



**Comité européen de liaison
sur les Services d'intérêt général**

**European Liaison Committee
on Services of General Interest**

**Europäisches Verbindungskomitee
"Dienstleistungen von allgemeinem Interesse"**

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2009 - Placing SGEI at the heart of European institutions.

The proposal, submitted by the CELSIG, on 13th November 2008, during the Seminar entitled “Services of general interest. Challenges of the European elections of June 2009”, to the effect that a Commissioner be nominated specifically and exclusively in charge of SGEI/SGI within the European Commission, having at his disposal a proper administrative structure, was a subject for debate. Members of the European Parliament present at the seminar, representing various groups in the EP (EPP-PES-ALDE-Greens-GUE), argued that the Commissioner might be marginalised and carry lesser weight compared to Commissioners for Competition and Internal Market and, that a Directorate, even a Directorate General might not be able to coordinate with sufficient authority the various relevant departments of the Commission.

These objections are debatable

So far, the responsibilities regarding SGEI within the European Commission have been shared, and in a way attenuated, between Commissioners and Directorate Generals of, on the one hand sectoral areas (Energy, Transport, Information society, Social, Health) and, on the other hand, transversal areas (Competition, Internal Market and Consumers) with coordination under the sole responsibility of the Secretariat General. The result is a series of divergences, deferments and inconsistencies.

Without detracting sectoral and transversal competences mentioned above, it would be appropriate to provide an integrated strategic steering by explicitly entrusting this responsibility to one of the Vice-Presidents of the Commission, coupled with the creation of a dedicated administrative unit (a DG or something else).

It is certainly because up until now nobody within the Commission has officially been transversally entrusted with the issue of SGEI, that dominant approaches have been those of sectors, competition and the Internal Market. Similarly, it is certainly because responsibilities have been scattered among various departments of the Commission that the social, service quality, user rights, territorial cohesion and even economic aspects, have been neglected and they, consequently, weigh insufficiently in the construction of the Internal Market and as regards competition policy.

Only one DG – the Transport DG - has a SGEI unit in its field. The public postal service is solely under the responsibility of the Internal Market DG, and it took a strong mobilisation by the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee of the Regions, the European Trade Union Confederation and the whole civil society to ensure that a demanding definition of universal postal service is adopted, however, without any funding guarantee at the Community level. In the case of telecommunications, the universal service is limited to a minimum service. In the electricity sector, the definition of the universal service remains very broad and users experience significant rises of prices without having any guarantee.

The issue of SGI/SGEI is a political issue and not just technical or sectoral. That is why, CELSIG proposals are concurrent and inseparable:

1st proposal

Given the position of the SGIs as guarantors of fundamental rights, tools for economic, social and territorial cohesion, vectors of sustainable development and of the fight against climate change, it is necessary to make SGIs an important issue of the election campaign for the European Parliament elections in June 2009, and each one of the political organisations taking part must clearly define the direction it proposes.

2nd proposal

Given the essential role played by the European Commission as regards legislative proposals, implementation of Community bearings and decisions, especially concerning competition issues, it is all important that the future President of the Commission makes the commitment that serious work on SGI and SGEI, both sectoral and transversal, will be part of priority working axes.

The next president of the European Commission should, during his inauguration, firmly declare that the SGI/SGEI issue is a priority throughout his tenure of office and organise his Commission accordingly.

The EP has the means to exert pressure and lay down requirements if it wishes because it is the one that invests the Commission and its President (even with the Treaty of Nice). The political groups of the European Parliament should make this commitment a *sine qua non* condition for the election of the Commission's President.

3rd proposal.

In order to ensure a strategic integrated steering of this commitment, this transversal responsibility should be explicitly assigned to one of the Vice-Presidents of the Commission, with the creation of a dedicated administrative structure (a DG or something else) in close relationship with the other administrative structures concerned.

4th proposal.

In order to ensure continuous monitoring of SGI and SGEI at the Parliament, as well as regular link with the Commission and the Council, it is judicious to set up a Commission or *a minima* a permanent intergroup at the European Parliament. Such an intergroup will not be competing against but complementary to the current social economy intergroup.

10 February 2009