



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION
OF PUBLIC WATER OPERATORS

Brussels, 6th March 2014

**APE response to
« La gestion de l'eau, cette autre guerre larvée en Europe »
published in *La Tribune*, 3rd March 2014**

Aqua Publica Europea, the European association of public water operators deplores the article « La gestion de l'eau, cette autre guerre larvée en Europe », published on Monday the 3rd of March in the online edition of *La Tribune*.

The article describes incorrectly the recent debate held at the European Parliament on the European Citizens Initiative "Right2Water"; it contains a series of actual mistakes; above all, it makes unproven and biased judgments about Belgian water operators, with the clear objective of discrediting the entire public sector.

First, it is not true - as suggested in the article - that representatives of the private sector were not allowed to participate in the discussion of ECI proposals at the European Parliament.

Simply, the rules of the ECI hearing at the Parliament established that only representatives of European Institutions and of the ECI organizing committee (those who collected the signatures) could participate in the debate. Other stakeholders (representatives from the private/public sector, NGO, etc.) could attend but not express their positions during the exchange of views.

Therefore, the private sector - like any other stakeholder – can call for another debate similar to the one held on the 17th February, upon condition to promote an ECI and collect the minimum amount of signatures.

In this regard, it should also be noted that the minimum number of signatures for an ECI proposal to be admitted is 1.000.000 and not 1.500.000 as erroneously stated in the article.

Second, affirming that the choice of a country to opt for public provision of water services equals to building an "inefficient and unchallengeable monopoly" is questionable at best. Indeed, it is undeniable that the supply of water corresponds to a natural monopoly, since citizens cannot choose between different pipes as they can do between different mobile networks (or financial services for that matter). The decision of a public authority to award the concession contract to a private operator – a fully legitimate decision, as long as it is taken transparently – has to include sometimes complex evaluations concerning the annual rate of profit assured to the contractor, for a time span of thirty years or more. What is more, even considering the possible competitive dynamics occurring at the time of the selection of the contractor, it must be recognized that there is not a significant number of competitors worldwide. The argument which affirms that the liberalization of services automatically leads to greater competition is therefore very weak.



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Above all, stating that the public sector is "a source of endemic corruption, as in Belgium," without providing any concrete evidence or fact is slanderous; all the while, everyone still remember some corruption cases confirmed by Court judgment, affecting concession contracts for water services in some French cities.

More generally, we can easily mention a series of statistics proving that the performances of Belgian operators, like other European public operators, are at least as good as those of the private operators.

We could also easily demonstrate that there are some public operators - at least Aqua Publica Europea members – that developed top-level approaches (in innovation, management, governance), sometimes becoming source of inspiration even for the private sector.

And we could conclude by mentioning examples of remunicipalisation that entailed a lowering of water bills, while ensuring the necessary investments and keeping financial balance.

We hope that *La Tribune* will proceed shortly to rectify an article which can only undermine the credibility of journalism.

Aqua Publica Europea is the European association of public water operators. The mission of APE is to promote public water management through cooperation and knowledge exchange. The members of APE provide collectively water and sanitation services to over 60 million European citizens, and they are committed to a constant improvement of their performances for the common interest.