


Procedure file

Basic information		
COS - Procedure on a strategy paper (historic)	2001/2157(COS)	Procedure completed
Services of general interest in Europe		
Subject 2.40.02 Public services, of general interest, universal service		

Key players			
European Parliament	Committee responsible	Rapporteur	Appointed
	ECON Economic and Monetary Affairs		06/11/2000
		PPE-DE LANGEN Werner	
	Committee for opinion	Rapporteur for opinion	Appointed
	JURI Legal Affairs and Internal Market	The committee decided not to give an opinion.	
	ITRE Industry, External Trade, Research, Energy		13/02/2001
		GUE/NGL HERZOG Philippe A.R.	
	EMPL Employment and Social Affairs		12/10/2000
		V/ALE FLAUTRE Hélène	
	ENVI Environment, Public Health, Consumer Policy	The committee decided not to give an opinion.	
Council of the European Union European Commission	RETT Regional Policy, Transport and Tourism	The committee decided not to give an opinion.	
	CULT Culture, Youth, Education, Media and Sport		06/02/2001
		PPE-DE PACK Doris	
	Commission DG	Commissioner	
	Secretariat-General		

Key events			
20/09/2000	Non-legislative basic document published	COM(2000)0580	Summary
30/11/2000	Debate in Council		
03/09/2001	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
16/10/2001	Vote in committee		Summary
16/10/2001	Committee report tabled for plenary	A5-0361/2001	

13/11/2001	Debate in Parliament		
13/11/2001	Decision by Parliament	T5-0595/2001	Summary
13/11/2001	End of procedure in Parliament		
13/06/2002	Final act published in Official Journal		

Technical information

Procedure reference	2001/2157(COS)
Procedure type	COS - Procedure on a strategy paper (historic)
Procedure subtype	Commission strategy paper
Legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 142
Stage reached in procedure	Procedure completed
Committee dossier	ECON/5/13751

Documentation gateway

Non-legislative basic document		COM(2000)0580	20/09/2000	EC	Summary
Committee of the Regions: opinion		CDR0180/2000 OJ C 148 18.05.2001, p. 0012	14/02/2001	CofR	
Economic and Social Committee: opinion, report		CES1120/2001	12/09/2001	ESC	
Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading		A5-0361/2001	16/10/2001	EP	
Document attached to the procedure		COM(2001)0598	17/10/2001	EC	
Text adopted by Parliament, single reading		T5-0595/2001 OJ C 140 13.06.2002, p. 0027-0153 E	13/11/2001	EP	Summary
Follow-up document		COM(2002)0331	18/06/2002	EC	Summary
Economic and Social Committee: opinion, report		CES0860/2002	17/07/2002	ESC	
Follow-up document		COM(2002)0689	04/12/2002	EC	Summary
Non-legislative basic document		COM(2003)0270	21/05/2003	EC	Summary
Follow-up document		SEC(2005)1781	20/12/2005	EC	Summary

Services of general interest in Europe

PURPOSE : to present a report from the Commission concerning services of general interest in Europe. **CONTENT** : services of general interest are a key element in the European model of society. The new Article 16 in the EC Treaty now confirms their place among the shared values of the Union and their role in promoting social and territorial cohesion. These services also contribute to the overall competitiveness of the European economy and are provided in the context of continuously evolving markets and technologies. The globalisation of trade, the completion of the internal market and rapid technological change can bring about increasing pressure to open up new sectors to competition. It is against this background that the European Council of Lisbon requested the Commission to update its Communication of 1996 on services of general interest in Europe. To sum up, the objective of the present proposal is twofold: - to provide further clarification on different levels of public authorities and of the competition and internal market provisions applied to services of general interest in order to respond to the request for greater legal certainty on the part of operators. Of special concern is the field of the rules on State aid; - to further develop the European framework relating to the good functioning of services of general interest, in which local, regional and national authorities as well as the Community have their role to play, in line with Article 16 EC Treaty. Finally, the communication is organised in several sections. In section 2 the Commission sets out its views on the mission fulfilled by services of general interest. Section 3 provides clarification on the application of competition and Single Market rules to services of general interest. Section 4 presents some preliminary results from experience with the application of the universal service principle in sectors liberalised under the Single Market Programme. Section 5 provides orientation for further action to enhance the quality and efficient provision of services of general interest as a key element in the European model of society.?

