

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0586/02
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to the Commission

Subject: Postal services

The Commission has introduced an effective system to monitor price differentials in the EU car sector. DG Competition regularly publishes studies that show the prices that consumers have to pay for the main car makes and models in every Member State. These studies have become a useful and powerful instrument for the Commission to fight breaches of the competition rules in the car sector and to promote changes of the internal market rules. Differences in car prices in the EU currently vary between approximately 10% and, in extreme cases, up to 50%.

In the EU postal sector, the differences in prices for similar postal services vary considerably. Consumers in Germany pay 2.33 times the price that Spanish consumers pay for a similar, basic service. Whereas buyers of cars can choose from multiple makes and supply channels, buyers of postal services are generally bound to one supplier, the national monopoly. Therefore, the effectiveness of the EC's efforts to ensure that consumers are not overcharged is crucial for the functioning of the market.

It seems that regular studies of price differentials for basic postal services, and their causes, are needed in order to ensure that consumers in the EU are not being overcharged, that EC competition rules are not being breached and that the Commission can adequately tackle internal market distortions. Such data would, for instance, help the Commission to determine whether the revenues from the postal operators' monopolies were not being misused for purposes that lie outside the universal service obligation in ways that are contrary to the Postal Directive. In addition, such data would increase the Commission's understanding of the postal market with regard to future EC liberalisation measures.

Can the Commission intimate its view on the introduction of a monitoring system for the postal sector, similar to the one used to monitor car prices and taking the characteristics of the postal market into consideration?