Transport by rail, road and inland waterway: aid for the coordination

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The Council held a policy debate on public service obligations in passenger transport by rail, road and inland waterway. Winding up the debate, the Presidency noted that there was a convergence of views on a number of very positive points: the fact that the Commission's proposal for a Regulation guarantees a fundamental role for public passenger services as services of general interest; - the need to recognise that the performance of public service requirements sometimes calls for financial compensation which must be clearly found to be compatible with the Treaty; - the importance of social aspects needing to be taken into account in public service contract award procedures. Environmental aspects were also mentioned. During this discussion, some Member States thought it ill-advised to open up the specific area of rail passenger transport to competition at a time when a similar approach had just been agreed regarding international rail freight carriage. Several Member States argued the importance of ensuring the permanence of integrated services where there was a recognised need. Several Member States also thought that the responsible authorities should be able to opt for the direct management of such services. Several Member States were likewise insistent on the need to provide for more flexible provisions which would take into account both local situations and subsidiarity. Finally, it was noted that a number of Member States had, with the responsible authorities and operators concerned, set up public transport services on the basis of existing Community law which called for major investment, particularly from operators. These Member States thought that the duration of contracts should be extended and longer transitional periods provided for in order that a fair return on investment for the benefit of society at large might be guaranteed.