

COMMON POSITION (EC) No 19/2007**adopted by the Council on 8 November 2007****with a view to adopting Directive 2007/.../EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of ...
amending Council Directive 97/67/EC with regard to the full accomplishment of the internal market
of Community postal services**

(2007/C 307 E/02)

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL OF THE
EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty establishing the European Community, and in particular Article 47(2), Articles 55 and 95 thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the Commission,

Having regard to the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee ⁽¹⁾,

Having regard to the opinion of the Committee of the Regions ⁽²⁾,

Acting in accordance with the procedure laid down in Article 251 of the Treaty ⁽³⁾,

Whereas:

- (1) The Council in its Resolution of 7 February 1994 on the development of Community Postal Services ⁽⁴⁾ identified as one of the main objectives of Community postal policy the reconciling of the gradual, controlled opening to competition of the postal market with a sustainable guarantee of the provision of the universal service.
- (2) Directive 97/67/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 December 1997 on common rules for the development of the internal market of Community postal services and the improvement of quality of service ⁽⁵⁾ established a regulatory framework for the postal sector at Community level, including measures to guarantee a universal service and the setting of maximum limits for the postal services which Member States may reserve to their universal service provider(s) with a view to the maintenance of the universal service, to be reduced in a gradual and progressive manner, and a timetable for decision-making on the further opening of the market to competition, for the purposes of creating an internal market in postal services.
- (3) Article 16 of the Treaty highlights the place occupied by services of general economic interest in the shared values of the European Union as well as their role in promoting social and territorial cohesion. It states that care should be taken that such services operate on the basis of principles and conditions which enable them to fulfil their missions.

- (4) The positive role played by services of general economic interest was emphasised by Special Eurobarometer 219 of October 2005 which indicated that postal services are the most appreciated services of general economic interest according to users throughout the EU, with 77 % of people questioned responding positively.

- (5) Since they constitute an essential instrument for communication and information exchange, postal services fulfil a vital role which contributes to the objectives of social, economic and territorial cohesion in the Union. Postal networks have important territorial and social dimensions which make universal access to essential local services possible.

- (6) The measures in the area of postal services should be designed in such a way that the tasks of the Community pursuant to Article 2 of the Treaty, namely, to promote throughout the Community a harmonious, balanced and sustainable development of economic activities, a high level of employment and of social protection, sustainable and non-inflationary growth, a high degree of competitiveness and convergence of economic performance, the raising of the standard of living and quality of life, and economic and social cohesion and solidarity among Member States, are achieved as objectives.

- (7) European postal markets have undergone dramatic change in recent years, a development that has been driven by technological advancements and increased competition resulting from deregulation. Due to globalisation, it is essential to take a pro-active and pro-development stance so as not to deprive Union citizens of the benefits of such change.

- (8) In its Conclusions concerning the mid-term review of the Lisbon Strategy the European Council of 22 and 23 March 2005 re-stated the importance of completing the internal market as an instrument to foster growth and create more and better jobs, and the important role that effective services of general economic interest have to play in a competitive and dynamic economy. These Conclusions remain applicable to postal services as an essential instrument of communication, trade, and social and territorial cohesion.

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 168, 20.7.2007, p. 74.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 197, 24.8.2007, p. 37. Opinion delivered following non-compulsory consultation.

⁽³⁾ Opinion of the European Parliament of 11 July 2007 (not yet published in the Official Journal), Council Common Position of 8 November 2007 and Position of the European Parliament of ... (not yet published in the Official Journal).

⁽⁴⁾ OJ C 48, 16.2.1994, p. 3.

⁽⁵⁾ OJ L 15, 21.1.1998, p. 14. Directive as last amended by Regulation (EC) No 1882/2003 (OJ L 284, 31.10.2003, p. 1).

- (9) The European Parliament Resolution of 2 February 2006 on the application of the Postal Directive ⁽¹⁾ highlighted the social and economic importance of efficient postal services and their important role within the framework of the Lisbon Strategy, indicating that reform measures undertaken so far have brought about significant positive developments in the postal sector, along with increased quality, more efficiency and better user-orientation. In its Resolution, the European Parliament called on the Commission, in view of the sometimes perceptibly divergent developments in universal service obligations in the Member States, to concentrate in particular, when drawing up its prospective study, on the quality of the universal service provided and on its future funding and to propose, in the context of that study, a definition, scope and appropriate financing for the universal service.
- (10) In accordance with Directive 97/67/EC, a prospective study assessing, for each Member State, the impact on universal service of the full accomplishment of the internal market of Community postal services in 2009 has been carried out. The Commission has also undertaken a thorough review of the Community postal sector, including the commissioning of studies on the economic, social and technological developments in the sector, and has consulted extensively with interested parties.
- (11) The prospective study states that the basic aim of ensuring the sustainable provision of a universal service matching the standard of quality defined by the Member States in accordance with Directive 97/67/EC can be secured throughout the Community by 2009 without the need for a reserved area.
- (12) The progressive and gradual opening of postal markets to competition has provided universal service providers with sufficient time to put in place the necessary modernisation and restructuring measures required to ensure their long-term viability under new market conditions, and enabled Member States to adapt their regulatory systems to a more open environment. Furthermore, Member States may avail themselves of the opportunity offered by the transposition period, and the substantial time necessary for the introduction of effective competition, in order to proceed with further modernisation and restructuring of the universal service providers as necessary.
- (13) The prospective study shows that the reserved area should no longer be the preferred solution for the financing of the universal service. This assessment takes into account the interest of the Community and its Member States in the accomplishment of the internal market and its potential for delivering growth and employment, as well as ensuring the availability of an efficient service of general economic interest for all users. It is therefore appropriate to confirm the final date for the accomplishment of the internal market for postal services.
- (14) There are a number of drivers of change within the postal sector, notably demand and changing user needs, organisational change, automation and the introduction of new technologies, substitution by electronic means of communication and the opening of the market. In order to meet competition, cope with new consumer requirements and secure new sources of funding, postal service providers may diversify their activities by providing electronic business services or other information society services.
- (15) Postal service providers, including the designated universal service providers, are being spurred on to improve efficiency as a result of new competitive challenges (such as digitalisation and electronic communications) which differ from the traditional postal services and this will in itself contribute to a major increase in competitiveness.
- (16) Complete market-opening will help to expand the overall size of the postal markets. It will further contribute to maintaining sustainable and quality employment within universal service providers as well as facilitate the creation of new jobs in other operators, new entrants and associated economic sectors. This Directive is without prejudice to the competence of Member States to regulate employment conditions in the postal services sector, which should not, however, lead to unfair competition. Social considerations should be taken into due account when preparing the opening up of the postal market.
- (17) Transport alone should not be considered as a postal service. Direct mail consisting solely of advertising, marketing or publicity material and comprising an identical message, except for the addressee's name, address and identifying number, may be considered as an item of correspondence.
- (18) Increased competitiveness should furthermore enable the postal sector to be integrated with alternative methods of communication and allow the quality of the service provided to evermore demanding users to be improved.
- (19) Rural postal networks, in, *inter alia*, mountain and island regions, play an important role in integrating businesses into the national/global economy and in maintaining cohesion in social and employment terms. Furthermore, rural postal points in remote regions can provide an important infrastructure network for access to new electronic communications services.
- (20) Developments in the neighbouring communications markets have had a varied impact in different regions of the Community and segments of the population and on the use of postal services. Territorial and social cohesion should be maintained, and taking into account that Member States may adapt some specific service features to accommodate local demand by making use of the flexibility provided for in Directive 97/67/EC, it is appropriate to fully maintain the universal service and the associated quality requirements set out in Directive 97/67/EC.

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 288 E, 25.11.2006, p. 77.

It is appropriate to clarify, in line with existing practice, that Member States should provide clearance and delivery of mail only on the working days of the week that are not defined, by national legislation, as public holidays. In order to ensure that the opening of the market continues to benefit all users, in particular consumers and small and medium-sized enterprises, Member States should monitor and supervise market developments. They should take appropriate regulatory measures, available under Directive 97/67/EC, to ensure that accessibility to postal services continues to satisfy the needs of users, including, by ensuring, where appropriate, a minimum number of services at the same access point and, in particular, that there is an appropriate density of access points to postal services in rural and remote regions.

