

Services of General Interest must be integrated into the Constitutional Treaty

The EPSU Executive Committee meeting on 25 April in Brussels, stresses the vital importance of the on-going work of the European Convention for the future of Europe, and for a European Union close to its citizens.

The role of services of general interest and their specific role in promoting economic prosperity, social, territorial and economic cohesion, as well as environmental protection, has been recognised by the EU. Article 36 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Article 16 of the Treaty establishing the European Community describe SGI as part of the shared values within the EU.

Continued and even accelerated liberalisation of certain sectors, such as electricity and gas, and the development of the internal market, with its emphasis on competition and trade policies, have fundamentally changed the parameters for the provision of SGI. The possibility for public authorities to determine the way of service provision at local, regional and national levels is being seriously pressurised, if not eroded. Competition and market mechanisms are effective tools in many areas of the economy, but they fail to ensure public policy objectives, such as social, territorial and economic cohesion, continuity of service, transparency and democratic control of services, and equal access to high quality of services of

general interest.

The Convention therefore represents an opportunity not to be missed to redress the current imbalance between competition rules and those governing services of general interest. Services of general interest must be anchored within the Constitutional Treaty, within their own right, as part of the EU's objectives and actions. Services of general interest are a major pillar of the European social model. It is crucial, particularly in the light of EU enlargement, to consolidate and further build the European social model,

The EPSU Executive Committee calls upon the members of the Convention to take on board the work done by the Social Europe group, especially the concrete proposals for the new Article 3. On the social objective of the Union, the Group recommends that Article 3 of the Constitutional Treaty include the promotion of: full employment, social justice, social peace, sustainable development, economic, social and territorial cohesion, social market economy, quality of work, lifelong learning, social inclusion, a high degree of social protection, equality between men and women, children's rights, a high level of public health and efficient and high quality social services and services of general interest.

EPSU welcomes the fact that Article 16 TEC is to feature as Clause 3 of the second part of the Constitutional Treaty. This article however needs to be strengthened in line with the proposals made by EPSU, the ETUC, the CEEP and a broad alliance of non-governmental organisations.

EPSU urges Members of the Convention to refocus their discussions. The

architecture of the EU is important, but there is little point if the structure is uninhabitable - equally important is the definition of policy objectives. The social acquis of the existing Treaties needs to be safeguarded and further developed. The key demands of the European Trade Union Confederation are that the Convention must ensure:

- The integration of the Fundamental Rights' Charter within the first part of the Constitutional Treaty;
- A clear commitment to a social market economy guaranteeing equal access of citizens to high quality services of general interest;
- A clearly defined role for the social dialogue and the social partners.

The European Federation of Public Service Unions is the largest federation affiliated to the ETUC and represents 10 million workers providing services to the public in health and social care, local, regional and central government, and utilities in energy, water and waste.

Brussels, 25 April 2003

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