



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

2014 - 2019

Committee on Petitions

2014/2239(INI)

13.5.2015

OPINION

of the Committee on Petitions

for the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety

on the follow-up to the European Citizens' Initiative Right2Water
(2014/2239(INI))

Rapporteur: Margrete Auken

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SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Petitions calls on the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution:

1. Considers that the Commission's follow-up to the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) Right2Water (R2W), as proposed in its communication, does not meet citizens' expectations of concrete action and legislative proposals, as the Commission had already announced that it would step up efforts towards ensuring full implementation of EU water legislation by the Member States, reviewing the Drinking Water Directive and proposing amendments; hopes that the Commission and the Vice-President responsible for sustainability will make a clear political commitment to ensuring that appropriate action is taken in response to the concerns raised by this ECI;
2. Recognises the international human right to water and sanitation as a basic human right, as reaffirmed in UN General Assembly resolution 64/292; believes that the right to water should guarantee everyone sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic use, in a fair and equal manner; urges the Commission to engage in the Sustainable Development Goals and Post-2015 Development Agenda process with a view to ensuring that future goals and targets are rights-sensitive, including in respect of the right to water;
3. Reiterates the commitment of its Committee on Petitions to give a voice to petitioners on issues concerning fundamental rights, and recalls that the petitioners presenting the R2W ECI have expressed their agreement with declaring water a human right that is guaranteed at EU level;
4. Stresses that the Commission's alleged neutrality regarding water ownership and management to be in contradiction with the privatisation programmes imposed on some Member States by the Troika;
5. Calls on the Commission to include water as part of the Agenda for Change, together with sustainable agriculture;
6. Stresses that an ECI is an important tool of participatory democracy, enabling citizens to make their voices heard in the legislative procedure, and that an admissible and appropriate ECI should in principle result in a new Commission legislative proposal that meets the demands set out in the ECI, at least when the Commission has committed itself to presenting such a proposal, as in the case of the R2W ECI; stresses that the Commission should ensure the utmost transparency during the two-month analysis phase, that a successful ECI should receive proper legal support and advice from the Commission and should be properly publicised, and that promoters and supporters should be kept fully informed and updated throughout the ECI process;
7. Stresses that an insufficient response to the first successful ECI could be detrimental to the reliability of the ECI as a tool of democracy among EU citizens;
8. Insists that the Commission implement the ECI Regulation effectively and proceed with

the removal of all administrative burdens encountered by citizens when submitting or supporting an ECI, and urges it to consider implementing a common ECI registration system for all Member States;

9. Calls on the Commission to support strongly efforts by Member States to develop and upgrade infrastructure that provides access to irrigation, sewerage and drinking water supply services;
10. Considers that more should be done to improve the quality and quantity of the information available to citizens in relation to water quality and services; insists that the Commission's response to the R2W ECI is insufficient; asks the Commission, in connection with this particular ECI, to conduct a serious information campaign on the measures already taken in the field of water and how they can help to achieve the objectives of the R2W ECI;
11. Reminds the Member States of their responsibility in implementing EU law; urges them to fully implement the Drinking Water Directive and all related legislation; reminds them to identify their spending priorities and to make full use of the opportunities for EU financial support in the water sector afforded by the new financial programming period (2014-2020), in particular through an investment priority specifically centred on water management;
12. Recalls the Member States' obligation to guarantee that the right to water and sanitation can be exercised in a fair manner without discrimination; points out that the Member States have a duty to ensure that the accessibility of quality water to those in need is guaranteed and affordable for all, and to make sure that operators provide safe drinking water and improved sanitation; calls on the Member States to adopt appropriate legislation and to develop and implement concrete programmes which are adequately resourced and monitored; notes that the Member States should give particular attention to vulnerable groups in society, such as those in low-income areas and geographical regions which have extensive poverty accumulation; calls on the Commission to identify areas in which water shortage is an existing or potential issue, and to help the Member States, regions and areas concerned, in particular rural areas and deprived urban areas, to address this issue properly;
13. Recognises that the Member States, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, have the right to choose different schemes for water delivery; declares that water should not be a source of illegitimate profit for either public or private operators; calls for increased transparency and greater provision of information in respect of water management and water pricing schemes within the Member States;
14. Recalls the obligation to guarantee access to justice and information in environmental matters, and public participation in decision-making, as laid down in the Aarhus Convention; calls, therefore, on the Commission, the Member States and their regional and local authorities to respect the principles and rights enshrined in the Aarhus Convention; recalls that citizens' awareness of their rights is fundamental to achieving the widest possible participation in the decision-making process; urges the Commission, therefore, to proactively set up a campaign to inform EU citizens about the achievements of the Aarhus Convention in the field of transparency and about the effective tools already at their disposal, and to comply with the provisions referring to the EU institutions; calls on the Commission to develop transparency, accountability and participation criteria as a

means to improving the performance, sustainability and cost-effectiveness of water services;