- (21) The universal service guarantees, in principle, one clearance and one delivery to the home or premises of every natural or legal person every working day, even in remote or sparsely populated areas.
- (22) The provision of high-quality postal services contributes significantly to attaining the objective of social and territorial cohesion. E-commerce, in particular, offers new opportunities for remote and sparsely populated areas to participate in economic life for which the provision of good postal services is an important precondition.
- (23) Directive 97/67/EC established a preference for the provision of the universal service through the designation of universal service providers. Member States may require that the universal service be provided throughout the whole of the national territory. Greater competition and choice means that Member States should be given further flexibility to determine the most efficient and appropriate mechanism to guarantee the availability of the universal service, while respecting the principles of objectivity, transparency, non-discrimination, proportionality and least market distortion necessary to ensure the free provision of postal services in the internal market. Member States may apply one or a combination of the following: the provision of the universal service by market forces, the designation of one or several undertakings to provide different elements of the universal service or to cover different parts of the territory and public procurement of services.

In the event that a Member State decides to designate one or more undertakings for the provision of the universal service, or for the provision of the various components of the universal service, it must be ensured that quality requirements pertaining to the universal service are imposed in a transparent and proportionate manner on the universal service providers. Where a Member State designates more than one undertaking, it should ensure that there is no overlap in the universal service obligations.

- (24) It is important that users be fully informed of the universal services provided and that postal service providers be informed of the rights and obligations of

universal service provider(s). Member States should ensure that users remain fully informed of the features and accessibility of the specific services provided. Member States should ensure that all such information is made available. It is however appropriate, in line with the enhanced flexibility given in favour of Member States, to ensure the provision of the universal service in ways other than the designation of the universal service provider(s), in order to give Member States the flexibility to decide how such information is to be made available to the public.

- (25) In the light of the studies carried out and with a view to unlocking the full potential of the internal market for postal services, it is appropriate to end the use of the reserved area and special rights as a means of ensuring that the universal service is financed.
- (26) The external financing of the residual net costs of the universal service may still be necessary for some Member States. It is therefore appropriate to explicitly clarify the alternatives available in order to ensure the financing of the universal service, to the extent that this is needed and is adequately justified, while leaving Member States the choice of the financing mechanisms to be used. These alternatives include the use of public procurement procedures including, as provided for in the public procurement Directives, competitive dialogue or negotiated procedures with or without the publication of a contract notice and, whenever universal service obligations entail net costs of the universal service and represent an unfair burden on the designated universal service provider, public compensation and cost sharing between service providers and/or users in a transparent manner by means of contributions to a compensation fund. Member States may use other means of financing permitted by Community law, such as deciding, where and if necessary, that the profits accruing from other activities of the universal service provider(s) outside the scope of the universal service are to be assigned, in whole or in part, to the financing of the net costs of the universal service, as long as this is in line with the Treaty. Without prejudice to the obligation of Member States to uphold the Treaty rules on State aid, including specific notification requirements in this context, Member States may notify the Commission of the financing mechanisms used to cover any net costs of the universal service, which should be reflected in the regular reports that the Commission should present to the European Parliament and Council on the application of Directive 97/67/EC.
- (27) Postal service providers may be required to contribute to the financing of the universal service in cases where provision is made for a compensation fund. In order to determine which undertakings may be required to contribute to a compensation fund, Member States should consider whether the services provided by such undertakings may, from a user's perspective, be regarded as services falling within the scope of the universal service,

as they display inter-changeability to a sufficient degree with the universal service, taking into account the characteristics of the services, including added value features, as well as the intended use and the pricing. These services do not necessarily have to cover all the features of the universal service, such as daily delivery or complete national coverage.

- (28) In order to comply with the principle of proportionality when determining the contribution to be made to the costs of the provision of the universal service in a Member State required from these undertakings, Member States should use transparent and non-discriminatory criteria such as the share of these undertakings in the activities falling within the scope of the universal service in this Member State. Member States may require those providers which are required to contribute to a compensation fund to introduce appropriate accounting separation in order to ensure the functioning of the fund.
- (29) The principles of transparency, non-discrimination and proportionality, as presently provided for in Directive 97/67/EC, should continue to be applied to any financing mechanism and any decision in this area should be based on transparent, objective and verifiable criteria. In particular, the net cost of the universal service should be calculated, under the supervision of the national regulatory authority, as the difference between the net costs of a designated universal service provider operating under a universal service obligation and not operating under a universal service obligation. The calculation should take into account all other relevant elements, including any market benefits which accrue to a postal service provider designated to provide universal service, the entitlement to a reasonable profit and incentives for cost efficiency.
- (30) In cases where Member States decide to make accessible to the public, on their national territory, additional or complementary services, with the exception of those relating to the universal service obligations, as defined in this Directive, such as pensions and postal orders delivery in rural areas, these services should not be subject to any compensation mechanisms requiring the contribution of specific undertakings. Where appropriate, Member States may grant financing for such additional or complementary services in accordance with the Treaty rules on State aid. Except in the case of universal service provider(s), the authorisations may not be made subject to the obligation to provide such additional services.
- (31) It is appropriate to provide Member States that have acceded to the Union after the entry into force of Directive 2002/39/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 June 2002 amending Directive 97/67/EC with regard to the further opening to competition of Community postal services ⁽¹⁾ and may have faced particular difficulties regarding the smooth adaptation of their postal markets because they joined the postal reform process at a late stage, and certain Member States

with a small population and a limited geographical size having specific characteristics that are particular to postal services or with a particularly difficult topography, with a huge number of islands with the possibility to postpone the implementation of this Directive for a limited period of time, in order to continue to reserve services to their universal service provider(s), subject to notification to the Commission. Taking into account the exceptional nature of such a possibility, it is also appropriate, within this limited period of time and for a limited number of services, to allow those Member States that have completely opened up their markets to refuse monopolies operating in another Member State authorisation to operate in their own territory.

- (32) The Commission should provide assistance to the Member States on the different aspects of the implementation of this Directive, including on the calculation of any net cost. Moreover, cooperation between national regulatory authorities in continuing to develop benchmarks and guidance in this area should contribute to the harmonised application of this Directive.
- (33) Member States should be allowed to use general authorisations and individual licences whenever justified and proportionate to the objective pursued. However, as highlighted by the Third report on the application of Directive 97/67/EC, further harmonisation of the conditions that may be introduced appears necessary in order to reduce unjustified barriers to the provision of services in the internal market. In this context, Member States may for example allow postal service providers to choose between the obligation to provide a service or to contribute financially to the costs of this service provided by another provider, but should no longer be allowed to impose concurrently a requirement to contribute to a sharing mechanism and universal service or quality obligations that are intended to serve the same purpose. It is also appropriate to clarify that some of the provisions on general authorisations and licensing should not apply to designated universal service providers.
- (34) In an environment where several postal undertakings provide services within the universal service area, it is appropriate to require all Member States to assess whether some elements of the postal infrastructure or certain services generally provided by universal service providers should be made accessible to other operators providing similar services, in order to promote effective competition, and/or protect all users by ensuring the overall quality of the postal service. Where several universal service providers with regional postal networks exist, Member States should also assess and, where necessary, ensure their interoperability in order to prevent impediments to the prompt transport of postal items. As the legal and market situation of these elements or services is different among the Member States it is appropriate to only require Member States to adopt an

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 176, 5.7.2002, p. 21.

informed decision on the need, extent and choice of the regulatory instrument, including where appropriate on cost sharing. This provision is without prejudice to the right of Member States to adopt measures to ensure access to the postal network under conditions of transparency and non-discrimination.

- (35) Member States should ensure that postal service providers, when processing personal data pursuant to Directive 97/67/EC, apply Community and national provisions on the protection of personal data, in particular those laid down by Directive 95/46/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 October 1995 on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data ⁽¹⁾.
- (36) The provisions of this Directive should be without prejudice to national provisions governing the expropriation conditions for organising the universal service provision.
- (37) Given the importance of postal services for blind and partially-sighted persons, it is appropriate to confirm that the opening of the market should not prevent the continuing provision by the universal service provider(s) of certain free services for blind and partially-sighted persons introduced by the Member States in accordance with applicable international obligations.
- (38) In a fully competitive environment, it is important, both for the financial equilibrium of the universal service as well as for limiting market distortions, that the principle that prices reflect normal commercial conditions and costs is only departed from in order to protect public interests. This objective should be achieved by continuing to allow Member States to maintain uniform tariffs for single piece tariff mail, the service most frequently used by consumers, including small and medium-sized enterprises. Member States may also maintain uniform tariffs for some other mail items, such as, for example, newspapers and books, to protect general public interests, such as access to culture, ensuring participation in a democratic society (freedom of press) or regional and social cohesion.
- (39) For the provision of services for all users, including businesses, bulk mailers and consolidators of mail from different users, universal service providers may enjoy more price flexibility in line with the cost-orientation principle. Tariffs should take account of the avoided costs, as compared to the standard service covering the complete range of features offered for the clearance, sorting, transport and distribution of individual postal items.

