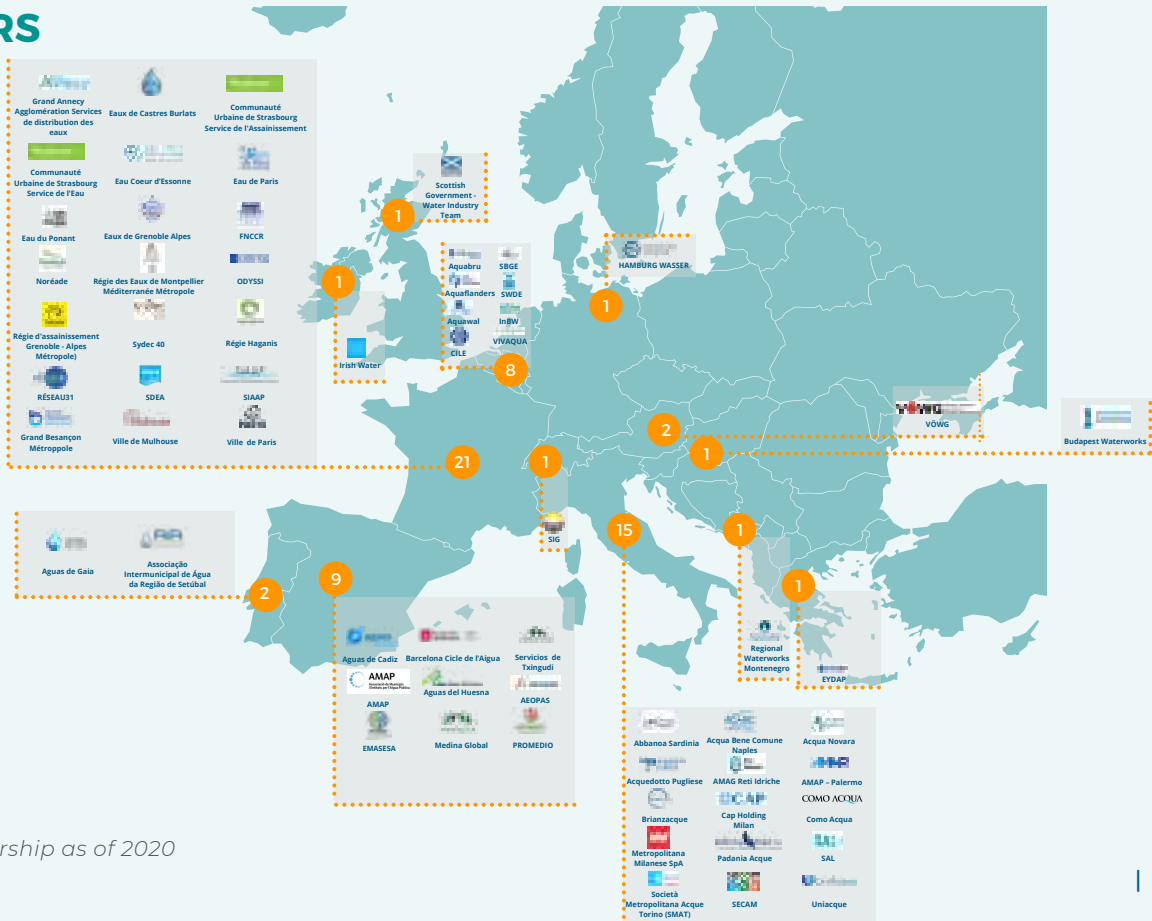
Como Acqua Srl was established in April 2014, after the Province of Como and 49 Municipalities of the Province took over the water service management. Today, Como Acqua provided water services to 516.000 people.

The Catalan Association of municipalities for public water management, SPAIN



The Catalan Association of municipalities for public water management - AMAP was established in 2018. AMAP represents 39 main Catalan municipalities and public water operators, such as Aqua Publica's member the Barcelona Cicle de l'Aigua SA (BCASA), covering a total of 44% of the population in Catalonia. The association aims to ensure that water supply and sanitation services are guaranteed equally to all citizens, recognising water services as an essential and common good, which should serve public interests rather than corporate ones.

2020 MEMBERS



*Map represents membership as of 2020

A close-up photograph of a globe, focusing on the continents of North and South America. The globe is tilted, showing the Americas in the center. The colors are vibrant, with blues for the oceans and greens and browns for the landmasses. A semi-transparent orange rectangle is overlaid on the right side of the globe, containing the text. The background is a solid green color.

DEVELOPING THE APE PLATFORM

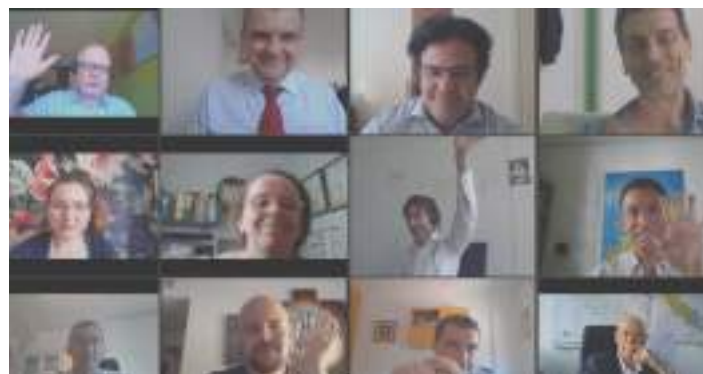
WORKING GROUPS



The Working Groups represent a fundamental pillar of the 'community dimension' of **Aqua Publica Europea**.

