

WRITTEN QUESTION by Dushana Zdravkova (PPE-DE) to the Commission

In the spirit of the Written Declaration of the European Parliament on the European Emergency Number 112 and in connection with the steps taken by the Bulgarian Government in response to the European Commission alert on 112 services in Bulgaria, I am inquiring about the steps taken by the Commission to ensure that the Bulgarian Government fulfils its commitment in the area of emergency communications and guarantees improved safety for European citizens in Bulgaria.

The Bulgarian Government had an obligation to have a functioning 112 Emergency Communications System by January 2007. As of today there is a 112 Service in Bulgaria. A pilot project was announced at the end of 2006. Tenders had to be submitted within 45 days, and were not based on a feasibility study or approved architecture. The pilot project was finally implemented by June 2007 — with six months' delay. At present, again without any assessment of the results of the pilot project, a new invitation to tender with a very short response time has been launched for a framework agreement to build another five call centres and integrate them with the first one, without providing any information to the potential tenderers. The price of more than EUR 2.5 million for the pilot project was not justified, and there is a decision to spend 12 to 14 times more money on the next five centres on the same vague grounds.

A Government Decree of August 2007 laying down that a 112 Emergency Communications System is to be introduced in Bulgaria does not comply with the agreed governance model, management mechanism or financing model, and gives rise to suspicions that the concern is purely to produce paperwork for the Commission to review, while the Bulgarian authorities do not understand the fundamental requirements that apply to a system capable of serving citizens and providing a high-standard emergency response in the event of any incident.

Is the Commission aware of the model and plans of the Bulgarian Government for implementing the 112 Emergency Communications System and the procedures used? I strongly urge the Commission to make a timely and objective assessment of the 112 pilot project in Bulgaria and of the plans for extension of the system in that country, as otherwise it risks giving the Bulgarian Government the opportunity to waste another year and to spend the limited national resources on a system that will not meet the requirements of 112 Emergency Communications Systems which are developing in EU Member States and will not provide European citizens with an appropriate level of emergency service and safety in Bulgaria.

Answer given by Ms Reding on behalf of the Commission

The Commission is aware of the serious delays encountered by the Bulgarian authorities in making the European emergency number '112' available for all citizens. Therefore, due to the lack of availability from fixed and mobile phones of '112' in Bulgaria, the Commission decided to open an infringement procedure against Bulgaria in October 2007.

Moreover, the Commission closely monitors the implementation of the European single emergency number '112' in Bulgaria and is in contact with the Bulgarian authorities to ensure that it will be made available as soon as possible and in an appropriate manner. Access to this number must be provided in a manner best suited to the national organisation of emergency systems, according to Article 26(2) of the Universal Service Directive. In this context, the Bulgarian authorities have recently provided the Commission with some information on the planning of pilot centres and the extension of the system in the country, which are expected to be completed by the end of 2009.

A questionnaire requesting detailed information from all Member States, including Bulgaria, on the implementation of the European emergency number '112', is also under preparation by the Commission, in the framework of the communications Committee (Cocom). This data gathering exercise is one of the Commission's follow-up activities to the written declaration of the Parliament on the European emergency number '112' of 6 September 2007.