# Services of general interest in Europe. Green paper

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The Report's objective is to describe and analyse the consultation process of the Commission's Green Paper on services of general interest. The Green Paper, published in May 2003, was presented in order to stimulate a discussion on the promotion of high-quality public services in the European Union. Its publication launched a broad public consultation on the role of public services in the EU. The consultation process attempted to stimulate a discussion on how public services in the EU are organised, financed and evaluated. In total the Commission received 281 contributions from a wide range of sectors, reflecting diverse views. This Report seeks to identify the main trends, views and concerns arising from the contributions. Contributions received by the Commission can be found on the Internet. The consultation process itself lasted four months - longer than the minimum of eight weeks. Although most countries contributed some material there was a strong level of interest and response from Belgium, France, Germany and Austria. Respondents included national governments, one national parliament, local and regional authorities, providers of health and social services, private organisations, media associations, trade unions, churches, political parties and academic organisations. Some of the main conclusion to be drawn from the Consultation exercise include, inter alia,: - Broad agreement on the importance of services of general interest. - No agreement on the relationship between services of general interest and market principles. - Broad agreement that the Community should not be given additional powers in the field of services of general interest. - Broad agreement that sector-specific regulation must not be extended to all services. However, for some services (water, waste, local public transport) diverging views exist regarding closer EU regulation. - No need for the creation of European regulator authorities. Networks of national regulators co-ordinated at European level seem to be the preferred option. - Broad agreement on the continued need for sector-specific legislation. - Broad agreement that the EU should not be given additional powers in the field of non-economic services. - Broad agreement that Regulation at Community level should establish principles and objectives, while Member States should be left to implement the specific rules. - Little or no support for the introduction of additional sector-specific obligations at a Community level. Some suggest close monitoring of this point in particular with regard to the "security of supply". - No agreement on the opening of the water sector at EU level. - Broad consensus that no specific EU measures are needed on media pluralism and that this issue is a matter for the Member States. - Calls for clarification on the rules and concession on public-private partnerships, procurement and state aid. - Agreement that further harmonisation of public service obligations at the EU level is not desirable. - Agreement on the need for flexible and non-bureaucraticexchange of best practice and benchmarking in the field of services of general interest. - A call for clarification and simplification of the rules applying to the financing of services of general interest and in particular state aid. - Consensus that the Member States retain the right to determine financing of services of general interest - provided that competition is no unduly distorted. The purpose of this Report is not to draw political conclusions from the consultation process but to report on the opinions and comments of those who submitted responses to the Green Paper. Any political conclusions will be presented in a follow-up to the Green Paper which the Commission will present in line with a request to do so from the European Parliament. This Commission Staff Working Paper should provide useful background material to future work on this subject.