In March 2020, **APE's** Management Board approved the work programme for six Working Groups for the period 2020-2021 period, see here below!

The Working Groups activities in 2020 were impacted by the pandemic, but the coordinators ensured the interaction and collaboration among members through online video conferences. Furthermore, the annual programmes were adapted to take into account the new priorities following the COVID-19 emergency.



WG Innovation meeting, 28 May 2020

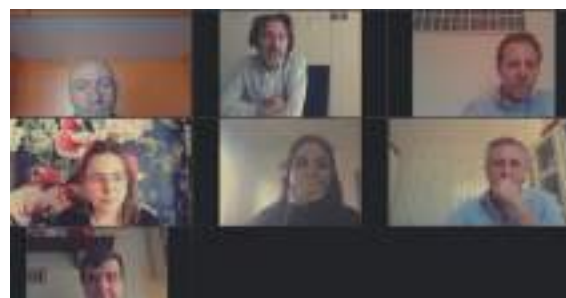
WG Financing and Economic Aspects



CEDRIC PREVEDELLO

The WG Financing and Economic Aspects is coordinated by Cedric Prevedello (Aquawal, Belgium). Members have been exchanging good practices on the conditions for effective financing of water service and emphasising the contribution of public water services to socio-economic development.

- **COVID-19 focus:** Considering the outbreak of the COVID-19, the WG discussion have been focusing on the economic impact, recovery, and post-emergency period.



18 May 2020

WG Performance



PEDRO TOMÁS MARTÍN
DE LA VEGA



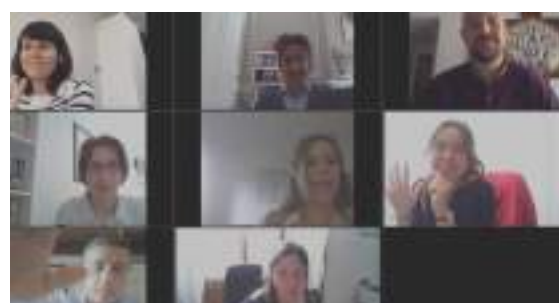
ANITA
PAPACHRISTOPOULOU



KATARINA
KRCUNOVIC

The WG Performance is coordinated by Pedro Tomas Martin de la Vega (Promedio, Badajoz, Spain), Katarina Krcunovic (Eau de Paris, Paris, Spain) and Anita Papachristopoulou (Eyda, Athens, Greece). The WG members have been exploring the conditions and characteristics of a 'well-performing public water operator' by collecting organisational charts and studying management approaches.

- **COVID-19 focus:** Following the COVID-19 outbreak, members have been sharing approaches for crisis management and lessons learnt from the emergency.



26 May 2020

WG Communication



CLAUDIO BODINI THIERRY TRUCHET

The WG Communication is coordinated by Claudio Bodini (Padania Acque, Cremona, Italy) and Thierry Truchet (Eau de Genève, Genève, Switzerland). The two main activities that members have been working on are the design of a joint survey on tap water consumption and the creation of an online catalogue where members can share their best practices and communications campaigns.

- **COVID-19 focus:** In the framework of the COVID-19, members have been sharing communication tap water campaigns in times of crisis.



09 December 2020

WG Sludge and Circular Economy



MARCO BLAZINA

The WG Sludge and Circular Economy is coordinated by Marco Blazina (MM, Milan, Italy). The WG has been collecting best practices on the best available technology for bio-sludge disposal and economic aspects of the circular economy.

- **COVID-19 focus:** In the framework of the COVID-19, participants have been sharing experiences on the impact of the coronavirus crisis on sludge management.



05 June 2020

WG Innovation



ARMANDO QUAZZO MARC RUELLE JUAN M. ORTEGA

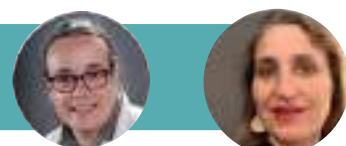
The WG Innovation is coordinated by Armando Quazzo (SMAT, Turin, Italy), Marc Ruelle (SWDE, Wallonia, Belgium) and Juan Manuel Ortega (Aguas del Huesna, Huesna, Spain). The WG has been focusing its exchanges on Water Safety Plans and on data analysis methodologies.

- **COVID-19 focus:** In light of the COVID-19, the WG online exchanges have been giving the opportunity to the participants to present their research projects to detect the presence of SARS-COV-2 traces in water and epidemiological potential of waste water.



24 November 2020

WG User-Centred public services



ARMELLE BERNARD E. MARCOVITCH

The WG User-Centred public services by Armelle Bernard and Emmanuelle Marcovitch (Eau d Paris, Paris, France). The WG members have been working on a common approach to defining the characteristics of user-centred water service, from a public sectors' angle, and on rethinking the future of customer services.

- **COVID-19 focus:** In light of the COVID-19, participants exchanges have been focusing on customer services continuity and reorganisation during and post-emergency.



12 May 2020

WATER ERASMUS

In 2020, **APE** launched the first annual call for interest to participate in the Water Erasmus initiative, with the aim to increase and systematise the realisation of staff exchanges among members.

While the COVID-19 outbreak reduced the possibilities to organise physical exchanges, the Secretariat facilitated members' knowledge sharing through online thematic webinars and working groups mainly focused on COVID-19 challenges for utilities.

Water Erasmus facilitates cooperation between member utilities on topics of common interest through peer-to-peer exchange and knowledge sharing.



