

European Commission: Green Paper on Services of General Interest in Europe

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On 21 May 2003, the European Commission adopted a Green Paper on services of general interest. With this document, the European Commission aims to launch an open debate on the role of the European Union in promoting the provision of high-quality public services (see IRIS 2002-8: 3).

Services of general interest are believed to form an essential element of the European model of society. In practice, the organisation of such services varies between the different Member States depending on cultural traditions, historical and geographical conditions. The European Union has, in line with the principle of subsidiarity, always respected this diversity and the roles of the different authorities (national, regional and local) in providing for the well-being of their citizens. This attitude towards the Member States and the diversity in the organisation of the services, explain the various degrees of Community involvement in this field.

The forthcoming enlargement of the European Union, however, warrants an assessment of whether any changes in the Union's attitude and legal framework are desirable. Besides giving an overview of the current European situation, the Green Paper raises questions on how the Union's policies in this field could be improved, while taking account of the continuing globalisation and liberalisation of such services. The question is also raised of whether there is a need for creating a general legal framework for services of general interest at Community level.

The Green Paper also addresses the issue of media pluralism. It recalls that the protection of media pluralism is currently primarily a task for the Member States and is not specifically addressed by existing Community secondary legislation. The need for Community action in this field was assessed on the basis of a Green Paper in 1992, but this did not lead to the adoption of any formal initiative. In light of the progressive concentration of the media sector and the proliferation of electronic media, the present Green Paper now raises the question of whether the Commission should re-examine the need for Community action in this field.

The Commission invites all interested parties to comment on the questions set out in the Green Paper before 15 September 2003.

"European Commission launches a broad debate on the future of services of general interest in Europe", Press release of the European Commission IP/03/714, 21 May 2003

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/03/714&format=HTML&aged=1&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

Green Paper on services of general interest, COM(2003) 270 final, 21 May 2003

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:52003DC0270:EN:HTML>

