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News

Lack of support for forced repair of leaking water networks

Robert Hodgson, 15 Jan 2019

Several governments have rejected a call by the European Parliament to tackle the heavy leakage from Europe's drinking water networks, it has emerged as the EU Council seeks to forge a compromise position on proposals to overhaul the 1998 Drinking Water Directive.

Germany, Poland and the UK were among those who opposed, at a working group meeting on Monday, an amendment calling for EU countries to adopt by the end of 2022 national targets to reduce leakage by the end of the decade, a source close to the talks told ENDS. The European Parliament proposed the measure in a report [adopted last October](#), while the latest EU Council compromise documents show it has been rejected.

The EU executive's proposal for a revised DWD calls for details on leakage rates, as well as energy efficiency of water networks, to be included in transparency rules that also mandate the routine publishing of information on the content of minerals and impurities. However, the Commission assumes this will "influence water suppliers and member states' authorities alike to address the issue of water losses and leakages".

The international energy agency estimates that 24% of drinking water, some 13 billion litres, is lost annually on the way to the tap, while EU auditors have [identified a need for billions of euros in investment](#) in some countries to remedy poor infrastructure.

With the water sector consuming some 3.5% of electricity in the EU, and up to half that of local authorities, cost savings can cover the expense of infrastructure improvements in just a few years, according to Jonas Fredsted Villadsen, chief operating officer of the Danish Environment Technology Association.

"I can't image one single EU-citizen who will find it acceptable nor economically viable to lose 25-60 % of the clean European water resources due to poor management," said Villadsen, speaking on behalf of a European alliance that has [called for clear green targets](#) in the revised legislation. "Imagine such a waste of water and energy in your own household."

The drinking and waste water service providers association Eureau, however, argues that the DWD is not the right legislative tool to tackle such issue, focused as it is on the quality of drinking water.

Firms are already working to reduce losses, as well as improving energy efficiency, said Eureau's head of policy Carla Chairetti. "Again, this is another element that would fit in a 'drinking water supply' directive and not a directive that has as a focus to ensure the quality of drinking water," she said.

Romania has signalled its intention to close the revised DWD file before its six-month EU presidency ends in June, and Monday's working group meeting was one of four scheduled for this month. The negotiators on the file from the European Parliaments main political groups have pencilled in a closed meeting for next Monday.

The Netherlands, Austria, Belgium and Sweden also rejected the MEPs proposal to force governments to address water leakage. Last summer, several government ministers [expressed reservations](#) about provisions in the original proposal to cut the use of plastic bottles by mandating access to drinking water in public places.

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Follow-up:

European Parliament [report](#), European Commission [proposal](#).

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