

E-0426/07 7 February 2007

WRITTEN QUESTION by Piia-Noora Kauppi (PPE-DE) to the Commission

Subject: Problems with European emergency call number 112 Answer(s)

Article 26 of Directive 2002/22/EC(1) (Universal Service) states that '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'. This same article provides 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', that 'undertakings which operate public telephone networks make caller location information available to authorities handling emergencies, to the extent technically feasible, for all calls to the single European emergency call number 112' and finally that 'citizens are adequately informed about the existence and use of the single European emergency call number 112'.

Some countries in the EU have set up some special centres to handle calls to 112 (Greece) or transmit calls to 112 to one of the centres handling emergency calls, such as fire-fighters/ambulances (Germany, Belgium, Spain) or police (Italy, Austria). The implementation of caller location in these countries for calls to 112 only, combined with a lack of information for citizens from these countries, and also for tourists visiting these countries, on the availability and use of 112 creates two categories of citizens — those who are aware of 112 and who will receive a service with location (and maybe a multilingual service) and the others who might die because they do not know which number to dial or will call the national numbers without being located.

Can the Commission provide a detailed explanation on how it plans to stop that discrimination?

(1) OJ L 108, 24.4.2002, p. 51.

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Answer given by Mrs Reding on behalf of the Commission

In regard to the implementation of the 112 single emergency number, the Honourable Member claims that special arrangements are put in place in certain Member States for the handling of calls to 112, in particular as concerns caller location and the possibility of a multilingual service, that are not used in relation to calls to the national emergency number.

The Honourable Member also draws attention to the possibility that citizens might die because they do not know which number to dial or will call the national numbers without being located.

While it has no information indicating that such differential treatment might be applied in certain Member States, the Commission stresses that national emergency numbers are the sole responsibility of the Member States, and that it has no powers in relation to such numbers. The Commission would also remind the Honourable Member that all questions relating to the languages used in the Member States are a matter of national competence, over which it has no powers.

Similarly, informing citizens of both the national and the European emergency numbers is the responsibility of the Member States. The Commission has the duty to verify that Member States ensure that 'citizens are adequately informed about the existence and use of the single European emergency call number 112'. Following extensive discussions with the Member States, the Commission is aware that wide publicity has been given to 112 across the Union: activities range from mentioning 112 alongside other emergency numbers in payphones, directories, telephone bills, police notices, newspapers and other media, to organising dedicated campaigns with posters, webpages, comic-strips, folders, radio commercials and TV clips. The latest 'E-communications household survey' for the Commission (November/December 2006) shows that 40 % of Europeans know that 112 is the emergency number to call from any location in the EU, compared to 35 % almost one year earlier, with higher percentages in some Member States (Luxembourg: 79 %, Slovakia: 66 % and Czech Republic: 63 %).

Finally, the Commission is currently reviewing the provisions of the e-communications regulatory framework, of which the article on 112 cited by the Honourable Member is a part. While the Commission will welcome the support of Parliament in ensuring that that Article is improved to the extent 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 in the context of an amendment of the EC Treaty.