



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

2009 - 2014

Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection

2009/2222(INI)

5.4.2011

OPINION

of the Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection

for the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

on the future for social services of general interest
(2009/2222(INI))

Rapporteur: Damien Abad

PA_NonLeg

SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection calls on the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions in its motion for a resolution:

1. Considers that social services of general interest (SSGI) play a comprehensive role in implementation of the principles set out in Article 3 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) and Articles 9 and 14 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), particularly with regard to the development of a highly competitive social market economy and the promotion of economic, social and territorial cohesion in the Union;
2. Stresses here that it is important to reinforce the social dimension of the single market and take better account of the special nature of SSGI, with emphasis on a pragmatic approach in which the accessibility, universality, fairness, quality and efficiency of such services are the prime considerations;
3. Draws attention to the range of public-service models in Europe and the fact that observance of the principle of subsidiarity should be at the centre of further considerations in the discussions aimed at clarifying the link between the European level and local, regional and national levels;
4. Reiterates the fact that SSGI are constantly evolving in response to new economic, social, institutional and technological developments; calls on the Commission and the Member States to continue the process of modernising the infrastructure, the organisation and the financing of services of general interest in light of constant changes in the internal market and the essential needs of European citizens;

Promoting the political importance of SSGI

5. Considers that, given the place these services have in Europe, especially against a background of economic crisis, the EU should recognise their importance; asks the Commission, therefore, to explore whether a European social services observatory, if set up, would be a suitable tool for collecting information from various sources in the Member States and promoting good practice at European, national, regional and local level;
6. Calls also on the Commission to update the SSGI questions and answers website, and to draw up a methodology which is better adapted to authorities running public services and to operators and is comprehensible, directly applicable and accessible in all the EU official languages;
7. Stresses the interest, for a better understanding of common concepts regarding the quality of SSGI, of the voluntary European quality framework for social services adopted in 2010 by the Social Protection Committee; wishes to see a definition of the common coordination instruments, with a view to optimising the use of this voluntary framework and exchanging best practices with the aim of determining comparable quality indicators;

8. Calls on the Commission to continue its efforts to identify the specific characteristics of SSGI and to find a common accepted definition of services of general interest, while fully respecting the responsibilities of the Member States and taking into account the distinctive and individual ways in which these services are tailored across Europe;

Taking into account the economic dimension of social services

9. Draws attention to the substantial proportion of total employment in the EU, and of public financing in the Member States, that is accounted for by SSGI; believes that, against a background of economic and budgetary crisis, a balanced approach needs to be adopted, based on preserving the continuity and quality of social services and making them more efficient;
10. Considers, therefore, that discussion is required, firstly, on clarifying concepts and especially the notion of mandating, and on the relationship between necessary compliance with public procurement rules and SSGI, particularly with regard to new management approaches such as in-house procurement and cooperation between local authorities, and secondly, on an increased emphasis on quality criteria in the tender selection process, ensuring that SMEs and other organisations participate on an equal footing;
11. Draws attention, in this context, to the rules regulating competition for service providers and recalls the general principles of the Treaty (non discrimination, equality of treatment, proportionality) to ensure fair competition between public and private businesses providing SSGI;

Determining a framework for SSGI

12. Emphasises the need to clarify the legal uncertainties affecting SSGI; welcomes the updating of the Commission's guide on the application of EU state aid, public procurement and single market rules to SSGI but recalls that this is not sufficient, as the rules raise problems for numerous players; calls on the Commission to simplify these rules;
13. Notes the proposals made in the Monti report, especially those concerned with the application of Article 14 TFEU and Protocol No 26; considers it essential to move forward with a pragmatic approach enabling the real problems, and potential solutions to them, to be identified; calls on the Commission, in association with Parliament and the Council, to carry out in-depth research into the functioning of a SSGI sector such as that of services to the elderly, which will have a major role to play as the EU will face substantial demographic changes in the near future;
14. Asks Member States to ensure that the quality requirements are met by public and private businesses providing SSGI; calls on the Commission to gather information on national quality requirements in addition to information on good practices in Member States;
15. Welcomes the Commission's initiative to improve transparency and awareness in the field of state aid, public procurement, public-private partnerships and concessions by developing communication tools in the field of social services; points out, however, that a number of issues are still pending and rules need to be adapted accordingly to the needs of

local authorities and small providers, and therefore the Commission should continue to provide a clear legal foundation and information on the application of EU rules, with the aim that services of general interest are capable of fulfilling their mission and contribute to a better quality of life for European citizens;

16. Stresses the importance of closer cooperation between providers and stakeholders in the context of SSGL, and of greater user involvement with a view to improving the definition of expectations and improving quality;
17. Points out that a wide range of social services have been excluded from the scope of the Directive on Services in the internal market; hopes the Commission will soon draw up a balance sheet concerning the transposition of those exclusion measures.

RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

Date adopted	22.3.2011
Result of final vote	+: 34 -: 2 0: 0
Members present for the final vote	Pablo Arias Echeverría, Adam Bielan, Cristian Silviu Buşoi, Lara Comi, Anna Maria Corazza Bildt, António Fernando Correia De Campos, Jürgen Creutzmann, Christian Engström, Evelyne Gebhardt, Iliana Ivanova, Philippe Juvin, Sandra Kalniete, Eija-Riitta Korhola, Edvard Kožušník, Kurt Lechner, Toine Manders, Gianni Pittella, Mitro Repo, Zuzana Roithová, Heide Rühle, Matteo Salvini, Christel Schaldemose, Andreas Schwab, Catherine Stihler, Kyriacos Triantaphyllides, Bernadette Vergnaud, Barbara Weiler
Substitute(s) present for the final vote	Damien Abad, Cornelis de Jong, Ashley Fox, Constance Le Grip, Pier Antonio Panzeri, Antonyia Parvanova, Sylvana Rapti, Amalia Sartori
Substitute(s) under Rule 187(2) present for the final vote	Michael Gahler