

WRITTEN QUESTION E-6292/08

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to the Commission

Subject: Distortions of competition on the European and Italian telecommunications market

The recent financial crisis has aggravated the already difficult economic situation in Europe, causing a recession in industrial production, as indicated by the most recent data presented by the Commission.

European consumers are faced with a general rise in prices (of approximately 4%), particularly prices of basic necessities. In this economic situation, recent events on the Italian telecommunications market - telecommunications being a significant item of everyday expenditure for people in Italy - suggest that there is likely to be a further deterioration in the situation, with a rise in the prices of fixed communications and continuing high prices of mobile communications. On the one hand, the recent request by the former monopoly operator for an increase in the subscription charge (from € 12.40 to € 13.66), accompanied by an increase in the unbundling charge (+23%), i.e. the charge paid by competitors to the former monopolist for access to the local network, which is not justified by any valid reason of an accounting nature which could lead to a better service or improved network efficiency, would have a regressive impact on the degree of opening of the market, on its efficiency and on competition, but also and above all on the economic interests and rights of consumers.

On the other hand, the recent decision by the Communications Guarantee Authority (AGCOM) on mobile termination (with a target value between 5.9 and 7 €cents per minute in 2011, as against a target value of between 2.5 and 1.5 €cents per minute calculated by the Commission) will enable mobile operators to continue to charge high retail rates, while investment costs have long since been written off.

The overall impact in terms of increased costs to Italian consumers would be of the order of € 400 m in 2009 alone, as alternative operators would be compelled to pass on this increased cost to their own customers as well.

The Italian telecommunications market is therefore manifestly moving in a direction contrary to the targets of the Commission, which are geared to reducing substantially the prices which European consumers have to pay for telecommunications services.

Is it not necessary to ask AGCOM to align itself fully with the Commission's targets in order to avoid an artificial rise in communications prices, both mobile and fixed, not justified by valid accounting arguments, particularly at a time of general economic crisis?

Is it not desirable to fully support the initiatives of DG Information Society and Media with a view to eliminating distortions of competition (particularly in roaming, SMS and termination services) which still persist on the European mobile communications market?