- (40) In view of the national specificities involved in the regulation of the conditions under which the incumbent universal service provider must operate in a fully competitive environment, it is appropriate to leave Member States the freedom to decide how best to monitor cross-subsidies.

- (41) In view of the transition towards a fully competitive market, and in order to prevent cross-subsidies from adversely affecting competition, it is appropriate to continue to require Member States to maintain the obligation on universal service providers of keeping separate and transparent accounts, subject to necessary adaptations.

This obligation should provide national regulatory authorities, competition authorities and the Commission with the information necessary to adopt decisions related to the universal service and to monitor fair market conditions until competition becomes effective. Cooperation between national regulatory authorities in continuing to develop benchmarks and guidelines in this area should contribute to the harmonised application of these rules.

Keeping separate and transparent accounts should provide Member States and their national regulatory authorities with accounting information of sufficient detail to:

- adopt decisions related to the universal service,
- be used as an input when determining whether the universal service obligations imposed entail a net cost and represent an unfair financial burden on the universal service provider,
- ensure that the tariffs applied to the universal service comply with the principles on tariffs as set out in this Directive,
- ensure compliance with the principles on terminal dues as set out in this Directive, and
- monitor fair market conditions until competition becomes effective.

- (42) In line with existing rules in other service areas and in order to increase consumer protection, it is appropriate to extend the application of minimum principles concerning complaint procedures beyond universal service providers. With a view to increasing the effectiveness of complaint handling procedures, it is appropriate to encourage the use of out-of-court settlement procedures as set out in Commission Recommendation 98/257/EC of 30 March 1998 on the principles applicable to the bodies responsible for out-of-court settlement of consumer disputes ⁽²⁾ and Commission Recommendation 2001/310/EC of 4 April 2001 on the principle for out-of-court bodies involved in the consensual resolution

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 281, 23.11.1995, p. 31. Directive as amended by Regulation (EC) No 1882/2003.

⁽²⁾ OJ L 115, 17.4.1998, p. 31.

of consumer disputes ⁽¹⁾. Consumer interests would also be furthered through the enhanced inter-operability between operators resulting from access to certain elements of infrastructure and services, and the requirement for cooperation between national regulatory authorities and consumer protection bodies.

In order to protect the interests of users in the event of theft or loss of, or damage to, postal items, Member States should introduce, where warranted, a system of reimbursement and/or compensation.

(43) Directive 97/67/EC provides that certain measures are to be adopted in accordance with Council Decision 1999/468/EC of 28 June 1999 laying down the procedures for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission ⁽²⁾.

(44) Decision 1999/468/EC has been amended by Decision 2006/512/EC, which introduced the regulatory procedure with scrutiny for the adoption of measures of general scope designed to amend non-essential elements of a basic instrument adopted in accordance with the procedure referred to in Article 251 of the Treaty, *inter alia* by deleting some of those elements or by supplementing the instrument with non-essential elements.

(45) In particular, the Commission should be empowered to adopt measures as regards future adjustment of quality-of-service standards to technical progress or market developments as well as of standardised conditions for independent performance monitoring by external bodies. Since those measures are of general scope and are designed to amend non-essential elements of this Directive and to supplement this Directive by the addition of new non-essential elements, they must be adopted in accordance with the regulatory procedure with scrutiny provided for in Article 5a of Decision 1999/468/EC.

(46) The Committee assisting the Commission in accordance with Directive 97/67/EC should follow developments in the provision of the universal service in Member States.

(47) The role of national regulatory authorities is likely to remain crucial, in particular in those Member States where the transition to competition still needs to be completed. In accordance with the principle of separation of regulatory and operational functions, Member States should guarantee the independence of the national regulatory authorities, thereby ensuring the impartiality of their decisions. This requirement of independence is without prejudice to the institutional autonomy and constitutional obligations of the Member States and to the principle of neutrality with regard to the rules in Member States governing the system of property ownership laid down in Article 295 of the Treaty. National

regulatory authorities should be provided with all necessary resources, in terms of staffing, expertise and financial means, for the performance of their tasks.

(48) Due to the frequent involvement of different national bodies in the exercise of regulatory functions, it is appropriate to introduce transparency in the allocation of tasks and require the different relevant bodies charged with sector regulation, the application of competition rules and with dealing with consumer issues to cooperate in order to ensure the effective accomplishment of their tasks.

(49) Any party which is the subject of a decision by a national regulatory authority should have the right to appeal to a body that is independent of that authority. This body may be a court. This appeal procedure is without prejudice to the division of competences within national judicial systems and to the rights of legal entities or natural persons under national law. Pending the conclusion of these procedures there is a need to ensure the temporary validity of national regulatory authorities' decisions in order to guarantee legal certainty and market security.

(50) National regulatory authorities should, where necessary, cooperate with other regulatory bodies of Member States and with the Commission in carrying out their tasks under Directive 97/67/EC. This would promote the development of the internal market for postal services and help to ensure the consistent application, in all Member States, of the provisions laid down by the Directive, in particular in areas where national law implementing Community law gives national regulatory authorities considerable discretionary powers in the application of the relevant rules. This cooperation could take place, *inter alia*, within the Committee assisting the Commission in accordance with the Directive or within a group comprising European regulators. Member States should decide which bodies are national regulatory authorities for the purposes of the Directive.

(51) National regulatory authorities need to gather information from market players in order to carry out their tasks effectively. Requests for information should be proportionate and not impose an undue burden on undertakings. Such information may also need to be gathered by the Commission in order to allow it to fulfil its obligations under Community law. The recipient of information should ensure confidentiality in accordance with the rules in force.

(52) In order to keep the European Parliament and the Council informed of developments in the internal market for postal services, the Commission should regularly submit reports to those institutions on the application of Directive 97/67/EC.

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 109, 19.4.2001, p. 56.

⁽²⁾ OJ L 184, 17.7.1999, p. 23. Decision as amended by Decision 2006/512/EC (OJ L 200, 22.7.2006, p. 11).

- (53) This Directive does not affect labour law, that is any legal or contractual provision concerning employment conditions, working conditions, including health and safety at work and the relationship between employers and workers, which Member States apply in accordance with national law which is in conformity with Community law. Equally, this Directive does not affect the social security legislation of the Member States. Where necessary, Member States may reflect working conditions in their authorisation procedures in line with the principles of transparency and proportionality.
- (54) Member States should ensure that sufficient access points are established that take account of the needs of users in rural and sparsely populated areas. Member States should ensure an appropriate density of access points in these areas in order to satisfy the universal service obligation.
- (55) In order to maintain the framework for the regulation of the postal sector, the date of expiry of Directive 97/67/EC should be deleted. The provisions that have not been amended by this Directive continue to apply. The services that Member States may continue to reserve, during the implementation period, are those specified in Directive 97/67/EC.
- (56) Since the objectives of this Directive, namely achieving an internal market of Community postal services, ensuring a common level of universal services for all users and setting harmonised principles for the regulation of postal services, cannot be sufficiently achieved by Member States and can therefore, by reason of the scale and effects, be better achieved at Community level, the Community may adopt measures in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity as set out in Article 5 of the Treaty. In accordance with the principle of proportionality, as set out in that Article, this Directive does not go beyond what is necessary in order to achieve those objectives.
- (57) Directive 97/67/EC should therefore be amended accordingly.
- (58) This Directive is consistent with other Community instruments concerning services. In the event of conflict between a provision of this Directive and a provision of another Community instrument, in particular Directive 2006/123/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 December 2006 on services in the internal market⁽¹⁾, the provisions of this Directive will prevail and will apply in full to the postal sector.
- (59) This Directive is without prejudice to the application of the Treaty rules on competition and on the freedom to provide services. Insofar as mechanisms for the financing of the universal service involve aid granted by a Member State or through State aid resources in any form

whatsoever within the meaning of Article 87(1) of the Treaty, this Directive is without prejudice to Member States' obligation to respect the Treaty rules on State aid.

