Services of general interest in Europe. Green paper

2003/2152(INI) - 14/01/2004 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initative report drafted by Philippe HERZOG (EUL/NGL, F) on services of general interest. (Please see the summary of 15/12/03.) Parliament felt that, in the light of the problems encountered with liberalisation in certain sectors, taking as an example the rail transport sector in Great Britain, it was necessary to assess, on the basis of a pluralist, open approach, the impact on employment, users' needs, safety, the environment, and social and territorial cohesion, before initiating new phases of liberalization. With regard to publically-funded services, Parliament strongly supported the right of Member States to fund public services from taxation, where they consider this to be appropriate. Member States may often choose to fund public services from taxation, while, at the same time, leaving the organisation and provision of those services to the private or voluntary sector. Member States should not be expected to run public services merely on the basis that they fund such services, and where Member States choose to make use of the private and voluntary sector in this way, there is significant potential to improve the quality and efficiency of service provision by opening up cross-border competition. Parliament went on to state that public radio and television broadcasters have a public service remit and play a major role in preserving cultural diversity and identity. Member States must therefore continue to have the right to fund public radio and television broadcasters and to define their public service remit. On the question of financing, Parliament stressed that calculating the actual costs of services of general economic interest constitutes a problem. It called for clear rules that would allow for transparency in determining the costs of providing services of general economic interest. The financing mechanisms introduced by Member States and the Community should comply with the following criteria: the least possible distortion of competition; the highest possible efficiency in the use of funds, attractive prices, high contribution to long-term investment, social and territorial cohesion, continuity and the greatest possible security of supply. Finally, Parliament appreciated the fact that consumers with a low income, in particular, have benefited from the liberalisation, notable in the telecommunication and energy sectors. Notwithstanding the fact that existing sectoral directives have not always achieved all their objectives for the creation of a large internal market in the case of energy or for establishment of a level playing field in the case of telecommunications, these deficiencies are often due to either the non-application or incorrect application of Community rules by Member States, or to the unsatisfactory compromises reached by Member States on some provisions of the relevant directives. This successful outcome has only been possible thanks to the activities of national regulatory authorities during the transitional phase. Parliament rejected the option of European regulators at sectoral level, but called for the strengthening of coordination and cooperation between the authorities responsible for national regulations in order to make the latter more consistent.