Services of general interest in Europe

The committee adopted the report by Werner LANGEN (EPP-ED, D) on the Commission communication. It agreed with the Commission that the definition and operation of a service of general interest should be decided locally, and said that the Commission's task was to define the common principles on which such services were based. The committee also announced its intention of using a little-known clause in the Treaty (Article 192) to request the Commission to submit a proposal to create a legal framework guaranteeing the provision of services of general interest to citizens. The report also backed the Commission's view that European citizens should receive high-quality services at affordable prices and, where justified, free of charge. The Commission was urged to make a detailed assessment of the impact of liberalisation of services of general interest before embarking upon further liberalisation. What mattered was not who performed the general interest services (whether public or private undertakings) but that they should ensure equality of access, security of supply and continuity. While acknowledging the importance of EU competition rules, the report nevertheless said that Member States should be allowed to grant financial assistance to companies for the provision of a service obligation without this constituting state aid. It stressed, however, that state enterprises involved in the running of services should not benefit from preferential tax treatment where there was competition from the private sector. The same rules should apply to the applicant countries. The committee agreed with the Commission that EU competition rules should not apply to national security, the administration of justice, the conduct of foreign relations, national education policies and social security schemes. However, there was support for completing the liberalisation of the transport, electricity, gas and postal services sectors. The report also called on the Member States to look at ways of opening up the water industry to private enterprise. Waste management and transport should also be open to competition, albeit under certain conditions. Lastly, the committee recognised that audiovisual services merited a specific approach in order to guarantee various objectives such as the protection of fundamental rights, pluralism, cultural and linguistic diversity and the protection of minors. There was a particular need to clarify the application of competition rules in respect of public service broadcasting.?

Services of general interest in Europe

The European Parliament adopted a resolution drafted by Werner LANGEN (EPP/ED, D) on the Commission Communication on services of general interest. (Please refer to previous text). Moreover, it called on the Commission to perform a precise and comparative evaluation of the real impact of the policy of liberalisation of such services before embarking on further liberalisation. The Commission is expected to define in the framework directive the common principles on which services of general interest are based at an appropriate tier of subsidiarity. General interest services should be taken to mean services that are important for people's daily lives, therefore including transport, postal services, telecommunications, education, hospitals, social services, drains, refuse collections and water and energy supply, particularly electricity. Parliament goes on to make certain recommendations with regard to particular sectoral cases. A specific approach should be taken to audiovisual services - irrespective of the type of audiovisual broadcast, whether public service television, private television, video streaming, etc., - and culture in order to achieve objectives such as the protection of fundamental rights and democratic principles, pluralism, access for all to culture and technological progress, the right of reply, cultural and linguistic diversity and the protection of users.?

Services of general interest in Europe

This paper concerns a methodological note for the horizontal evaluation of services of general economic interest. The object of the paper is to make a positive contribution to the decision-making process in all policy areas related to network industries providing services of general interest by providing a methodology that can help produce precise, thorough and comparative evaluations of the performance of those network industries and the services they provide. The evaluations will be based on factual information on the evolution of those industries and feedback from citizens, consumers and other stakeholders. They will focus on the following questions: -How has competition evolved in these industries and, in particular, how important was the influence of the market opening process on these changes? This will cover the changes in the number of competitors, the evolution of prices, the degree of openness in the market in legal terms and the evolution of concentration. It will also involve investigating whether more freedom of choice has led to users changing suppliers. -Have these changes had an impact on market performance? This requires an assessment in terms of productivity, innovation, employment and growth, but also on the equally important aspects of affordability, quality and accessibility of services of general interest. -How have these changes been perceived by users? The Commission will undertake consumers' satisfaction surveys. Any discrepancy between users' perception and actual market performances by these industries will indicate the need for more transparency, better communication, and better dialogue with users about their performance. The paper describes in detail the principles that have been taken into account in preparing this methodology. These involve the need to apply the subsidiarity principle, and the requirements for transparency and pluralism. Initially, horizontal evaluations will cover the following sectors : air transport, local and regional public transport, electricity, gas postal services, railway transport and telecommunications. Finally, the Commission will produce annual reports consisting of three main parts: -analysis of structural changes and market performance; -results of the permanent consumer consultation process, and -cross-sectoral review of horizontal topics.?