INSTITUTIONAL



"Encourages national, regional and local authorities with publicly-owned water utilities to participate in the Water Erasmus initiative allowing technical staff to visit counterparts in the other Member States and learn from their water management practices. Exchanges of this kind, as well as other initiatives such as technical workshops, should be scaled up, as they provide an opportunity to raise awareness, foster dialogue, learn about solutions and build capacity"



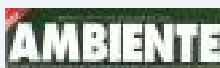
The "Opinion on the Fitness Check of the Water Framework Directive, Groundwater Quality Directive, Environmental Quality Standards Directive and Floods" adopted on 2 July 2020 by the **'European Committee of the Regions'**, highlights **Aqua Publica Europea's** Water Erasmus initiative as a key tool to continuously strengthen water management.



A Water Erasmus session with the participation of **Vasilis Liogkas (European Commission)** took place after the 2020's General Meeting. Mr Liogkas illustrated the *Technical Assistance and Information Exchange Instrument (TAIEX)*: a financing instrument that could support the Water Erasmus exchanges.



PRESS



Italian Magazine *Hi-Tech Ambiente* (n.3.2020) March issue featured an article on Aqua Publica Europea's Water Erasmus initiative. The article covers the first staff exchange that took place between Gruppo CAP (Milan, Italy) and Eau de Paris (Paris, France). Furthermore, it highlights Water Erasmus value for utilities to address common challenges and share its know-how.



EU FUNDED PROJECT

SMART.MET WORKING TOGETHER ON RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

The research and innovation project SMART MET, funded under Horizon 2020, moved to the next stage.

The SMART.MET, led by a group of 7 water utilities, all members of Aqua Publica Europea, aims to drive the development of new innovative solutions to deal with the collection and management of smart water metering data, through a joint pre-commercial procurement (PCP), under Italian law. Smart water metering presents itself as an effective solution to the challenges faced by most European water utilities today, from extreme events induced by climate change to the need to replace ageing infrastructure. Indeed, providing access to accurate data in real-time can help decrease operating costs and prioritize infrastructure investments, while also improving the daily management of networks and customer services.

SMART.MET intends to address the needs of water utilities regarding smart-metering such as the collection of accurate data in real-time, readability, interoperability and cost-efficiency, through a pre-commercial procurement (PCP).

This European research and innovation project was born integrally within **Aqua Publica Europea**, by a group of members aiming to find innovative solutions to challenges not yet addressed by existing products provided by the market.



In 2020, the consortium started the second phase of the joint Pre-Commercial Procurement (PCP). In this phase, the innovating companies that were selected through the joint PCP were invited to demonstrate the validity of their proposed smart water metering solutions prototypes in all their components: meter, communication infrastructure, and control systems. This phase will be followed by the final one, field-testing of the smart water meters (planned for 2021).

Aqua Publica Europea disseminated the project achievements through different communication channels and in public forums. In July 2020, **Aqua Publica Europea** was invited to introduce SMART MET in the online workshop on 'green companies for green regions and green cities' organised by the *European Association of Development Agencies* (EURADA).

VIVERACQUA
SESTO SAN GIOVANNI DEL VINETO



VIVAQUA



POLICY & ADVOCACY

POLICY & ADVOCACY

Despite the external circumstances linked to the COVID-19 outbreak, the year 2020 was particularly active in terms of policy files related to water and waste water treatment. From the wrap-up of new legislation on drinking water and water reuse, to the launch of fresh work on waste water treatment and sewage sludge, the regulatory framework has been changing deeply and operators must be prepared for the future. Furthermore, the crisis has highlighted the importance for health and society as a whole of not only water – through the continued supply of essential services – but also wastewater which can be a useful tool for surveillance of virus spread. While water continued to gain political momentum, **Aqua Publica Europea's** action focused on representing the perspectives and sharing the expertise of public water operators, key actors in the development of a fair, resilient, and sustainable society.



Aqua Publica-European Commission technical meeting on the combined implementation of the Water Framework and Urban Wastewater Directives

**3 March 2020
Brussels**

2020 Policy Dossiers - Overview



WATER POLICY

- Drinking Water Directive
- Water Reuse Regulation
- Water Framework Directive
- Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive



CIRCULAR ECONOMY

- New Circular Economy Action Plan



COVID-19

- EU study the detection of the coronavirus in waste water
- Post-COVID-19 recovery



ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

- Pharmaceutical in the Environment
- Zero Pollution Action Plan



WATER & AGRICULTURE

- Farm-to-Fork strategy
- Water Reuse Regulation



ECONOMY

- EU Taxonomy

WATER POLICY

Drinking-Water Directive formally adopted

While EU institutions reached a deal on the "Drinking Water" Directive in December 2019, it took another year until it was formally adopted. **Aqua Publica Europea** welcomed the new transparency measures, improved access to water and a clear risk-based approach. The Directive will enter into force at the beginning of 2021, with a period of two years for transposition into national legislation. In the next years, several implementing and delegated acts are expected to complement the legislation, starting with an EU positive list of substances that can safely be used in materials in contact with water, to be established by 2024.



Water Reuse regulation adopted

The "Water Reuse Regulation", setting quality requirements for treated water to be reused for agricultural irrigation, was adopted by EU institutions amidst the Brussels lockdown in the spring and published on 25 May 2020. It will apply from 26 June 2023 throughout the EU. **Aqua Publica Europa** welcomed the objectives of the regulation and the distribution of responsibilities but also called for cautious use of water and raised concerns about the potential risks for ecological flows.



