

WRITTEN QUESTION E-3469/04
by Stavros Arnautakis (PSE)
to the Commission

Subject: Death of five-year old boy through negligence in handling an emergency call and the European emergency call number '112'

On 1 December 2004, the day on which the second European conference on the European emergency call number '112' was meeting in Brussels, a young Greek boy died through lack of medical care, because the ambulance called by his parents never arrived.

Article 26 of Directive 2002/22/EC¹ 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 (Universal Service Directive) provides (in paragraphs 1 and 2, respectively) that:

- (a) 'Member States shall ensure that, in addition to any other national emergency call numbers specified by the national regulatory authorities, all end-users of publicly available telephone services, including users of public pay telephones, are able to call the emergency services free of charge, by using the single European emergency call number "112" '.
- (b) 'Member States shall ensure that calls to the single European emergency call number "112" are appropriately answered and handled in a manner best suited to the national organisation of emergency systems and within the technological possibilities of the networks'.

Will the Commission say what measures it intends to take to ensure that calls are in fact 'appropriately answered and handled in a manner best suited...' by the emergency medical assistance services in Greece, as the provided for in the above Community directive, since, as the tragic incident referred to above shows, this does not always appear to be the case?

Answer given by Mrs Reding

The Honourable Member questions what measures the Commission intends to take to ensure that emergency services in Greece respond appropriately to emergency calls and are handled in the most suitable manner.

Relevant information on the state of play regarding the operation of the 112 European emergency call number in Greece can be found in the reply of the Commission to written question E-3470/04 of the Honourable Member.

Regarding the provision and handling of a 112 call itself, the objective of Article 26 of the Universal Service Directive² is to ensure that all users, local and foreigners, in a Member State, are able to call a single European emergency call number, free of charge, from any telephone, including public pay telephones, without the use of any means of payment. From a technical point of view, as soon as a call arrives at the three digit call centre, it is routed to the 112 operators. Once the operator receives it, he passes it on to the proper emergency agent, and stays on the line to offer additional assistance, i.e. extra translation.

In Greece, organisational structures for calling the 112 number are in place. From the information given in the written question, it appears that the 112 call was answered and the request for an ambulance made.

¹ OJ L 108, 24.04.2002, p. 51.

² Directive 2002/22/EC of the Parliament and of the Council on universal service and users' rights relating to electronic communications networks and services

The Commission regrets the death of the five-year old boy and expresses deepest condolences to his parents. However, the fact that an ambulance did not arrive on time is not related to the implementation of Article 26 of the Universal Service Directive but to the local organisation of the ambulance services in Greece, which is not a community competence.