- (60) In accordance with point 34 of the Interinstitutional agreement on better law-making⁽²⁾, Member States are encouraged to draw up, for themselves and in the interests of the Community, their own tables illustrating, as far as possible, the correlation between this Directive and the transposition measures, and to make them public,

HAVE ADOPTED THIS DIRECTIVE:

Article 1

Directive 97/67/EC is hereby amended as follows:

1. Article 1 shall be replaced by the following:

'Article 1

This Directive establishes common rules concerning:

- the conditions governing the provision of postal services,
- the provision of a universal postal service within the Community,
- the financing of universal services under conditions that guarantee the permanent provision of such services,
- tariff principles and transparency of accounts for universal service provision,
- the setting of quality standards for universal service provision and the setting-up of a system to ensure compliance with those standards,
- the harmonisation of technical standards,
- the creation of independent national regulatory authorities.;

2. Article 2 shall be amended as follows:

- (a) point 1 shall be replaced by the following:

'1. postal services: services involving the clearance, sorting, transport and distribution of postal items;';

- (b) the following point shall be inserted:

'1a. postal service provider: undertaking that provides one or more postal services;';

- (c) in point 2 the words 'public postal network' shall be replaced by 'postal network';

- (d) point 3 shall be replaced by the following:

'3. access points: physical facilities, including letter boxes provided for the public either on the public highway or at the premises of the postal service provider(s), where postal items may be deposited with the postal network by senders;';

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 376, 27.12.2006, p. 36.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 321, 31.12.2003, p. 1.

(e) point 4 shall be replaced by the following:

‘4. clearance: the operation of collecting postal items by a postal service provider;’

(f) point 6 shall be replaced by the following:

‘6. postal item: an item addressed in the final form in which it is to be carried by a postal service provider. In addition to items of correspondence, such items also include for instance books, catalogues, newspapers, periodicals and postal parcels containing merchandise with or without commercial value;’

(g) point 8 shall be deleted;

(h) point 12 shall be deleted;

(i) point 13 shall be replaced by the following:

‘13. universal service provider: the public or private postal service provider providing a universal postal service or parts thereof within a Member State, the identity of which has been notified to the Commission in accordance with Article 4;’

(j) point 14 shall be replaced by the following:

‘14. authorisations: any permission setting out rights and obligations specific to the postal sector and allowing undertakings to provide postal services and, where applicable, to establish and/or operate their networks for the provision of such services, in the form of a general authorisation or individual licence as defined below:

— “general authorisation”: an authorisation, regardless of whether it is regulated by a “class licence” or under general law and regardless of whether such regulation requires registration or declaration procedures, which does not require the postal service provider concerned to obtain an explicit decision by the national regulatory authority before exercising the rights stemming from the authorisation,

— “individual licence”: an authorisation which is granted by a national regulatory authority and which gives a postal service provider specific rights, or which subjects that undertaking’s operations to specific obligations supplementing the general authorisation where applicable, where the postal service provider is not entitled to exercise the rights concerned until it has received the decision by the national regulatory authority;’

(k) point 17 shall be replaced by the following:

‘17. user: any natural or legal person benefiting from postal service provision as a sender or an addressee;’

(l) point 19 shall be replaced by the following:

‘19. essential requirements: general non-economic reasons which can induce a Member State to impose conditions on the supply of postal services. These reasons are the confidentiality of correspondence, security of the network as regards the transport of dangerous goods, respect for the terms and conditions of employment, social security schemes, laid down by law, regulation or administrative provision and/or by collective agreement negotiated between national social partners, in accordance with Community and national law and, where justified, data protection, environmental protection and regional planning. Data protection may include personal data protection, the confidentiality of information transmitted or stored and protection of privacy;’

(m) the following point shall be added:

‘20. services provided at single piece tariff: postal services for which the tariff is set in the general terms and conditions of universal service provider (s) for individual postal items;’

3. Article 3 shall be amended as follows:

(a) the first subparagraph of paragraph 3 shall be replaced by the following:

‘3. Member States shall take steps to ensure that the universal service is guaranteed not less than five working days a week, save in circumstances or geographical conditions deemed exceptional, and that it includes as a minimum:

— one clearance,

— one delivery to the home or premises of every natural or legal person or, by way of derogation, under conditions at the discretion of the national regulatory authority, one delivery to appropriate installations;’

(b) paragraph 5 shall be replaced by the following:

‘5. The national regulatory authorities may increase the weight limit of universal service coverage for postal parcels to any weight not exceeding 20 kilograms and may lay down special arrangements for the door-to-door delivery of such parcels.

Notwithstanding the weight limit of universal service coverage for postal parcels established by a given Member State, Member States shall ensure that postal parcels received from other Member States and weighing up to 20 kilograms are delivered within their territory;’

(c) paragraph 6 shall be replaced by the following:

‘6. The minimum and maximum dimensions for the postal items in question shall be those as laid down in the relevant provisions adopted by the Universal Postal Union;’

4. Article 4 shall be replaced by the following:

'Article 4

1. Each Member State shall ensure that the provision of the universal service is guaranteed and shall notify the Commission of the steps it has taken to fulfil this obligation. The Committee referred to in Article 21 shall be informed of the measures established by Member States to ensure the provision of the universal service.

2. Member States may designate one or more undertakings as universal service providers in order that the whole of the national territory can be covered. Member States may designate different undertakings to provide different elements of universal service and/or to cover different parts of the national territory. When they do so, they shall determine in accordance with Community law the obligations and rights assigned to them and shall publish these obligations and rights. In particular, Member States shall take measures to ensure that the conditions under which universal services are entrusted are based on the principles of transparency, non-discrimination and proportionality, thereby guaranteeing the continuity of the universal service provision, by taking into account the important role it plays in social and territorial cohesion.

Member States shall notify the Commission of the identity of the universal service provider(s) they designate. The designation of a universal service provider shall be subject to a periodic review and be examined against the conditions and principles set out in this Article. However, Member States shall ensure that the duration of this designation provides a sufficient period for return on investments.;

5. paragraph 2 of Article 5 shall be replaced by the following:

'2. The provisions of paragraph 1 shall not preclude measures which the Member States take in accordance with requirements relating to the public interest recognised in the Treaty, in particular Articles 30 and 46 thereof, concerning, *inter alia*, public morality, public security, including criminal investigations, and public policy.;

6. Article 6 shall be replaced by the following:

'Article 6

Member States shall take steps to ensure that users and postal service providers are regularly given sufficiently detailed and up-to-date information by the universal service provider(s) regarding the particular features of the universal service offered, with special reference to the general conditions of access to these services as well as to prices and quality standard levels. This information shall be published in an appropriate manner.

Member States shall notify the Commission, of how the information to be published in accordance with the first paragraph is to be made available.;

7. the heading of Chapter 3 shall be replaced by the following:

'Financing of universal services';

8. Article 7 shall be replaced by the following:

'Article 7

1. Member States shall not grant or maintain in force exclusive or special rights for the establishment and provision of postal services. Member States may finance the provision of universal services in accordance with one or more of the means provided for in paragraphs 2, 3 and 4, or in accordance with any other means compatible with the Treaty.

2. Member States may ensure the provision of universal services by procuring such services in accordance with applicable public procurement rules and regulations, including, as provided for in Directive 2004/17/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 31 March 2004 coordinating the procurement procedures of entities operating in the water, energy, transport and postal services (*), competitive dialogue or negotiated procedures with or without publication of a contract notice.

3. Where a Member State determines that the universal service obligations, as provided for in this Directive, entail a net cost, calculated taking into account Annex I, and represent an unfair financial burden on the universal service provider(s), it may introduce:

(a) a mechanism to compensate the undertaking(s) concerned from public funds; or

(b) a mechanism for the sharing of the net cost of the universal service obligations between providers of services and/or users.

4. Where the net cost is shared in accordance with paragraph 3(b), Member States may establish a compensation fund which may be funded by service providers and/or users' fees, and is administered for this purpose by a body independent of the beneficiary or beneficiaries. Member States may make the granting of authorisations to service providers under Article 9(2) subject to an obligation to make a financial contribution to that fund or to comply with universal service obligations. The universal service obligations of the universal service provider(s) set out in Article 3 may be financed in this manner.

5. Member States shall ensure that the principles of transparency, non-discrimination and proportionality are respected in establishing the compensation fund and when fixing the level of the financial contributions referred to in paragraphs 3 and 4. Decisions taken in accordance with paragraphs 3 and 4 shall be based on objective and verifiable criteria and be made public.

(*) OJ L 134, 30.4.2004, p. 1. Directive as last amended by Council Directive 2006/97/EC (OJ L 363, 20.12.2006, p. 107).;

9. the heading of Chapter 4 shall be replaced by the following:

‘Conditions governing the provision of postal services and access to the network’;

10. Article 9 shall be replaced by the following:

‘Article 9

1. For services which fall outside the scope of the universal service, Member States may introduce general authorisations to the extent necessary to guarantee compliance with the essential requirements.

2. For services which fall within the scope of the universal service, Member States may introduce authorisation procedures, including individual licences, to the extent necessary in order to guarantee compliance with the essential requirements and to ensure the provision of the universal service.

