



**Commissioner Andris Piebalgs**  
European Commission  
Rue de la Loi 200  
1049, Brussels  
Belgium

Brussels, 25 November 2013

**Subject: European public water operators call for an ambitious future development policy for water**

Dear Commissioner,

While the current UN international year of water cooperation is coming to an end, *Aqua Publica Europea – The European Association of Public Water Operators* would like to stress the importance for the EU to keep an ambitious development policy in the water domain for the next programming period.

In its recent communication “a decent life for all”, the European Commission clearly identifies water as an important and specific domain of intervention. Several institutions and initiatives (including the recent Budapest Water summit) have then been calling for the inclusion of a dedicated “water goal” in the post 2015 MDGs framework.

We fully share this view since we are persuaded that access to water and sanitation is a fundamental human right and because the fulfilment of this right has a direct and proved impact on development. Furthermore, we believe that managing water resources in a sustainable and effective way is a complex task, which involves high levels of expertise and therefore requires specific interventions.

Within this framework, we would like to emphasise the importance of **supporting mechanisms for not-for-profit Water Operators Partnerships (WOPs)**.

APE’s members, which overall provide water and sanitation services to more than 50 million European citizens, have acquired a significant experience in the development domain. Drawing on that, we can confidently affirm that WOPs represent a successful approach for improving access to water in less developed countries. In particular, when they involve a direct know-how transfer through in situ training schemes, WOPs have proved to be an effective tool for sustainable capacity-building actions as:

- They establish direct relations with final beneficiaries and facilitate the involvement of local communities and non-state actors, thus increasing responsiveness to local needs and ownership of results by beneficiaries.
- They create a local learning capacity that boosts self-sustained development process. This also increases the local absorption potential for more advanced – but locally needed - technologies, hence setting the basis for future scaling up of more ambitious projects.
- They are highly effective from a cost/benefit perspective: thanks to a relatively small financial effort, a large number of agents can benefit from training programmes at local level with clear long term and multiplying effects.



In short, we believe that this approach perfectly responds to the main objective set out by the “a decent life for all” communication that is “*empowering people to lift themselves out of poverty*”.

We find that, in the current programming period, the EU has already taken some important initiatives in this domain. In particular, the “Partnerships for Capacity Development in the ACP Water & Sanitation Sector” under the 10<sup>th</sup> EDF was characterized by some important innovative aspects. In 2012, a report from Public Services International Research Unit (PSIRU) - University of Greenwich highlighted how projects supported by this instrument were likely to “achieve permanent results”, with a strong replicating potential. The report also pointed out that, compared to other WOP platforms supported by different international institutions, the ACP-EU Water Partnership mobilised a greater amount of financial resources within a more rigorous evaluation framework.

Against this background, and looking forward to the next programming period, we call the European Commission for keeping its leadership in the development policy domain, by supporting ambitious and innovative programmes.

We certainly share the view that actions taken at EU level have to demonstrate a real added value with regard to the regional or national dimension. Decentralised voluntary-based actions should be supported through appropriate incentives and we support the diffusion of solidarity mechanisms based on financial resources generated within the water cycle (1% principle).

However, we believe that also the EU has a crucial role to play in this field, and that its fundamental objectives regarding agriculture, energy and nutrition could hardly be achieved without a robust action addressing the particularities of the water sector.

In particular, **the EU should promote not-for-profit excellence-driven partnership projects, which combine top water management expertise at transnational level** with a view to supporting capacity development and good governance in less developed countries.

The public water operators gathered in Aqua Publica Europea are ready to take up the challenge and would be glad to give a contribution to the definition of future approaches.

Yours sincerely,

*The Members of Aqua Publica Europea*

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