Services of general interest in Europe

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To avoid any confusion, the Committee recommends that only the term "services of general interest" be used in future; such services are regarded as an important element in the European social model, and the Committee defines them as follows: "services which the public authorities class as being of general interest, are accessible to everyone in the EU, satisfy high quality requirements and are available at affordable prices, irrespective of the question who the owner is of the service provider." The Committee therefore thinks that Member States should be able to treat other sectors, such as health care and education, as being of general interest. The Committee also emphasizes that although the introduction of competition in general interest service sectors may result in more effective and efficient service provision, the quest for profitability may mean that services for certain regions or groups are threatened, as is clear from developments in some sectors. Regulatory measures are needed to remedy this. The Committee does not endorse the view that Article 90(2) of the Treaty offers sufficient guarantees for appropriate measures to be taken at national level. Rather, it thinks that measures must be taken at EU level, as it is at this level that measures likely to jeopardize services of general interest are adopted. The Committee therefore calls for a specific reference to services of general interest in the Treaty, and asks the Commission to use the definition given in the opinion.