No revision of the Water Framework Directive but focus on implementation

Following the *European Commission's* evaluation of the "Water Framework" Directive in December 2019, the future of the legislation was in question until June when EU Commissioner for the Environment **Virginijus Sinkevičius** announced that there would be no revision of the text and instead instructed to focus on implementation and enforcement. Following up, the *Committee of the Regions* (CoR) adopted its Opinion on "Water Legislation" in July 2020 **which, amongst others, acknowledged the potential of the Water Erasmus initiative to support implementation**, and the European Parliament adopted a resolution on "[the implementation of water policy](#)" addressing key aspects for water management such as the precautionary approach to pollution and the polluter-pays principle, the protection of catchment areas and issues of water quantity and over-abstraction but also rejecting commodification of water.

Aqua Publica Europea contributed to discussions by sharing a Position Paper noting key elements to focus on in case the WFD were to be revised but also for its implementation and providing oral and written inputs during consultations.

In parallel to this work, the *European Commission* convened, in March, its new ad-hoc "Task Group on Economics" as part of the Common Implementation Strategy of the "Water Framework" Directive to discuss the economic aspects of the Directive.

Start of the revision process of the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive

After publishing its evaluation of the "Urban Waste Water Treatment" Directive in 2019, the *European Commission* took up addressing the identified shortcomings by launching the review process of the Directive to identify and analyse policy options and aim to table a legislative proposal at the beginning of 2022. The process will include a wide range of consultations to address shortcomings including shortcomings of the Directive on overflow, small agglomerations, individual systems, nutrient levels and sensitive areas, the assessment will also look into new challenges including emerging pollutants, energy efficiency, emissions and sludge management.

In this process, **Aqua Publica** is actively contributing to public and targeted consultations and highlighting our members' priorities, notably prioritisation pollution control at the source; ensuring adequate funding and adopting a pragmatic approach to new requirements for circular economy and energy efficiency.



POSITION | 12 key points for a strong Water Framework Directive and its implementation



[Read here](#)



Aqua Publica Europea was approved as a member of European Commission ad-hoc Task Group on Economics and provided feedback on financing challenges and solutions



Aqua Publica Europea factsheet on the "Revision of the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive"



[See next page](#)



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION
OF PUBLIC WATER OPERATORS

REVISION OF THE EU URBAN WASTE WATER TREATMENT DIRECTIVE

OVERVIEW FOR APE MEMBERS

September 2020

BACKGROUND

Directive adopted in 1991 to set waste water treatment requirements

European Commission evaluation (2019) highlighted effectiveness but several shortcomings: **lack of investment and governance, remaining pollution and new challenges**

OECD Study found that an additional **€253 billion** are necessary by 2030 to comply with existing legislation (2020)

European Commission started working on an Impact Assessment to identify **policy options** towards a **revision** of the UWWTD (2022)

MAIN ISSUES & IMPACT

Addressing remaining pollution

storm water overflows and urban runoff, small agglomerations, Individual or other Appropriate Systems, nutrient removal, sensitive areas, industrial discharges

New pollutants , microplastics

options: preventive measures, monitoring, possible EU thresholds or (targeted) treatment requirements

Extended Producer Responsibility

evaluating how to financially support additional treatment

Energy efficiency, energy production

options: energy efficiency audits, possible energy reduction targets, labeling, promotion of energy generation

Promotion of the Circular Economy

options: nutrient recovery, coordination with Sewage Sludge Directive, anaerobic digestion, pollution prevention

Governance

Monitoring, reporting, financing, information to the public

NEXT STEPS

Consultations with stakeholders (2020-2021)

Impact Assessment on policy options

Likely legislative proposal for revision (2022)

STAKEHOLDERS



HIGHLIGHT

Aqua Publica Europea Technical Meeting - The combined implementation of EU water policy, March 2020

On 3 March 2020, **Aqua Publica Europea** organised a technical meeting between its Management Board, the *European Commission* and key water stakeholders, in Brussels, to discuss the concrete application of water policy, addressing, in particular, the question of the combined implementation of the "Water Framework" Directive and the "Urban Waste Water Treatment" Directive.

Taking into account the complementarity of the WFD and the UWWTD, the presentations of concrete experiences of public water operators' members of **Aqua Publica Europea** allowed participants to review their articulation and to identify the challenges in their combined implementation. From: Alsace-Moselle Report (France) sharing insight from the provisions of service in river basins characterised by several tributaries with varying levels of quality converging into one mainstream; Badajoz (Spain) in charge of the waste water treatment of small agglomerations in rural areas; Turin (Italy) focused on stormwater management in an urban context and Geneva (Switzerland) as Switzerland is deploying quaternary treatment for micropollutants.



 [Read here](#)



ENVIRONMENT POLICY

Pharmaceutical in the Environment

In September, the *European Parliament* adopted its motion for a resolution on "[a strategic approach to pharmaceuticals in the environment](#)", as a response to the *European Commission* strategy presented in 2019. *Members of the European Parliament* called for effective measures to tackle pharmaceutical pollution and included a call for a revision of the "Sewage Sludge" Directive by the end of 2021. **Aqua Publica Europea** shared with policymakers the views that a life-cycle approach needs to be adopted to tackle pollution – as per the recommendation of the **OECD** – rather than focus only on the last-resort end of pipe solutions, in particular in order to facilitate the circular economy. We also noted the need to be careful not to place the burden of de-pollution on households and citizens rather than polluters, and to protect water affordability.



APE's Position Paper

Comments on the European Parliament's Draft Motion for a Resolution on Pharmaceuticals in the Environment



[Read here](#)

On 22 January, the Secretariat participated in a debate on "Pharmaceuticals in the environment" at the European Parliament



Follow us on twitter!



