

Right2water citizens' initiative: Commission must act, say MEPs

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The European Commission's weak response to the first EU citizens' initiative (ECI) petition, on the "Right2Water", could discredit the ECI system, warn Environment Committee MEPs in a resolution voted on Wednesday. It "lacks any real ambition and failed to meet the demands of the organizers", they add. ECIs enable citizens to ask the Commission to propose laws in areas within its competence, if they can muster at least one million signatures from at least a quarter of EU member states.

"I am absolutely delighted that the committee has adopted my recommendations on the European Citizen's Initiative on the Right2Water. Whilst I know that water can be a divisive issue, there was excellent cooperation between most of the groups on this important issue" said lead MEP Lynn Boylan (GUE/NGL, IE), whose report was approved by 38 votes to 22, with 6 abstentions.

"Almost 2 million citizens signed this ECI and the Commission's response was simply not good enough. Citizens have serious and legitimate concerns regarding the privatisation of water services which I have highlighted in my report. Water is a human right, not a commodity and should not be treated as such", she added.

Commission "limits itself to reiterating existing commitments"

MEPs regret that the European Commission communication responding to the "Right2Water" ECI and a European Parliament hearing in February 2014 "lacks any real ambition, does not meet the specific demands made in the ECI, and limits itself to reiterating existing commitments".

"If successful and widely supported ECIs (...) are neglected by the Commission, the EU as such will lose credibility in the eyes of citizens", MEPs say.

They call on the Commission to table legislative proposals, if appropriate including a revision of the EU Water Framework Directive, in order to recognise that affordable access to water is a basic human right.

Guarantee access for all

MEPs point out 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.

The EU should also remain neutral with regard to national decisions governing the ownership of water companies. Given that water suppliers provide services of general interest, these services should be permanently excluded from EU single market rules, MEPs say.

Keep water out of trade deals

Moreover, the special character of water and sanitation services, such as production, distribution and treatment, makes it imperative to exclude them from any trade agreements the EU is negotiating or considering, they add.

Press release

Next steps

The report will be put to a vote by Parliament as a whole at the 7-10 September plenary session in Strasbourg.

Note to editors

In February 2014, organisers of the "Right2Water campaign held a hearing with the Environment Committee, in association with the Development, Internal market and Petitions committees.

They urged the EU Commission to guarantee access to water and sanitation as a human right, and give a legal undertaking that water services will not be liberalised in the EU.. MEPs shared the view that access to water is a basic human right, but some pointed out that rules on providing drinkable water remain within the remit of EU member states.

Further information

- Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety:
<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/envi/home.html>

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