

WRITTEN QUESTION E-3544/09
by Elizabeth Lynne (ALDE)
to the Commission

Subject: Use of premium rate telephone numbers by public institutions including healthcare agencies

Does the Commission have any information on public agencies in Member States, and at EU level - particularly health services offering only premium rate telephone numbers as means of contact?

Does the Commission not feel it would be discriminatory for public services or agencies to only allow themselves to be addressed by a premium rate phone number, and, in the case of health services, potentially irresponsible?

Would the Commission have any jurisdiction in this area, for example to require that EU institutions or public agencies in Member States offer standard rate numbers on which the public may contact them?

In its 11 July 2006 response to my previous written question E-2259/06 on the matter, the Commission informed me that under the Misleading Advertising Directive, which will be replaced by the Unfair Commercial Practices Directive, 'Failure to disclose beforehand the cost of premium rate calls, or misleading consumers to believing that they are normal numbers, when they are not, could constitute a misleading practice'.

Does the Commission not agree that providing this information on the line when actually making the call would be the only sure way of ensuring the consumer is informed of the cost beforehand, as opposed to noting the cost on a website, for example?