

E-0846/07 22 February 2007

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

Subject: Quality standards of emergency call cases Answer(s)

In Finland, there are standards for maximum response time in case of emergency. Can the Commission guarantee that Finnish citizens travelling to other Member States are entitled to the same level of standards?

According to Article 26 of Directive 2002/22/EC(1) on universal service, emergency calls to 112 have to be 'appropriately answered and handled'. What is the Commission doing to ensure a proper quality of service?

In Finland calls to 112 are answered in several languages. What is the Commission doing to ensure that citizens from Finland travelling abroad and calling 112 are answered with the same high quality of service?

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

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Answer given by Mrs Reding on behalf of the Commission

The Commission is actively involved in issues related to the development of the 112 emergency number in Europe and provides regular detailed reports on implementation. 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, the EC Treaty limits the Commission's powers in this connection, and it is clear that emergency services and civil protection remain the responsibility of the Member States. As stated in Article 26 of the Universal Service Directive(1), EC law does place an obligation on 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. It also requires that such calls are appropriately answered and handled in a manner best suited to the national organisation of emergency systems, within the technological possibilities of the network.

While the Commission supports voluntary national measures setting high quality standards for 112 calls handling and answering, it has no additional powers beyond ensuring appropriate implementation of the directive.

The Commission considers that the level and quality of service provided in each Member State by national emergency numbers is an important benchmark for the 112 number in that state. In March 2005(2), the Commission stressed that '(...) the end-user should be able to rely on the 112 number in the same way as it might rely on a national emergency number. This means that, in practice, a person calling 112 should get a similar level of service (in terms of quality of the response, and in particular the time taken to process such a call) to the one obtained when dialling another national emergency number.' This approach, backed with potential enforcement actions of the Commission, secures appropriate and non-discriminatory treatment for emergency calls to 112 within a given Member State. However, as the current legal basis for 112 does not provide for a pan-European standardisation, this approach cannot serve as a guarantee that high standards respected in one Member State will also apply for 112 calls in other Member States, for example in relation to the response time at the emergency services to which the Honourable Member refers.

To ensure a proper quality of service in accordance with the approach outlined above, the Commission makes full use of its powers of scrutiny, including scrutiny of the national legislation of all Member States, and makes a detailed assessment of all complaints received from national authorities, undertakings and private individuals. The Commission also consults Member States in the relevant advisory committees, in this case 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, and is currently examining functional requirements for 112 at European level.

(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.

(2) Communications Committee Working Document COCOM05-07.