Zero Pollution Action Plan

In October, following the publication of the *European Commission's* "[Roadmap on the EU Action Plan Towards a Zero Pollution Ambition for air, water and soil](#)", as part of the "EU Green Deal", **APE** provided comments on the plans to tackle pollution. We called for the full implementation of the "Water Framework" Directive but also insisted that preventing pollution is the most effective and cost-effective approach, the polluter-pays principle needs to be applied fully and Extended Producer Responsibility schemes established, geographical differences between regions and contextual local characteristics should also be kept in mind.



APE's contribution

Roadmap EU Action Plan "Towards a Zero Pollution Ambition for air, water and soil – building a Healthier Planet for Healthier People"



[Read here](#)

CIRCULAR ECONOMY

New circular economy action plan and the start of the Review of the EU Sludge Directive

In the summer, the **European Commission** launched a study to review the "Sewage Sludge" Directive and analyse whether it is still fit for its purpose in the face of new challenges, including new pollutants and potential in a circular economy, with the objective to finalise the study by the end of 2021. With the support of the **APE's** working group on sludge and circular economy, **Aqua Publica** contributed to public and targeted consultations, highlighting the importance of having a stable environment and enable conditions that allow reaping the benefits offered by sludge reuse in a fair circular economy.



APE's Position Paper

A roadmap for unlocking the potential of biological resources: Aqua Publica Europea's contribution on sludge management in a circular economy, August 2020



[Read here](#)

WATER & AGRICULTURE

In May, the *European Commission* published the "Farm-to-Fork strategy", as part of the "EU Green Deal" aiming to foster more sustainable food systems addressing environmental, health and food security considerations and setting targets by 2030: 50% reduction of pesticide use and risk and 25% of organic farming. Ahead of the publication, **APE** submitted a set of ten proposals to the *European Commission* for consideration, including for the protection of water resources and in particular catchment areas for drinking water from pollution. The strategy will be implemented through different legislative and non-legislative initiatives.



APE's contribution

*Farm-to-Fork Strategy – Roadmap
March 2020*



[Read here](#)



EUROPEAN
COURT
OF AUDITORS

In addition, APE was consulted by the **European Court of Auditors** (ECA) in February on the pressure of agriculture on water quantity, including obstacles to the implementation of the WFD, the integration of water objectives in agriculture policy and funding. The report is expected in September 2021.



COVID-19

European Commission launches call to study the detection of the coronavirus in waste water

The *European Commission's Joint Research Centre and Directorate-General for the Environment* launched an EU feasibility assessment on the monitoring of SARS-CoV-2 in waste water as an instrument for early warning of infection in populations and a tool for health-related decision-making. **APE** was invited to cooperate with the *European Commission* and other stakeholders in the framework and facilitated the participation of individual members in the exercise and shared members' activities during an international knowledge-sharing meeting.



APE's Position Paper

A roadmap for unlocking the potential of biological resources: Aqua Publica Europea's contribution on sludge management in a circular economy, August 2020



[Read here](#)

Post-COVID-19 recovery: The role of public water services for a more resilient, fairer and greener EU

Following the first wave of COVID-19 which deeply affected citizens' lives, economies, and public systems throughout the EU, and in the context of the adoption of the "EU recovery plan", **Aqua Publica Europea** published, during the summer, a policy paper to focus on drawing the lessons from the emergency and its management, to make the EU more resilient, fairer and more respectful of resources. We outlined the role of public water services in emergencies - and beyond - as essential services that leave no one behind; economic actors that can contribute to 'building back better and in the context of a greener future.



APE's Position Paper

Post-COVID-19 recovery: The role of public water services for a more resilient, fairer and greener EU



[Read here](#)



ECONOMY

EU Taxonomy

The "EU Regulation on the establishment of a framework to facilitate sustainable investment" ('EU Taxonomy') was adopted in June. This regulation provides a classification of economic activities for which investments are considered environmentally sustainable if they contribute to one of six environmental objectives (1) climate change mitigation; (2) climate change adaptation; (3) the sustainable use and protection of water and marine resources; (4) the transition to a circular economy; (5) pollution prevention and control; (6) the protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems - without causing significant harm to any of the other ones. As a follow-up, the *European Commission* tabled, at the end of the year, a first delegated regulation on screening criteria (the actual parameters to assess if the investment is sustainable) for the first two objectives, including chapters on water and waste water activities. **Aqua Publica Europea** engaged with the *European Commission* to share the perspectives and challenges of the public water sector, highlighting the risk of impeding investments in a sector that not only has immense investment needs – as highlighted by the **OECD** - but also fundamentally contributes to improving the environment. The dossier will be picked up again in 2021.



APE's Position Paper

A roadmap for unlocking the potential of biological resources: Aqua Publica Europea's contribution on sludge management in a circular economy, August 2020



[Read here](#)

THE EU TAXONOMY

A close-up photograph showing several hands of different skin tones (light, medium, and dark) interlocking in a supportive grip. The hands are arranged in a vertical stack, with fingers and thumbs interlaced. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting an outdoor setting with foliage. A semi-transparent rectangular box is overlaid in the center, containing the text "BEYOND EUROPE" in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters.

**BEYOND
EUROPE**

BEYOND EUROPE

In this unprecedented year, **Aqua Publica Europea** joined forces with international organisations and stakeholders to promote equal access to water and sanitation across the world.

Aqua Publica facilitated several initiatives to share members' best practices and lessons learnt from the pandemic with utilities operating in third countries. Furthermore, the association endorsed an international initiative calling on European Institutions to give full support to water services in developing countries, as a key condition to fight the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic worldwide.

