

E-0052/07 19 January 2007

WRITTEN QUESTION by Marc Tarabella (PSE) to the Commission

Subject: The challenge of emergency telecommunications Answer(s)

The American FCC (Federal Communications Commission) recently set up a specialised office for matters of emergency telecommunications (localisation of emergency calls, interoperability of emergency services' telecommunications systems, public warning systems).

Can the Commission say whether it plans to set up an operational service of the same kind equipped with a budget and clear objectives to address the new challenges of emergency telecommunications within the EU?

E-0052/2007 28 February 2007

Answer given by Mrs Reding on behalf of the Commission

The Commission addresses pro-actively the issues related to the development of the 112 emergency number in Europe and provides regular detailed reports on implementation. The importance of 112 has been emphasised by the Commission on numerous occasions, during workshops and conferences (such as the one organised by it in October 2005), in press releases, and in ongoing dialogue with the public and the Member States. In its consultations with the Member States, the Commission strongly encourages them to strengthen their efforts to provide the best possible solutions for emergency telecommunications and provides opportunities to share know-how and best practice.

However, as stated in Article 26 of the Universal Service Directive(1), it remains the responsibility of the Member States to ensure that all end-users of publicly available telephone services are able to call the emergency services free of charge, by using the single European emergency call number 112, and to inform citizens of the use of 112.

Furthermore, the Treaty limits the Commission's powers in this connection, and it is clear that emergency telecommunications and civil protection remain the responsibility of the Member States. The Commission has no additional powers beyond ensuring appropriate implementation of the directive. In the implementation process, the Commission does not, and indeed under the Treaty cannot, substitute itself for the competent national authorities.

Accordingly, the Commission pursues the rigorous implementation of the provisions of the current regulatory framework for electronic communications, and brings infringement

proceedings against Member States which have not transposed or implemented the directives. In the field of 112, the Commission also promotes best practice and reinforces cooperation between the Member States, but has to rely on the Member States as regards any developments falling outside of the scope of the Universal Service Directive.

To foster such developments, the Commission regularly discusses 112 with the Member States in the communications Committee and in the expert group established to improve dialogue on 112 issues. This Expert Group on Emergency Access is dedicated to the development of common approaches for reaching and communicating with emergency response centres. Its work has recently centred on topics such as the organisation of emergency telecommunications in the Member States, functioning of public safety answering points (PSAPs), procedures and costs related to caller location provision, and a common approach to subscriber identity module (SIM)-less emergency calls.

Finally, the Commission is currently reviewing the provisions of the e-communications regulatory framework, of which the article on 112 is a part. While the Commission will welcome the support of Parliament in ensuring that this Article is improved as far as is possible, it reminds the Honourable Member that any extension of the Commission's powers vis-à-vis those of the Member States would require the consent of the Member States.

(1) Directive 2002/22/EC of the 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), OJ L 108, 24.4.2002.