The granting of authorisations may:

- be made subject to universal service obligations,
- if necessary and justified, impose requirements concerning the quality, availability and performance of the relevant services,
- where appropriate, be subject to an obligation to make a financial contribution to the sharing mechanisms referred to in Article 7, if the provision of the universal service entails a net cost and represents an unfair burden on the universal service provider(s), designated in accordance with Article 4,
- where appropriate, be subject to an obligation to make a financial contribution to the national regulatory authority’s operational costs referred to in Article 22,
- where appropriate, be made subject to or impose an obligation to respect working conditions laid down by national legislation.

Obligations and requirements referred to in the first indent and in Article 3 may only be imposed on designated universal service providers.

Except in the case of undertakings that have been designated as universal service providers in accordance with Article 4, authorisations may not:

- be limited in number,
- for the same elements of the universal service or parts of the national territory, impose universal service obligations and, at the same time, financial contributions to a sharing mechanism,
- duplicate conditions which are applicable to undertakings by virtue of other, non-sector-specific national legislation,
- impose technical or operational conditions other than those necessary to fulfil the obligations of this Directive.

3. The procedures, obligations and requirements referred to in paragraphs 1 and 2 shall be transparent, accessible, non-discriminatory, proportionate, precise and unambiguous, made public in advance and based on objective criteria. Member States shall ensure that the reasons for refusing or withdrawing an authorisation in whole or in part are communicated to the applicant and shall establish an appeal procedure.’;

11. paragraph 1 of Article 10 shall be replaced by the following:

‘1. The European Parliament and the Council, acting on a proposal from the Commission and on the basis of Articles 47(2), 55 and 95 of the Treaty, shall adopt the measures necessary for the harmonisation of the procedures referred to in Article 9 governing the commercial provision of postal services to the public.’;

12. Article 11 shall be replaced by the following:

‘Article 11

The European Parliament and the Council, acting on a proposal from the Commission and on the basis of Articles 47(2), 55 and 95 of the Treaty, shall adopt such harmonisation measures as are necessary to ensure that users and the postal service provider(s) have access to the postal network under conditions which are transparent and non-discriminatory.’;

13. the following Article shall be inserted:

‘Article 11a

Whenever necessary to protect the interest of users and/or to promote effective competition, and in the light of national conditions and national legislation, Member States shall ensure that transparent, non-discriminatory access conditions are available to elements of postal infrastructure or services provided within the scope of the universal service, such as postcode system, address database, post office boxes, delivery boxes, information on change of address, re-direction service and return to sender service. This provision shall be without prejudice to the right of Member States to adopt measures to ensure access to the postal network under transparent, proportional and non-discriminatory conditions.’;

14. Article 12 shall be replaced by the following:

‘Article 12

Member States shall take steps to ensure that the tariffs for each of the services forming part of the universal service comply with the following principles:

- prices shall be affordable and must be such that all users, independent of geographical location, and, in the light of specific national conditions, have access to the services provided. Member States may maintain or introduce the provision of a free postal service for the use of blind and partially-sighted persons,

- prices shall be cost-oriented and give incentives for an efficient universal service provision. Whenever necessary for reasons relating to the public interest, Member States may decide that a uniform tariff shall be applied, throughout their national territory and/or cross-border, to services provided at single piece tariff and to other postal items,
- the application of a uniform tariff shall not exclude the right of the universal service provider(s) to conclude individual agreements on prices with users,
- tariffs shall be transparent and non-discriminatory,
- whenever universal service providers apply special tariffs, for example for services for businesses, bulk mailers or consolidators of mail from different users, they shall apply the principles of transparency and non-discrimination with regard both to the tariffs and to the associated conditions. The tariffs, together with the associated conditions, shall apply equally both as between different third parties and as between third parties and universal service providers supplying equivalent services. Any such tariffs shall also be available to users, in particular individual users and small and medium-sized enterprises, who post under similar conditions.;

15. Article 14 shall be amended as follows:

- (a) paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 shall be replaced by the following:

‘1. Member States shall take the measures necessary to ensure that the accounting of the universal service providers is conducted in accordance with the provisions of this Article.

2. The universal service provider(s) shall keep separate accounts within their internal accounting systems in order to clearly distinguish between each of the services and products which are part of the universal service and those which are not. This accounting separation shall be used as an input when Member States calculate the net cost of the universal service. Such internal accounting systems shall operate on the basis of consistently applied and objectively justifiable cost accounting principles.

3. The accounting systems referred to in paragraph 2 shall, without prejudice to paragraph 4, allocate costs in the following manner:

- (a) costs which can be directly assigned to a particular service or product shall be so assigned;
- (b) common costs, that is costs which cannot be directly assigned to a particular service or product, shall be allocated as follows:
 - (i) whenever possible, common costs shall be allocated on the basis of direct analysis of the origin of the costs themselves;

- (ii) when direct analysis is not possible, common cost categories shall be allocated on the basis of an indirect linkage to another cost category or group of cost categories for which a direct assignment or allocation is possible; the indirect linkage shall be based on comparable cost structures;

- (iii) when neither direct nor indirect measures of cost allocation can be found, the cost category shall be allocated on the basis of a general allocator computed by using the ratio of all expenses directly or indirectly assigned or allocated, on the one hand, to each of the universal services and, on the other hand, to the other services;

- (iv) common costs, which are necessary for the provision of both universal services and non-universal services, shall be allocated appropriately; the same cost drivers must be applied to both universal services and non-universal services.;

- (b) paragraph 8 shall be replaced by the following:

‘8. Where a given Member State has not used a financing mechanism for the provision of the universal service, as permitted under Article 7, and where the national regulatory authority is satisfied that none of the designated universal service providers in that Member State is in receipt of State assistance, hidden or otherwise, and that competition in the market is fully effective, the national regulatory authority may decide not to apply the requirements of this Article.’;

- (c) the following paragraphs shall be added:

‘9. This Article may, however, be applied to the universal service provider designated before the final date for Full Market Opening as long as no other universal service provider(s) have been designated. The national regulatory authority shall inform the Commission in advance of any such decision.

10. Member States may require those postal service providers which are obliged to contribute to a compensation fund to introduce an appropriate accounting separation to ensure the functioning of the fund.’;

16. Article 16 shall be amended as follows:

- (a) the second indent of the third paragraph shall be replaced by the following:

‘— the European Parliament and the Council in the case of intra-Community cross-border services (see Annex II). Future adjustment of these standards to technical progress or market developments shall be made in accordance with the regulatory procedure with scrutiny referred to in Article 21(2).’;

(b) the fourth paragraph shall be replaced by the following:

'Independent performance monitoring shall be carried out at least once a year by external bodies having no links with the universal service providers under standardised conditions to be specified in accordance with the regulatory procedure with scrutiny referred to in Article 21(2) and shall be the subject of reports published at least once a year.;

17. paragraphs 1 and 2 of Article 18 shall be replaced by the following:

'1. In accordance with Article 16, quality standards for intra-Community cross-border services are laid down in Annex II.

2. Where exceptional situations relating to infrastructure or geography so require, the national regulatory authorities may determine exemptions from the quality standards provided for in Annex II. Where national regulatory authorities determine exemptions in this manner, they shall notify the Commission forthwith. The Commission shall submit an annual report of the notifications received during the previous 12 months to the Committee referred to in Article 21 for its information.;

18. Article 19 shall be replaced by the following:

'Article 19

1. Member States shall ensure that transparent, simple and inexpensive procedures are made available by all postal service providers for dealing with postal users' complaints, particularly in cases involving loss, theft, damage or non-compliance with service quality standards (including procedures for determining where responsibility lies in cases where more than one operator is involved), without prejudice to relevant international and national provisions on compensation schemes.

Member States shall adopt measures to ensure that the procedures referred to in the first subparagraph enable disputes to be settled fairly and promptly with provision, where warranted, for a system of reimbursement and/or compensation.

Member States shall also encourage the development of independent out-of-court schemes for the resolution of disputes between postal service providers and users.

2. Without prejudice to other possibilities of appeal or means of redress under national and Community legislation, Member States shall ensure that users, acting individually or, where permitted by national law, jointly with organisations representing the interests of users and/or consumers, may bring before the competent national authority cases where users' complaints to undertakings providing postal services within the scope of the universal service have not been satisfactorily resolved.

In accordance with Article 16, Member States shall ensure that the universal service providers and, wherever appro-

priate, undertakings providing services within the scope of the universal service, publish, together with the annual report on the monitoring of their performance, information on the number of complaints and the manner in which they have been dealt with.;

19. Article 21 shall be replaced by the following:

'Article 21

1. The Commission shall be assisted by a committee.

2. Where reference is made to this paragraph, Articles 5a(1) to (4) and Article 7 of Decision 1999/468/EC shall apply, having regard to the provisions of Article 8 thereof.;

20. Article 22 shall be replaced by the following:

'Article 22

1. Each Member State shall designate one or more national regulatory authorities for the postal sector that are legally separate from and operationally independent of the postal operators. Member States that retain ownership or control of postal service providers shall ensure effective structural separation of the regulatory functions from activities associated with ownership or control.