Services of general interest in Europe

The Commission has presented its communication on the status of work on the examination of a proposal for a Framework Directive on Services of General Interest. As a follow-up to its commitment submitted to the Laeken European Council, the Commission has decided to produce a Green Paper on services of general interest. The Green Paper will allow the Commission to examine the question of a proposal for a framework directive but also to look more thoroughly at the issue of the role of the European Union in ensuring the provision of high-quality services of general interest to consumers and businesses in Europe. The feasibility and possible added-value of a framework directive will be a core subject for the Green Paper. As already suggested by the Commission in its Report to the Laeken European Council, this issue raises complex questions regarding, among other aspects, the possible objectives, the scope of application and the content of such a directive and its links with existing sector-specific legislation. These questions will require further reflection and discussion which is what the Green Paper is designated to stimulate. Following a public consultation on the basis of this Green Paper, the Commission will finalise its examination and present its conclusions together with concrete initiatives and legislative proposals, if appropriate, by the summer 2003.?

Services of general interest in Europe

This is the second horizontal evaluation report prepared by the Commission regarding the EU's network industries which provide services of general economic interest to EU consumers. The networks scrutinised are telecommunications (both mobile and fixed lines), energy, gas, air, rail, road transport and postal services. Given the wide spectrum of issues affecting these industries the Commission has chosen to focus on a few key points. They are: analysing recent legislative developments, examining the results of studies on the effect of market openings and comparing the network performance in the new EU Member States (EU 10) with that of the old EU Member States (EU 15). In presenting this report, the Commission hopes to stimulate an open and transparent debate on the performance of network services in the EU.

Concerning the EU's legislative framework, the report notes that the general debate on the future of services of general interest has intensified since the publication of the May 2004 White Paper on this subject. A decision has yet to be taken on whether or not to prepare a framework Directive. On the other hand there have been a number of important developments regarding competition provisions for the regulation of the gas, electricity and public transport services. The Commission notes that there are many outstanding issues on the transposition of new Directives and it therefore urges the Member States to take more stringent measures to ensure the appropriate transposition of EU legislation.

Concerning the matter of market structure, the Commission finds that the number of competitors in the telecommunications sector has increased. At the same time, however, the report makes note of the fact that the market share of incumbents remains high in many service industries including telecommunications and the energy sectors. Mergers and acquisitions in the energy sector have resulted in the creation of large pan-European players. The Commission urges the Member States' authorities to scrutinise this development carefully.

Concerning differences between the EU 10 and the EU 15, the report finds that there are some differences in the market performance of network industries. The market structure in the ten new Member States appears more concentrated than in the EU 15. Although significant price differences exist between the new and old Member States in nominal terms, the difference is modest once expressed in terms of purchasing power parity other than in the transport sector. As far as the quality of services is concerned what data there is indicates that both the old and the new Member States face similar challenges.

In the final Chapter the report assesses consumer satisfaction for the network services of general interest. The most recent surveys confirm the results of previous assessments. Overall, the satisfaction of consumers is relatively high but there are important differences depending on the country and sector studied. Postal services receive the best appraisal and inter-city rail transport the lowest. Finally, consumers in the new Member States express concern regarding possible price increases following accession.

To conclude, the report comments that significant milestones have been achieved in opening up the network industries of general economic interest. Nevertheless, the Commission urges the Member States to take a greater interest in removing any outstanding obstacles hindering the completion of the internal market and to introduce effective provisions that stimulate competition between the various market players. The Commission expresses some concern regarding the emergence of large pan-European market players, which, in future, will require closer scrutiny by the competition authorities. The Commission reminds the Member States that, under the principle of subsidiarity, it is they who are responsible for the effective implementation of provisions. At the same time the Commission suggests that the improvements are thanks to the introduction of competitive elements and market openings. According to the Commission, lower prices and labour productivity can be statistically explained by market openings and that countries with a high level of market opening tend to perform better in terms of price and productivity.