What's more, in 2020, the *European Commission's Directorate-General for International Partnerships* officially confirmed the new funding programme to support the international "Water Operators' Partnership" (WOP), which will be managed by the *UN's-Global Water Operator Partnership Alliance* (GWOPA). **Aqua Publica** is one of the leading organisations that worked hard to make the programme a reality through a years-long advocacy initiative. Next year, the members of

Aqua Publica will have the opportunity to apply for funding support under the new programme, and thus increasing their engagement in peer-to-peer international cooperation projects to improve water management.

Further, **Aqua Publica** continued its engagement with international organisations such as the *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development* (OECD) on water governance issues and water financing, the UN's Habitat/GWOPA on promoting water utilities knowledge sharing, and with the UN's Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation office on the promotion of the public management of water services and equal access to water and sanitation services.

 **APE's Press Release | Aqua Publica Europea supports UN report on Human rights & the privatisation of water and sanitation services**

 [Read here](#)

 **APE's Joint Statement | Water and sanitation utilities call to European Institutions to give full support to water services in developing countries**

 [Read here](#)

APE ACTIVITIES IN THE FRAMEWORK OF UN'S HABITAT - GLOBAL WATER OPERATOR PARTNERSHIP ALLIANCE



12th GWOPA Annual International Steering Committee

On 25-26 June, as a member of the *UN's Global Water Operators Partnership Alliance* Steering Committee, **Aqua Publica** participated in the Annual meeting. The objective of the meeting was to discuss governance and operational issues.



Crisis Management: Strategy, Assessment and Decision-Making

In April 2020, **Aqua Publica Europea** and SMAT, the public water operator of Turin, participated in GWOPA's webinar series "Utilities fight COVID-19" focused on 'Crisis Management: Strategy, Assessment and Decision-Making.' This was the opportunity to share lessons learnt and exchange on best practices from different operators. In August, **Aqua Publica** took part in a new webinar focused on financial challenges for water and sanitation operators in the post-emergency context.



There's a hole in my bucket: Addressing water utilities' growing liquidity challenges to ensure inclusive service continuity through the coronavirus pandemic

In August 2020, the Secretariat participated in the final "Utilities Fight Covid" webinar series on financial liquidity risks for water operators in light of the global coronavirus pandemic.



OUTREACH & COMMUNICATION

EXTERNAL OUTREACH

In 2020, **Aqua Publica Europea** increased its presence in social media, launched several communication campaigns, produced publications, policy papers and brochures on COVID-19 issues and boosted its external media presence.

Likewise, the association reaches regularly more than 2,000 water professionals, academics, policy makers ... through its external newsletter.

CAMPAIGNS

WORLD WATER DAY, 22 MARCH 2020

For "World Water Day 2020 edition", **Aqua Publica Europea** launched a joint statement stressing European public water operator's commitment to the continuity of water services in response to the COVID-19 emergency.

 [Read here](#)

PUBLIC SERVICES DAY, 23 JUNE 2020

To mark "International Public Services Day", **Aqua Publica** published a brief Question and Answers factsheet outlining the key characteristics of public water management.

 [Read here](#)

GLOBAL HANDWASHING DAY-15 OCTOBER 2020

On "International Global Handwashing Day" **Aqua Publica Europea** produced a short video to recall that more efforts are needed by the international community to increase access to essential water and hygiene facilities

 [Read here](#)

WORLD TOILET DAY, 19 NOVEMBER 2020

Ensuring that everyone has access to essential water and hygiene services, leaving no one behind, remains a key challenge for governments and institutions. That's why on "2020 World Toilet Day" **Aqua Publica** called on all governments and European institutions to make the appropriate legal changes to ensure that the necessary safeguards are in place.

 [Read here](#)



MEMBERS INVOLVING OTHER MEMBERS

Online seminar 'Re-thinking the future: Circular Economy' 27 November 2020

Aguas de Gaia - the public water operator of the Portuguese city of Vila Nova de Gaia -, invited Water Industry Team of **the Scottish Government** (Aqua Publica's member from the UK) to share Scotland's best practices on circular economy at the online seminar 'Re-thinking the future: Circular Economy.'



Online Conference "Right to water. Risks and challenges for the future" 16 December 2020

APE's President, **Bernard Van Nuffel** was invited to participate in an event on right to water, organised by the city town hall of Barcelona and the **Catalan Association of municipalities for public water management – AMAP** (Catalunya, Spain).



Dret a l'aigua: riscos i reptes de futur

Dimecres, 16 de desembre
de 18.30 a 20.00 h.



Aqua Publica Europea
WAPE EU

Bernard Van Nuffel (@VIVAQUA_be) takes the floor at the #Right2Water event.

It's a pleasure to share the floor with @SRWatSan and @leoheller21 in this inspiring event organised by our member @aiguapublica.

#PublicWater



PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC EVENTS AND KEY PARTNERSHIPS



INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS: 13TH MEETING OF THE OECD'S WATER GOVERNANCE INITIATIVE 09-10 January, Paris (France)

The Secretariat participated in the 13th meeting of the OECD's "Water Governance Initiative" (WGI) in Paris, on 09-10 January 2020. The meeting allowed us to take stock of the latest international developments in water governance with delegates from all over the world and discuss the contribution made by the WGI at the global level.



EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS OF THE EU - PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON WATER POLICY 20 February, Brussels (Belgium)

Aqua Publica Europea was invited to participate in the "European Committee of the Regions' Stakeholders consultation" on water policy. The Secretariat brought the voice of its members into the discussion. The consultation tackled key issues such as the role of local governments, cross-sectoral approach, water protection and the importance of drinking water in light of new challenges.



