Postal services: common rules for the development of the services and improvement of quality of service

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Further liberalisation of postal services in the European Union may be at stake after the Committee on Transport and Tourism's rejection of essential parts of the Commission proposal . By adopting a number of compromise amendments, the Committee set out the lines for a clear and regulatory framework governing the activity of the postal services and the means which should ensure the maintenance of an efficient and affordable universal service. It also adopted amendments tabled by rapporteur, other land Committee members by the EP Committees on EMAC, Social Affairs, Legal Affairs and Budgetary Control. This led to a considerable modification of the Commission's proposal. The rapporteur considers the proposed Directive as a step forward for the development of the Single Market for postal services which, in the version adopted by the EP, fully complies with the coherence and legal security requirements as well as the necessity to guarantee the economic viability, the quality and efficiency of the postal services as well as the conditions for a liberalised and open market. By adopting Mr SIMPSON's compromise amendment no 3, the Committee took on board a definition of harmonization of those postal services to be reserved, which goes much further than the Commission's proposal. Therefore, the most important Article 8 was considerably amended. Paragraph 1 of Article 8 now reads as follows: In order to ensure the maintenance of the universal service and the economic viability of the operator responsible for providing it, the services which can be reserved to the universal service provider(s) in each Member State are the collection, sorting, transport and delivery of items of domestic correspondence, including the direct mail, whose price is less than 5 times the public tariff for an item of correspondence in the first weight step, provided they weigh less than 350 gr. In the case of the free postal services for blind and partially sighted persons, exceptions to the weight and price restrictions shall be permitted. In paragraph 2, the Commission had proposed that the distribution of incoming cross-border mail and direct mail may continue to be reserved until 31 December 2000 and that the Commission will decide on 30 June 1998 at the latest, as to the appropriateness of maintaining the reservation of these services after 31 December 2000. No, said the Committee, and agreed on the following definition of this paragraph: The distribution of cross-border mail within the same limits of tariff and weight can continue to be reserved until five years after the coming into force of this directive. Four years after the entry into force of this directive at the latest, the Commission will present a proposal for a directive in this area. It will take into account the further measures required to maintain an equal level of service for all members of the public and good social conditions for employees. After the vote, a Commission representative could not inform the Committee if the amended proposal will be accepted. It became clear, that Member States like Sweden and the Netherlands, where the postal services are liberalised already, will not be affected by yesterday's vote.