

CALL FOR THE BUILDING OF A EUROPEAN NETWORK FOR PUBLIC WATER (ENPW)

Water is a common good for people, communities and humanity, an essential resource of life on the planet. Access to water is an inalienable human right. Water is a source of life closely connected to another fundamental element of life, food. Water therefore is not a good that can be privatised, reduced to a commodity, delivered under market management or left in the hands of private companies. Being a "common good", citizens, workers, local authorities and local governments must participate in the management of water supplies and water resources.

These principles, shared and practiced by the movements and groups involved at various levels in European countries in defence of water as a common good, constitute the platform on which, through meetings in Milan and Zaragoza, the process for the building of a European network was initiated.

The processes of privatisation and the reasons for a European network

The urgent need to create a European network of water movements is based on the following assumptions:

- the European Union (EU) wants to become "the most competitive market" in the world, and the role of Europe in the international trade negotiations on water services remains deeply problematic.
- Despite the fact that the European Parliament declared water a human right in 2006, this principle has not been included in the European treaty currently undergoing ratification. What is more, we are witnessing an acceleration of processes of privatisation and commercialisation of water resources in Europe, encouraged by the European Commission.
- The European Commission is preparing new initiatives to promote privatisation and commercialisation of water supply inside the EU, while at the level of international trade talks and development cooperation the Commission has not abandoned its push to advance access to water for European multinational corporations.

The largest water multinationals in the world are based in Europe and have formed coalitions such as AquaFed and the European Water Partnership, which are well-equipped to influence political decisions. The European Water Partnership, with close links to the Parliament and the European Commission, with the support of multinationals like Coca Cola, has already prepared a "New European vision of Water", which will be submitted to the next World Water Forum in Istanbul.

We are witnessing an acceleration in the process of water privatisation through sector laws introduced by the individual states and regions. In Eastern Europe, this process is especially widespread and brutal, while elsewhere in Europe, the changes are more gradual and more subtle. Sometimes water is turned into a commodity even when it remains formally public, because the management of supply and sewage is entrusted to companies managed under commercial law. Whichever method is chosen, the results are full cost recovery, tariff increases and insufficient investment, turning water from a right into a product for sale with high and fast financial profitability.

At the same time, local governments, citizens and citizens' movements are gradually excluded from decision making and control. In many countries, the cost for the use of water increases dramatically without any improved efficiency in service delivery, without a plan for reducing water consumption and without adequate environmental protection for the source. The level of pollution is increasingly

directly proportional to the degradation of public control of health and hygiene, which is also struck by the parallel process of privatisation.

Resistance

At the same time, in some European countries such as France, some decisions are countering this trend. An important example is the case of the city of Paris which is moving towards the remunicipalisation of water services with the creation of a public company which will be responsible for managing an integrated water cycle. Similar progressive public water approaches are being implemented in other European countries such as the Netherlands, and Spain (Seville), while in Latin America we witness the right to water is being included in constitutions, as a result of the mobilization of populations and local communities through referendums, as has happened recently in Ecuador. In a large number of European countries citizens groups, NGOs, trade unions, environmental groups, water or social forums are opposing the processes of privatisation and are doing crucial work in the fields of information, consumer education and mobilization for the defense of water and water sources, as well as taking action to counter the entrustment of water services to private management. In some countries, as in Italy, following the convergence of social and popular movements around strong campaigns, national coordination bodies have formed.

Networks of local authorities, trade unions but also professional groups, such as public water managers, engineers and geologists, are participating in these initiatives across Europe. Also in faith-based networks around the world, the issue of the defence of water is becoming increasingly important. And processes of coordination between public utilities have been launched.

In all these cases, beyond the national differences and specific characteristics of each initiative, the fundamental fact that unites them is the renewed important involvement of citizens, workers and local authorities.

It is as a result of evidence of these trends that the present appeal was born, whose aim is to collect, not disperse, and to relaunch, alongside the battle for water, a battle for participation and democracy from below as one of the most important challenges of this century, giving life to a European Network for Public Water. (European Public Water Network?)

Defending water as a public and common good is fundamental to the idea of genuine democracy. In all territories and countries of the world where concrete struggles in defense of this common good have developed, as networks and experience of participatory democracy have grown, there has been a growing self-awareness, the awareness that another world is necessary and possible, but also feasible.

To prepare this proposal and to ensure its feasibility, we met in Milan (February 2008) and Zaragoza (June 2008), taking the statements that emerged from seminars and alternative forums in Mexico City, Caracas, Nairobi, Istanbul, Vienna and Brussels as points of reference.

On the occasion of the European Social Forum, held in Malmö from 17 to 22 September, we propose to organise the launching Assembly for the construction of the European Network for Public Water to congregate around some general principles and in a way that all those who want to cooperate, can relate and propose common ways forward. For this occasion we have prepared a first draft manifesto summarising the points of convergence that have emerged so far in the various platforms and outlined some methodologies and ways of working together to enhance our knowledge and refine our capacity to advise.

Vision for the Network

We see the new Network as a moment of convergence for those who already works in defence of water, as an open space for to discuss and construct proposals on the issue, and therefore not as a structured or vertical organisation.

The Network should ensure effective communication, facilitate the expression of views of all, be able to adopt positions and take decisions on important issues, while respecting the diversity of approaches and identities.

The Network could (choose to) launch campaigns to raise awareness on the subject, supporting the struggles and local disputes that may require legal advice or technical expertise that not all have. It could improve the structure of relationships with other international networks and subjects in the defence of water.

The only "structure" – we suggest - will be that of a group of facilitators (to be determined during the ESF in Malmö) that can, from assembly to assembly, prepare reports, share information on the itinerary that is in place in order to promote mechanisms for inclusion and prepare future meetings.

We do not want the homogenisation of differences, but the empowerment of the diversities that each group or territorial reality brings with it, in order to improve the ability of all participants to take part in changing the balance of power in society at a local and at a European level and to therefore be involved in the real possibility of achieving our common objectives in defence of water.

In the days preceding the launch meeting of the European Network during the ESF, the seminars that we have organized will be important moments of preparation and deepening. The assembly will then start with a first part dedicated to the brief presentation of participants and a second part dedicated to the definition of the working strategy on actions that should to be taken, and to the agenda of future meetings.

The group of facilitators (appointed during the first preparatory meeting in Milan, 22-23 February):

Eloi Badia (Enginyeria Sense Fronteres, Catalunya)

Andre Abreu (France Libertés, France)

Olivier Hoedeman (Corporate Europe Observatory, The Netherlands)

Marco Iob (CeVi, Italy)

Renato di Nicola (Italian Forum of Movements on Water, Italy)