ACADEMIA: "Resilient, Sustainable, Green Water and Wastewater Forum", 14 December, Online

Aqua Publica Europea was invited to speak at the "Resilient, Sustainable, Green Water and Wastewater Forum" organised by the Florence School of Regulators - Water & Waste Resilient. It was the opportunity to share the association views on the EU Water legislation and the emerging challenges.



STAKEHOLDERS: "Green procurement and the role of the public sector for more sustainability", 15 July, Online

Aqua Publica Europea was invited to introduce the research and innovation EU-funded project SMART-MET and the Pre-commercial procurement procedure at the workshop on 'green companies for green regions and green cities' organised by the European Association of Development Agencies (EURADA).

PUBLICATIONS

In 2020, **Aqua Publica Europea** published a brochure and a booklet summing up the measures adopted by the members of APE to ensure the continuity of water services during the lock-down.

These reports present build on in the three online exchanges that took place in the first quarter of the year.



Managing the Unexpected: European Public Water Utilities Facing the Coronavirus Emergency

Aqua Publica Europea publication provides an overview of the responses and strategies developed by European public utilities to ensure the continuity of water services during the Coronavirus emergency.



[Read here](#)



Brochure on members responses to COVID-19

The first summary of measures adopted by its members in response to the COVID-19 health crisis.



[Read here](#)

EDITORIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The Future is Public: Towards Democratic Ownership of Public Services (2020)

Published by Transnational Institute (TNI) - the book collects successful examples of *republicanisation* across the world in different sectors like health, water, energy, or waste management. Célia Blauel, President of Eau de Paris and of Aqua Publica Europea and Milo Fiasconaro, Executive Director of Aqua Publica Europea are among the contributors.



[Read here](#)

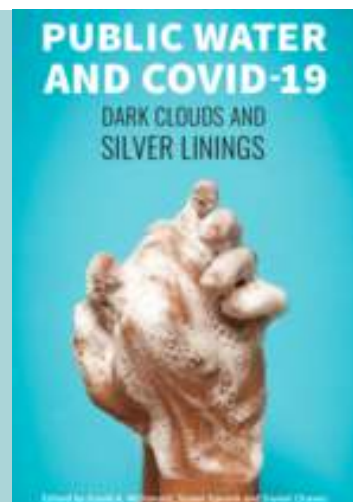


Public Water and COVID-19: Dark Clouds and Silver Linings (2020)

Published by the Municipal Services Project (Kingston), Transnational Institute (Amsterdam) and Latin American Council of Social Sciences (CLACSO) (Buenos Aires) - The book explores why water matters during the pandemic and presents the latest research on the impact of Covid-19 on the public water sector. The 'Public Water and COVID-19: Dark Clouds and Silver Linings' collects case studies from public water operators' based in more than 20 countries. Aqua Publica Europea, as well as Aqua Publica's members Eau de Paris (Paris, France) and HAMBURG WASSER (Hamburg, Germany), are among the contributors.



[Read here](#)



EXTERNAL NEWSLETTER

Two issues of our external newsletter were sent to over a list of over 2,000 contacts of the association, including press contacts, international and European institutions, utilities, regulators, water professionals, academics, and civil society representatives.

This newsletter gives visibility to the association's activities.



**Aqua Publica
Europea**
External newsletter

AUDIO-VISUAL PRODUCTION

In the context of the COVID-19 health crisis, Aqua Publica produced two video campaigns to give visibility to members activities to ensure services continuity and to support citizens

during the difficult times of the COVID-19 outbreak.



**Video - Healthy and safe water supply
guaranteed thanks to the commitment of
water operator's employees**



**Video - Slide show - communication
campaign to reassure citizens on the
safety of tap water.**

SOCIAL MEDIA



↑ +25%

**Over 1,000 followers
In 2020 APE reached
1,000 followers!**



↑ +6%

Over 500 followers



**New YouTube
channel: Follow us!**

PRESS MENTIONS

PRINTED MEDIA



Italian Magazine Hi-Tech Ambiente (n.3.2020) - Aqua Publica Europea's Water Erasmus initiative, March 2020



[Read](#)



10th anniversary of the recognition of water & sanitation as a human right by the UN's GA, July 2020

A Spanish local newspaper refers to the foundation of Aqua Publica Europea as one of the milestones in the way to defend water as a common good



[Read](#)

POLITICO

On the occasion of a debate on pharmaceuticals in the environment organised at the European Parliament, Aqua Publica Europea was quoted on **Politico**, one of the European Affairs leading newsletter, when stressed the importance of taking into account that the polluters pay principle should remain and that raising prices to depolluted water is not the solution, as *"people need to be able to afford their water bills."*

TV



L'état de l'eau européenne - Vox Pop, December 2020

The French TV programme, *VOX POP* (Arte TV channel) produced a documentary on the risk of tap water pollution. Aqua Publica Europea was invited to participate in the programme and shared its expertise on this topic.



[Play](#)

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Throughout 2021, reinforcing the association's internal communication was crucial to keep our community connected, while physical meetings were not possible. While the association

several online exchanges among members on COVID-19's response, other resources were designed to improve membership's knowledge and visibility.

MEMBER'S NEWSLETTERS



The Water Voice Newsletter
Dedicated to members exchange and internal activity



EU Policy Update Newsletter
focusing on the development of the EU Policy.

