

EPSU Press communication – 14 May 2014

EPSU supports YES vote in Thessaloniki Water Referendum; asks Suez Environment to respect outcome

- Thessaloniki referendum on future of water company 18 May 2014
- Local coalition campaigns for YES vote to public company, NO to corporate take-over
- International team of observers will monitor referendum
- Greek government and French multinational Suez Environment asked to respect outcome.

The Greek government wants to sell the water and sanitation company of Thessaloniki. It hopes to gain money to reduce the state debt. Privatisation of public companies is part of the agreement between the Troika and the Greek government. This has been welcomed by Dutch Finance Minister Dijsselbloem, head of the Eurogroup. A broad coalition of groups and including the trade unions and the local Greek Orthodox Church is opposed. They stress that public services such as the supply of drinking water should be delivered through a public company as the best guarantee to ensure quality, safe and affordable services under democratic control. Water is not a commodity. The coalition has forced a local referendum in which people will be asked to vote yes to maintain the public company. The referendum takes place 18 May. The unions and other social groups are facing the national government, its supporters in the media as well as the deep pockets of Suez Environment, the French multinational company that wants to run Thessaloniki Water Company to make profits.

To monitor these elections EPSU is supporting an international team of observers from Austria, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Sweden. They will watch if the voting will not be obstructed and will take place in fair manner.

Recalling an international appeal of a group of trade unions, social groups and water activists EPSU's **Jan Willem Goudriaan** states: "*We want Suez Environment to respect the results of the referendum. To do different would taint its image, show that its Corporate Social Responsibility policies are window dressing and its statements of respect for local communities empty. It could face years of local unrest.*"

To underline these points, demonstrations will take place 15 May in Paris, headquarter of the company. With opinion polls showing that over 70% of the people, supported by different political parties, are against the sale, other companies like Israeli public water company Mekorot have not shown further interest. Goudriaan calls into question the legality of the process: "*If the referendum is positive, the Greek government should stop the privatisation*"



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process. With only one bidder left, the Greek people will not get real value and are robbed of their company.”

The sell of the Athens Water Company is similarly opposed by a broad coalition. It has been delayed due to technical and legal questions.

Read also our article [here](#)

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EPSU is the European Federation of Public Service Unions. It is the largest federation of the ETUC and comprises 8 million public service workers from over 265 trade unions; EPSU organises workers in the energy, water and waste sectors, health and social services and local and national administration, in all European countries including in the EU's Eastern Neighborhood. EPSU is the recognized regional organization of Public Services International (PSI). For more information on EPSU and our work please go to: <http://www.epsu.org>