

Brussels, 27 February 2008

Publication of Postal Directive marks start date for real market opening

The Third Postal Directive is published today in the Official Journal. The publication marks the entry into force of the directive and sets the clock ticking for abolishing legal monopolies on postal services by 31 December 2010. The Directive is the result of a broad political consensus on the way forward for the regulatory framework of European postal services. The Commission will monitor and assist Member States pro-actively in implementing the Directive. In particular, it will pay close attention to potential entry barriers that would deprive users of the benefit of a dynamic and open market.

Internal Market and Services Commissioner Charlie McCreevy said that: *"agreeing this Third Postal Directive was a job well done. But work is hardly finished. A Directive means little if it is not properly transposed in national law and rigorously implemented on the ground. We have to be vigilant to ensure that what is given by one hand is not taken away by the other."*

Commissioner McCreevy also insisted on the huge potential of the postal sector and said *"I am not among those that consider it yesterday's business. It has a great future, that can not be substituted by electronic means. If anything, electronic commerce provides an opportunity rather than a threat to postal services. The postal sector provides essential infrastructure for our citizens and companies to communicate with each other. We can't have a state of the art economy without a state of the art postal sector."*

Monitoring and assistance

The mission of EU postal reform continues. Next steps will require close monitoring of the development of competition notably by national regulatory authorities whose role has now been strengthened further. Particular attention will be paid to quality and prices of universal postal service. The Commission services will assist Member States in the transposition of the Directive to ensure that postal reform remains true to its objective of high quality and innovative postal services.

Commissioner McCreevy expressed his concerns on protectionist tendencies that are contrary to the spirit of EU postal reform on which the EU has engaged for over 15 years. These include restrictive licensing requirements for new operators, abnormally high setting of minimum wages which create a disproportionate barrier to entry, predatory pricing, discriminatory access to the postal infrastructure, operational standards that limit interoperability between operators, etc. The Commissioner stated: *"We hear calls for all sorts of prohibitive requirements or conditions to be imposed on new entrants that would make it effectively impossible for them to run their business. This is not my idea of a Single Market. We will use the means at our disposal to address such protectionist behaviour to see to it that what we agreed will also be implemented."*

Concrete benefits for citizens and businesses

The text published today reflects the overall political agreement between the institutions and keeps the key elements of the Commission's initial proposal and in particular: the accomplishment of the internal market of Community postal services via the abolition of the reserved area in all Member States; the confirmation of the scope and standard of universal service; reinforcement of consumers' rights and upgrading of the role of national regulatory authorities; the offering of a list of measures Member States may take to safeguard and finance, if necessary, the universal service.

With the removal of reserved areas, users of postal services can expect the services available to them to develop and further improve. In this open environment, universal service providers will be motivated to become more reliable and efficient and to further increase their customer focus in the light of potential competition from new market entrants. In line with the goals of the Lisbon agenda, full market opening will also directly foster the creation of new jobs in new postal companies, and, indirectly, in the industries dependent on the postal sector.

Background

Postal services are at the cross roads of the communication and e-commerce sectors, and as such they are a cornerstone of the internal market and account for some 1% of EU GDP.

Postal Services in the EU are covered by the 1997 Postal Directive (97/67/EC). Through the creation of a robust regulatory framework, the Directive guarantees citizens a high quality universal postal service. The Directive aims at ensuring the best possible service through a progressive opening of the market by gradually reducing the scope of the reserved area (initially mail under 350 grams, amended in 2002 to 100 grams and reduced on 1/1/2006 to 50 grams). This new Directive published today is the final step in a long reform process that has already seen large sections of EU postal markets opened to competition, with very positive results. The Directive requires Member States to continue to ensure a universal service for all customers including collection and delivery of mail at least 5 days per week at affordable prices throughout the territory.

As regards the final date for the implementation of the new Directive, the date is now 31 December 2010, with the possibility for some Member States to postpone full market opening by two more years as a maximum and the inclusion of a temporary reciprocity clause applying to those Member States that make use of this transitional period.

More information is available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/post/index_en.htm