COMMUNICATION TOOLKIT

In 2020 **Aqua Publica Europea** launched a new Communication Toolkit which collects all the graphic material needed to give visibility to **Aqua Publica Europea** membership, including logos, graphics, templates, and guidelines on how to use the material. The toolkit is available in our members' area.



WELCOME PACKAGE FOR NEW MEMBERS

How to participate in APE's exchanges? How to contribute to APE's advocacy? How to connect with APE's community? Aqua Publica Europea launched a 'New Members Welcome Package' a guide for (new) members!



MEMBER'S CERTIFICATE

In 2020, all **Aqua Publica's** members received a membership certificate stating that the utility is an active member of the association



2021 OUTLOOK



2021 OUTLOOK

The COVID-19 pandemic has certainly continued to affect the operations of **Aqua Publica** also in 2021. However, the persisting

restrictions to travelling and meeting have not prevented us from carrying out a far-reaching programme of activities.

INSTITUTIONAL ENGAGEMENT AND VISIBILITY

- In line with the three new thematic priorities adopted by the Management Board, **Aqua Publica** organised in cooperation with Aguas de Gaia (public water operator from the city of Gaia, Portugal) a high-level conference on '**A Blue New Deal**'. The event, which was supported by the *Portuguese Presidency of the EU*, was the opportunity to discuss the link between effective water resources management and local development together with high-level speakers, including the Portuguese Minister for Environment and representatives from the *European Commission*, *European Committee of the Regions*, NGOs, and water regulators.
- Pursuing the objective of strengthening the relations with civil society's organisations, Bernard Van Nuffel participated on behalf of APE in a seminar on Nature-Based Solutions organised by WWF in the framework of the **Stockholm International Water Week**.
- We published a series of web interviews with the new **Special Rapporteur of the United Nation for the human right to water and sanitation**, **Prof Pedro Arrojo**, to explore together the conditions to realise these rights worldwide and the contribution that the public sector can give to achieve this objective.



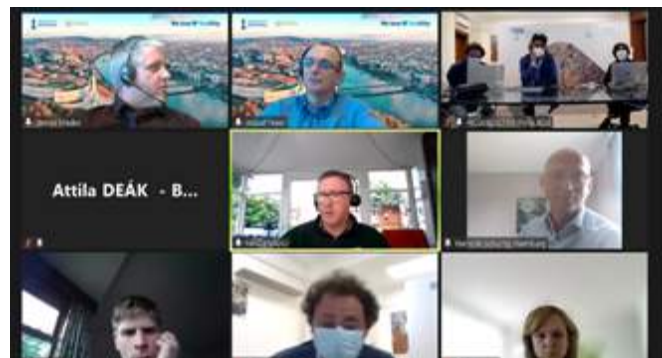
OUR PLATFORM: FACILITATING EXCHANGES AMONG MEMBERS

This year we have resumed our Water Erasmus exchanges (although only online for the time being). Three exchanges were organised on the following topics:

- Energy efficiency (Scottish Water, Budapest Waterworks, Hamburg Wasser, Acquedotto Pugliese).
- Energy production in waste water operations (Scottish Water, Budapest Waterworks, Hamburg Wasser, Acquedotto Pugliese).
- Nutrients Recovery (Budapest Waterworks, Hamburg Wasser, Acquedotto Pugliese, *Flemish Environmental Agency, European Commission*), which also received economic support by the *European Commission*

Three webinars on 'EU funding opportunities for the water sector' were organised for APE's members with the participation of experts from the EU institutions focused on

- Horizon Programme
- Interreg and Structural Funds
- Financial instruments by the European Investment Bank and InvestEU



Water Erasmus exchange on energy efficiency and production (1 June 2021)



Water Erasmus exchange on phosphorus recovery (23 June 2021)



Webinar on "EU funding opportunities for the water sector" (28 April 2021)

POLICY WORK WITH THE EU AND BEYOND

- The Secretariat, with the active involvement and support from members, has been working intensively and exchanging with the *European Commission* on the revision of the **"Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive and Sludge" Directive**. A meeting between the *European Commission* and APE's **Management Board** was organised to bring the contribution of our association into the debate.
- The Secretariat has been active also on other dossiers, including the **Taxonomy for the Green Finance, Pharmaceutical in the Environment, EU initiative on Sars-Cov-2 in wastewater, Zero Pollution Action Plan** and, last but not least, APE contributed to a report by the *European Court of Auditors* on the impact of "Common Agricultural Policy" on water resources.
- In 2021 we welcomed the launch of the new funding programme by the EU to support international cooperation between water operators for capacity development: the **"EU WOP programme"**. The new funding programme is the result of the long advocacy action by **Aqua Publica** towards the *European Commission* and several members have already seen their project proposals for international cooperation approved.
- **Aqua Publica** contributed also to initiatives of international institutions beyond the EU, in particular:
 - We contributed to the work of the "Expert Group on Equitable Access Water and Sanitation" under the *International Protocol for Water and Health*, convened by the "United Nations Economic Commission for Europe"
 - We continued our contribution to the work of the OECD's initiative on 'Water and Finance'.



Management Board meeting with the European Commission (11 June 2020)

INTERNAL GOVERNANCE

- Last but not least, during 2021 the Management Board of **Aqua Publica** pursued its revision of the association's strategy; the results of this intense work will be the object of the General Meeting 2021.
- The Management Board also worked on a long-due revision of the Association's By-laws.
- Finally, the Secretariat has completed a whole transfer of its web-based activities, its IT infrastructures, and its accounting operations to external companies, so making the association completely autonomous from any members for its daily operations.



OUR MEMBERS



NOTES

NOTES