15. Recalls that Directive 2006/123/EC on services in the internal market attracted strong opposition from civil society in many respects, including matters relating to services of general economic interest such as water distribution and supply services and wastewater management; recalls that the EU institutions were eventually forced to include these sectors among the services which cannot be liberalised;
16. Notes that since 1988 its Committee on Petitions has received a significant number of petitions from EU citizens in many Member States expressing their concerns about water supply and quality and wastewater management; draws attention to a number of negative factors deplored by petitioners – such as waste landfills, failure by authorities to control water quality effectively, and irregular or unlawful agricultural and industrial practices – which are responsible for poor water quality and thus have an impact on the environment and on human and animal health; considers that these petitions demonstrate a genuine interest on the part of citizens in the thorough enforcement and further development of sustainable water-related EU legislation;
17. Considers that many of the petitions concerning water quality and management come from Member States which are not well-represented in the EU-wide public consultation launched in June 2014, and stresses that there may therefore be some inconsistency between the results of the public consultation and the situation highlighted by petitions;
18. Deplores the fact that in the EU-28 more than 1 million people still lack access to a safe and clean drinking water supply and nearly 2 % of the population lacks access to sanitation, according to the World Water Assessment Programme (WWAP), and therefore urges the Commission to act immediately;
19. Believes that there should be an assessment of European water and sanitation projects and programmes from the perspective of human rights, with a view to developing appropriate policies, guidelines and practices; invites the Commission to set up a benchmarking system (for water quality, affordability, sustainability, coverage, etc.) in order to improve the quality of public water supply and sanitation services across the European Union, and as a way of empowering citizens;
20. Strongly urges the Commission to take the concerns and warnings expressed by citizens in such petitions seriously and to act on them, in particular given the urgent need to address the problem of diminishing water resources as a result of overuse and climate change, while there is still time to prevent pollution and mismanagement; expresses its concern about the number of infringement procedures concerning water quality and management; recalls the significant number of petitions opposing the inclusion of essential public services such as water and sanitation in the negotiations for the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP); calls on the Commission to increase the accountability of water suppliers;
21. Calls on the Commission to draw up binding legislation to ensure that all information on water quality and water management is made available by the competent authorities to the citizens concerned in an easily accessible and understandable form, and that citizens are

fully informed and consulted in good time about all water management projects; notes, moreover, that in the public consultation launched by the Commission, 80 % of the participants considered it essential to improve the transparency of water quality monitoring;

22. Calls on the Member States to complete their River Basin Management Plans as a matter of urgency and as a key element in the enforcement of the Water Framework Directive, and to implement them properly with full respect for the overriding ecological criteria; draws attention to the fact that certain Member States are increasingly confronted with damaging floods which have a severe impact on the local population; points out that the River Basin Management Plans under the Water Framework Directive, and the Flood Risk Management Plans under the Floods Directive, afford a great opportunity to exploit synergies between these instruments, thereby helping to provide clean water in sufficient quantities while reducing flood risks; recalls, furthermore, that each Member State should have a central webpage to provide information on the implementation of the Water Framework Directive, so as to facilitate an overview of water quality and management;
23. Calls on the Committee of the Regions to be more involved in this ECI with a view to encouraging greater involvement in the issue on the part of regional authorities;
24. Calls on the Commission to monitor carefully the use of direct and indirect EU funding for water management projects and to ensure that such funding is used only for the projects for which it was intended, bearing in mind that access to water is pivotal in reducing disparities between EU citizens and enhancing economic, social and territorial cohesion in the EU; calls on the Court of Auditors, in this connection, to verify that the criteria relating to efficiency and sustainability are fulfilled satisfactorily;
25. Calls on the Commission to take into consideration the current lack of investment in balanced water management, bearing in mind that water is one of the shared assets of EU citizens;
26. Points out that sound water management is shaping up to be a priority, both ecologically and environmentally, for the decades to come, as it fulfils energy and agriculture requirements and responds to economic and social imperatives.

RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

Date adopted	5.5.2015
Result of final vote	+: 26 -: 0 0: 2
Members present for the final vote	Margrete Auken, Beatriz Becerra Basterrechea, Andrea Cozzolino, Pál Csáky, Miriam Dalli, Rosa Estaràs Ferragut, Eleonora Evi, Lidia Joanna Geringer de Oedenberg, Peter Jahr, Rikke Karlsson, Notis Marias, Edouard Martin, Marlene Mizzi, Julia Pitera, Laurențiu Rebega, Sofia Sakorafa, Jarosław Wałęsa, Cecilia Wikström, Tatjana Ždanoka
Substitutes present for the final vote	Anja Hazekamp, György Hölvényi, Demetris Papadakis, Josep-Maria Terricabras, Ángela Vallina
Substitutes under Rule 200(2) present for the final vote	Paul Brannen, Norbert Lins, Dario Tamburrano, Martina Werner