Member States shall inform the Commission which national regulatory authorities they have designated to carry out the tasks arising from this Directive. They shall publish the tasks to be undertaken by national regulatory authorities in an easily accessible form, in particular where those tasks are assigned to more than one body. Member States shall ensure, where appropriate, consultation and cooperation between those authorities and national authorities entrusted with the implementation of competition law and consumer protection law on matters of common interest.

2. The national regulatory authorities shall have as a particular task ensuring compliance with the obligations arising from this Directive, in particular by establishing monitoring and regulatory procedures to ensure the provision of the universal service. They may also be charged with ensuring compliance with competition rules in the postal sector.

The national regulatory authorities shall work in close collaboration and shall provide mutual assistance in order to facilitate the application of this Directive within the appropriate existing bodies.

3. Member States shall ensure that effective mechanisms exist at national level under which any user or postal service provider affected by a decision of a national regulatory authority has the right to appeal against the decision to an appeal body which is independent of the parties involved. Pending the outcome of any such appeal, the decision of the national regulatory authority shall stand, unless the appeal body decides otherwise.;

21. the following Chapter shall be inserted:

‘CHAPTER 9a

Provision of information

Article 22a

1. Member States shall ensure that postal service providers provide all the information, in particular to the national regulatory authorities, including financial information and information concerning the provision of the universal service, namely for the following purposes:

- (a) for national regulatory authorities to ensure conformity with the provisions of, or decisions made in accordance with this Directive;
- (b) for clearly defined statistical purposes.

2. Postal service providers shall provide such information promptly on request and in confidence, where necessary, within the timescales and to the level of detail required by the national regulatory authority. The information requested by the national regulatory authority shall be proportionate to the performance of its tasks. The national regulatory authority shall give the reasons justifying its request for information.

3. Member States shall ensure that national regulatory authorities provide the Commission, upon request, with appropriate and relevant information necessary for it to carry out its tasks under this Directive.

4. Where information is considered confidential by a national regulatory authority, in accordance with Community and national business confidentiality rules, the Commission and the national regulatory authorities concerned shall preserve such confidentiality;

22. Article 23 shall be replaced by the following:

‘Article 23

Every four years, on the first occasion no later than 31 December 2013, the Commission shall submit a report to the European Parliament and the Council on the application of this Directive, including appropriate information on developments in the sector, particularly concerning economic, social, employment patterns and technological aspects, as well as on quality of service. The report shall be accompanied, where appropriate, by proposals to the European Parliament and the Council.’;

23. the following Article shall be inserted:

‘Article 23a

The Commission shall provide assistance to the Member States on the implementation of this Directive, including on the calculation of any net cost of the universal service.’;

24. Articles 24, 25, 26 and 27 shall be deleted;

25. the following text shall be inserted as Annex I:

‘ANNEX I

Guidance on calculating the net cost, if any, of universal service

Part A: Definition of the universal service obligations

Universal service obligations refer to the obligations referred to in Article 3 placed upon a postal service provider by a Member State which concern the provision of a postal service throughout a specified geographical area, including, where required, uniform prices in that geographical area for the provision of that service or provision of certain free services for blind and partially-sighted persons.

Those obligations may include, among others, the following:

- a number of days of delivery, superior to those set in this Directive,
- accessibility to access points, in order to satisfy the universal service obligations,
- the tariffs affordability of the universal service,
- uniform prices for universal service,
- the provision of certain free services for blind and partially-sighted persons.

Part B: Calculation of net cost

National regulatory authorities are to consider all means to ensure appropriate incentives for postal service providers (designated or not) to provide universal service obligations cost efficiently.

The net cost of universal service obligations is any cost related to and necessary for the operation of the universal service provision. The net cost of universal service obligations is to be calculated, as the difference between the net cost for a designated universal service provider of operating with the universal service obligations and the same postal service provider operating without the universal service obligations.

The calculation shall take into account all other relevant elements, including any intangible and market benefits which accrue to a postal service provider designated to provide universal service, the entitlement to a reasonable profit and incentives for cost efficiency.

Due attention is to be given to correctly assessing the costs that any designated universal service provider would have chosen to avoid, had there been no universal service obligation. The net cost calculation should assess the benefits, including intangible benefits, to the universal service operator.

The calculation is to be based upon the costs attributable to:

- (i) elements of the identified services which can only be provided at a loss or provided under cost conditions falling outside normal commercial standards. This category may include service elements such as the services defined in Part A;
- (ii) specific users or groups of users who, taking into account the cost of providing the specified service, the revenue generated and any uniform prices imposed by the Member State, can only be served at a loss or under cost conditions falling outside normal commercial standards.

This category includes those users or groups of users that would not be served by a commercial operator that did not have an obligation to provide universal service.

The calculation of the net cost of specific aspects of universal service obligations is to be made separately and so as to avoid the double counting of any direct or indirect benefits and costs. The overall net cost of universal service obligations to any designated universal service provider is to be calculated as the sum of the net costs arising from the specific components of universal service obligations, taking account of any intangible benefits. The responsibility for verifying the net cost lies with the national regulatory authority. The universal service provider(s) shall cooperate with the national regulatory authority to enable it to verify the net cost.

Part C: Recovery of any net costs of universal service obligations

The recovery or financing of any net costs of universal service obligations may require designated universal service providers to be compensated for the services that they provide under non-commercial conditions. As such compensation involves financial transfers, Member States have to ensure that they are undertaken in an objective, transparent, non-discriminatory and proportionate manner. This means that the transfers result as far as possible in the least distortion to competition and to user demand.

A sharing mechanism based on a fund referred to in Article 7(4) should use a transparent and neutral mechanism for collecting contributions that avoids a double imposition of contributions falling on both outputs and inputs of undertakings.

The independent body administering the fund is to be responsible for collecting contributions from undertakings, which are assessed as liable to contribute to the net cost of universal service obligations in the Member State and is to oversee the transfer of sums due to the undertakings entitled to receive payments from the fund.;

26. the Annex shall become Annex II.

Article 2

1. Member States shall bring into force the laws, regulations and administrative provisions necessary to comply with this Directive by 31 December 2010 at the latest. They shall forthwith inform the Commission thereof.

When Member States adopt these measures, they shall contain a reference to this Directive or shall be accompanied by such reference on the occasion of their official publication. The methods of making such reference shall be laid down by Member States

2. Member States shall communicate to the Commission the text of their laws, regulations and administrative provisions with regard to the application of this Directive.

Article 3

1. By derogation to Article 2, the following Member States may postpone the implementation of this Directive until 31 December 2012, in order to continue to reserve services to universal service provider(s):

- Czech Republic
- Greece
- Cyprus
- Latvia
- Lithuania
- Luxembourg
- Hungary
- Malta
- Poland
- Romania
- Slovakia

These Member States may decide to implement this Directive at an earlier stage.

2. The relevant Member States shall notify the Commission confirming their intention to make use of the implementation delay set out in paragraph 1 by ... (*).

(*) Six months after the date of entry into force of this Directive.

3. Member States that abolish their reserved areas by 31 December 2012 may, between 1 January 2011 and 31 December 2012, refuse to grant the authorisation provided for in Article 9(2) of Directive 97/67/EC for services within the abolished reserved area in question to postal operators providing services within the scope of the universal service, as well as companies controlled by them, which are granted a reserved area in another Member State.

Article 4

This Directive shall enter into force on the day of its publication in the *Official Journal of the European Union*.

Article 5

This Directive is addressed to the Member States.

Done at ..., ...

For the European Parliament

The President

...

For the Council

The President

...

STATEMENT OF THE COUNCIL'S REASONS

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Commission adopted its proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 97/67/EC with regard to the full accomplishment of the internal market of Community postal services on 18 October 2006. ⁽¹⁾ The proposal is based on Articles 47(2), 55 and 95 of the Treaty.
2. The European Parliament adopted its First-Reading Opinion at its 9 July to 12 July 2007 plenary session.

In carrying out its work, the Council also took account of the opinions of the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions adopted on 26 April and 6 June 2007 respectively ⁽²⁾.

