Services of general interest in Europe

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In a report by Ms. Angela BILLINGHAM (PES, UK), the Committee expressed its support for a Commission Communication on general interest services, such as distribution of gas and electricity, railways, local public transport and broadcasting. Stressing the importance of such services for the everyday lives of European citizens, the Committee particularly welcomed the fact the Amsterdam Treaty recognises the notion of services of general interest as one of the common values of Europe. The Committee called upon the Commission to start the process towards full implementation of the provisions on services of general interest. As a first step, the Committee urged the Commission to define the scope and nature of services of general interest, to specify more closely both the level of services necessary for accomplishing EU objectives and the regulatory framework needed to attain those objectives. Following that, the Commission has been asked to draw up a timetable within which it will translate Treaty aspirations into action, specifying for each sector the level of service to be guaranteed and the special rights that may be necessary to carry out the service. In drawing up plans and proposals, the Commission was requested to regularly consult representatives of public service undertakings, competitors and the respective workforces. Equally, the rigorous application of Community Competition Law to services of general interest is of importance. To coordinate the implementation of the provisions on services of general interest, the Commission is requested to attribute special responsibility for public services to one of the Commissioners and one of the Commission's Directorates General.