3. On 8 November 2007, the Council adopted its common position in accordance with Article 251 of the Treaty.

II. OBJECTIVES

The proposal for the amending Directive aims to set the 'last step' towards Full Market Opening (FMO) by removing all remaining exclusive or special rights in force for (a) universal service provider(s) and all other obstacles to the postal services provision, as foreseen by the current Postal Services Directive 97/67/EC (as amended by Directive 2002/39/EC). In accordance with the timetable established in its Article 7 and on the basis of several studies and a thorough Impact Assessment, the Commission confirmed that 1 January 2009 would be the final date for the full accomplishment of the postal services internal market. The amending provisions seek to adapt the regulatory framework to the new environment, whilst ensuring the universal service provision and its appropriate financing by suggesting a non-exhaustive list of indicative accompanying measures. Upon entry into force of the new Directive, the 'sunset clause' included in the 2002 Directive ⁽³⁾ would be deleted (Article 1 (point 24), recital 55), thereby ensuring legal continuity beyond the expiration of the current Directive (31 December 2008).

III. ANALYSIS OF THE COMMON POSITION

1. GENERAL

In its 11 July 2007 Plenary, the European Parliament (EP) adopted 64 amendments to the Commission proposal. The Council common position reflects changes to the Commission proposal (see below under 2(a)) by incorporating a considerable number of amendments,

- either *verbatim* or almost *verbatim* (EP amendments 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 12, 14, 16, 17, 18, 25, 36, 37, 39, 49, 50, 53, 61, 79),
- in part (EP amendments 10, 13, 20, 31, 46, 47, 48, 56, 58), or
- in spirit, by means of similar wording (EP amendments 21 + 65, 22 + 34, 23, 28, 30, 32, 35, 63, 40, 44 + 81, 46, 52, 55).

However, a few amendments are not reflected in the common position because the Council agreed that they were either redundant (as they are covered by other modifications) or because provisions from the original Commission proposal were completed or thoroughly redrafted (see below under 2(b)).

⁽¹⁾ COM(2006) 594 final, OJ C ...

⁽²⁾ OJ C 168, 20.7.2007, p. 74.
OJ C 197, 24.8.2007, p. 37.

⁽³⁾ Article 27 sets out that, unless otherwise decided, the provisions of the existing Directive shall expire on 31 December 2008.

The common position also includes changes other than those envisaged in the European Parliament's First — Reading opinion. A number of drafting changes have been introduced, mostly as a consequence of:

- the insertion of a new Annex I (Guidance on calculating the net cost, if any, of universal service) and the appearance of the existing Annex (Quality of standards for intra-Community cross-border mail) as Annex II to the amending Directive (Article 1, points 16, 17 and 25), and
- the introduction of new terms into the definitions (in Article 1 (point 2) and its further impact on the terminology used throughout the text (e.g. Article 1 (point 18)).

Others seek to ensure the Directive's overall coherence, in particular with respect to:

- the notification of a/the universal service provider(s) to the Commission (Article 1, point 4),
- accountancy separation and transparency rules (Article 1, point 15, in conjunction with recital 41), and
- the new rules on the 'comitology' procedure which are to be applied (regulatory procedure with scrutiny, Article 1 (point 16, 19), recitals 43-46), and
- the Inter-institutional agreement on better law-making (recital 60, on which the Commission made a statement).

2. SPECIFIC ISSUES

(a) **Changes to the Commission's proposal**

The fundamental modification to the Commission's original proposal regards the final date for Full Market Opening. It sets (in Article 2) the end of 2010 as the final date for the amending Directive's implementation that is the full accomplishment of the postal services internal market. An implementation delay until 31 December 2012 is provided under strict conditions for certain Member States (listed in Article 3 of the Directive) which seeks to meet particular difficulties with regard to the postal sector reform process (see below under (x)).

All the above led to a number of other substantial changes to the original proposal (they can be identified under the amending Directive's Article 1), which could be summarized as follows:

(i) ***Rationale and Scope (Article 1 (point 1), Recitals 1-9, 14-15, 19-20, 22, 56)***

Relevant European Parliament amendments: 1-4, 8-9, 11-12, 13, 16

The common position confirms the ultimate goals and the rationale of the Community postal policy and highlights the positive role of postal services as services of general economic interest as well as their contribution to the objectives of social, economic and territorial cohesion in the EU. It mainly clarifies the Directive's scope with regard to the universal service provision, by considering its financing under conditions that guarantee its permanent provision as a key objective of postal reform. This acknowledgment is enshrined in the text and can be used as a guiding principle for the implementation of the amending Directive.

(ii) ***Definitions (Article 1 (point 2), Recitals 17, 27, 42)***

Relevant European Parliament amendments: 15, 21 + 65, 36-37

The common position seeks to update and adapt a significant number of definitions included in the existing Directive to the regulatory changes and new circumstances in the postal markets. The newly inserted term 'postal service provider' and its distinction with the 'universal service provider', as well as the re-definition of 'user', are pivotal and seek to clarify the roles and responsibilities of each of these in a FMO context. In addition, the common position identifies the key elements qualifying the 'services falling within the scope of the universal service' in accordance with the European Court of Justice relevant case law and includes in the list of 'essential requirements' (which can induce a Member State to impose conditions on the supply of postal services), respect for the terms and conditions of employment as well as social security provisions, in accordance with Community and national law. This is in line with the political importance that social considerations maintain within the FMO process.

(iii) **Universal service provision (Article 1 (points 3-6), Recitals 5, 8-12, 20-21, 23-24, 27-30, 36-37, 40-41, 46, 54)**

Relevant European Parliament amendments: 4, 6, 13-14, 17-18, 24-27, 32, 39, 43, 62 + 64, 63

The common position is based on the principle that universal service provision is a key element for the accomplishment of the postal services' internal market and plays a paramount role in terms of social and territorial cohesion. Against this background, the text aims at strengthening the existing Directive's provisions and safeguarding its swift implementation in the new FMO context. It permits Member States a certain flexibility in the designation and operation of the (a) universal service provider(s), whilst on the other hand, ensuring a periodic review of their conformity with the statutory principles set out in the Directive as well as a sufficient period for return on investments.

Furthermore, it makes clear that (a) universal service provider(s) shall provide sufficiently detailed and up-to-date information regarding the particular features of the universal service offered, including the general conditions of access to these services, as well as to prices and quality standard levels. Finally, the common position excludes from the amending Directive's scope the national provisions governing the expropriation conditions for organising the universal service provision and acknowledges that the continuing supply of certain free services for blind and partially-sighted persons introduced by the Member States should not be curtailed.

(iv) **Financing of universal services (Article 1 (points 7-8 and 25), Recitals 13, 25-30, 33, 40-41, 59)**

Relevant European Parliament amendments: 4, 6, 20, 21 + 65, 22, 24, 29-30, 40, 41 + 66, 62 + 64

The common position, based on the principles enshrined in the Commission's proposal, devotes particular attention to the means of guaranteeing the universal service financing. The Council agrees in general on the means proposed by the Commission, as they are fully in line with the subsidiarity principle and devote attention to national market conditions. Member States may choose an appropriate enabling measure for that purpose, depending on the specific national market characteristics. In order to meet concerns expressed by some Member States with regard to the net cost calculation and to ensure guidance on the basis of an indicative common methodology, the common position introduced a new Annex to the Directive. This is largely inspired by Annex IV to the Universal Service Directive ⁽¹⁾.

(v) **Conditions governing the provision of postal services and the access to the networks (Article 1 (points 9-13), Recitals 30, 33)**

Relevant European Parliament amendments: 44 + 81

The common position sets out further detailed conditions governing the provision of postal services and the access to the networks with the dual aim of providing legal certainty for (a) universal service provider(s) and other postal service provider(s), as well as avoiding these being used as concealed barriers to new market entrants. The overall objective is the proper functioning of postal markets and the complementary functioning of different postal networks. The Directive's provisions are without prejudice to the right of Member States to adopt measures to ensure access to the postal network under the conditions of transparency, proportionality and non-discrimination.

The common position includes, where appropriate, among the conditions for granting authorisations, the possible financial contribution to the national regulatory authority operational costs and the respect of working conditions established by national legislation. Clarification is also provided as regards the exclusion of a 'double' imposition (for the same elements of universal service or parts of the national territory) of universal service obligations and, at the same time, of financial contributions to a sharing mechanism (compensation fund).

⁽¹⁾ Directive 2002/22/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 March 2002 on universal service and users' rights relating to electronic communications networks and services (OJ L 108, 24.4.2002, p. 51 (73)).

(vi) **Employment and social security provisions (Article 1 (points 2 and 10), Recitals 16, 53)**

Relevant European Parliament amendments: 10, 35, 37

As developed above (under ii), the common position includes in the list of 'essential requirements', respect for the terms and conditions of employment as well as social security provisions, in accordance with Community and national law. Furthermore, social considerations are addressed in the provisions regarding the conditions for granting authorisations, whereby it may, where appropriate, be made subject to or impose the respect of working conditions laid down by national legislation (see also under (v)).

(vii) **Tariff principles and transparency of accounts (accounting separation) (Article 1 (points 14-15), Recitals 26, 28, 37-39, 41)**

Relevant European Parliament amendments: 27-28, 30, 47-49, 50-52, 79

The common position accepts the basic innovations contained in the Commission proposal with regard to the different tariff principles for universal service provision (cost-orientation principle, notwithstanding a certain degree of tariff flexibility under specific conditions). Furthermore, it allows Member States to maintain or introduce the provision of a free postal service for the use of blind and partially-sighted persons.

The/a universal service provider(s) is/are obliged to keep separate accounts in order to clearly distinguish between universal services and other services which are not part of it. Specific provisions allow Member States to apply the transparency rules (set out in Article 1, point 15) to the universal service provider designated before the FMO final date, as long as no other universal service provider(s) have been designated.

(viii) **National regulatory authorities and information provision (Article 1 (points 20-21), Recitals 41-42, 47-51)**

Relevant European Parliament amendments: 18, 33, 55

The common position leaves no doubt about the form of co-operation between the national regulatory authorities, thereby excluding the establishment of new bodies or structures at European level.

National regulatory authorities are focused on postal markets monitoring, including by appropriate information provision by all market players. The general principles governing the information provision and the respect for confidentiality rules are adequately addressed in the text.

(ix) **The Commission's assistance in the Directive's implementation (Article 1 (points 22-23), Recitals 32, 52)**

Relevant European Parliament amendments: 22, 34, 56-58

The Commission assumes enhanced responsibilities in the new FMO environment, as it is entrusted with the general task of providing assistance during the new Directive's implementation, including on the calculation of any universal service net cost and on evaluating, on a regular basis, all relevant developments, particularly concerning economic, social, employment patterns and technological aspects, as well as in quality of service.

(x) **Final date(s) for Full Market Opening (Articles 2 and 3, Recitals 25, 31, 55)**

Relevant European Parliament amendments: 7 + 74, 19, 23, 41 + 66 as well as 59, 61, 62 + 64

With regard to the final date(s) for the accomplishment of the Community postal services internal market, the Council took into serious consideration the approach enshrined in the relevant European Parliament amendments. The European Parliament considered that the Commission's proposed final date of 1 January 2009 was not proven appropriate and suggested therefore a Full Market Opening of the postal sector from 31 December 2010. In addition, it proposed that Member States that acceded to the EU after the entry into force of Directive 2002/39/EC or Member States with a small population and limited geographical size, or Member States with a particularly difficult topography, especially those with a considerable ('huge') number of islands, may continue, until 31 December 2012, to reserve services to (a) universal service provider(s) within certain limits and conditions.

The common position lists a number of Member States which have explicitly requested a maximal implementation delay till 31 December 2012 at the latest. Such a notification shall be addressed to the Commission, without impeding them from terminating it at an earlier stage. For those Member States wishing to apply the above implementation delay, a reciprocity clause towards Member States that opened up their postal markets completely shall apply for a limited time-period.

(b) European Parliament amendments

The Council moreover considered a number of amendments, even though maintaining a different position in that respect. In some cases, their acknowledgment however becomes clear from a combined reading of different provisions. In particular,

Recitals:

- Amendment 6 is not accepted, since the prospective study is one of the elements considered by the European Parliament and the Council as a basis for their agreement on the basic aim of the amending Directive (see also recital 13),
- Amendments 7 and 74 have been modified in recital 13, where one specific date is not precisely mentioned, but the idea of a final date for the accomplishment of the internal market for postal services is clearly confirmed,
- Amendment 11 was considered redundant, as it is sufficiently addressed in recitals 14 and 18,
- Amendment 13 is not fully accepted, as part of it due to its normative character was considered as inappropriate for a recital and is better reflected in Article 1 (point 18),
- Amendment 15 has become now part of the wider definition of ‘user’ (in Article 1, point 2),
- Amendment 19 is addressed in the core provisions of the common position; it becomes clear, in particular from a combined reading of the amending Article 2 and recital 13,
- Amendment 22 has been taken into serious consideration and a new specific Article has been introduced to that purpose into the common position (Article 1, point 23),
- Amendment 24 is considered as unnecessary, as the underlying issue is dealt with in the general principles governing the universal service scope (N.B.: The Commission will also make a relevant statement on the Council’s common position),
- Amendment 26: The Council considered that the most appropriate place for this amendment to provide some legal effect would be within its main provisions; therefore, the idea is now considered in Article 12 (Article 1, point 14),
- Amendment 27 was considered as too detailed and prescriptive; Article 12 provisions instead comprise all necessary clarification about the conditions justifying price flexibility and the public interest reasons allowing uniform tariffs; recital 38 provides significant examples for the latter case,
- Amendment 29 was not supported, as the deleted general statement should remain valid throughout the FMO process. However, the Council agreed with the related EP amendment 30,
- Amendment 31 was adapted to the general principles set out in Article 1 (point 18),
- on Amendment 32 the Council maintains its position with respect to the composition of the Postal Committee,
- on Amendment 33, the Council supports the Commission proposal and considers that the co-operation between national regulatory authorities, other regulatory bodies and the Commission shall be under the specific conditions set out in Article 22 (Article 1, point 20).

Articles:

- with regard to Amendments 41 and 66, the Council supports a consistent approach to the financing of universal services; the text of the Commission proposal has been considerably improved, in order to better reflect the different means and ways for guaranteeing its permanent provision. In addition, a new Annex I on the net cost calculation provides an indicative common basis. Member States may provide the Commission with their financing plans as indicated in recital 26,

- Amendments 62 and 64 have constituted the basis for the derogation set out now in Article 3 of the amending Directive; however, the general and unconditional derogation for all Member States that acceded to the EU after the entry into force of the last postal Directive 2002/39/EC has been substituted by a precise list of Member States that have explicitly requested such a derogation,
- Amendment 43 gave rise to concerns and scepticism within the Council, and therefore, the Council agreed to maintain the text of the existing Directive, on the additional grounds that its practice was not so far put into question,
- with regard to Amendments 44 and 81, the Council undertook a thorough examination and re-drafting of the Article dealing with authorisation issues with the ultimate goal of eliminating any obstacles to the unhindered provision of postal services. Regarding the precise references to services falling within the scope of universal service, the Council agreed to maintain the existing provisions and the Commission made a statement thereon. In addition, it has to be noted that the question of the respect for working conditions is appropriately addressed in other parts of the common position (as presented under 2(a)(vi)),
- Amendment 46 is currently addressed partly in recital 35 and partly in Article 1 (point 13),
- Amendment 51 was considered as a superfluous reference to another amending provision of the same Directive,
- Amendment 54 was not accepted by the Council, as being out of the scope of this amending Directive and not in line with the subsidiarity principle,
- Amendment 56 was supported by the Council, although it agreed on the first report being issued no later than 31 December 2013 (instead of 31 December 2011), in order for it to provide a thorough overview of the Directive's implementation in all Member States, including those benefiting from an implementation delay by the end of 2012,
- Amendment 57 is covered by Article 1 (point 22); the Commission shall provide a thorough analysis of employment trends in the postal sector in its regular report,
- Amendment's 58 objective was carefully taken into consideration in the Council common position (Article 1 (point 23)); however, the limitations in time are not taken on board, as the Commission's assistance on the Directive's implementation is to be understood as a general task and a continuous exercise throughout the Directive's implementation. In addition, the Council strongly supports the position that it should not be compulsory for all Member States to submit their financing plans to the Commission (recital 26),
- finally, Amendment 59 is no longer consistent with the overall transposition time-table, as set out in the common position.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The common position is largely and extensively based on the European Parliament First Reading opinion and reflects the overall balance achieved at the informal negotiations between the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission with a view to concluding an early agreement at the stage of second reading in the European Parliament. The text maintains the approach and the legal architecture proposed by the Commission (and based on the current Directive 97/67/EC, as amended) with a view to adapting the regulation of the postal sector to the new conditions pertaining to the full accomplishment of the internal market by the end of 2010. It provides a certain number of Member States with the possibility of requesting a derogation (by 31 December 2012, at the latest) with regard to the implementation date of the new Directive, in order to meet particular structural needs of their national postal markets.

Against this background, important clarifications and re-adjustments have been made in particular, to the relevant definitions of the proposal, the guarantees for the universal service provision, including its financing, the authorisation regime, the role of the national authorities and the information provision by all postal service providers.

The Council looks forward to the confirmation by the European Parliament of its agreement on the common position with a view to an early adoption of this Directive.
