

**CONTRIBUTION OF MS. HILDEGARD PUWAK,  
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AT THE CONVENTION ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE  
*February 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup>***

**Services of general interest**

Dear colleagues,

First of all I would like to congratulate Mr. Katiforis and the rest of the working group for their contribution to our debate and to express my full support for the conclusions and recommendations they formulated.

Secondly, I wish to underline the sensitivity of the topic, that we are debating from the point of view of those countries, soon-to-become new Member States, which do not have consolidated market economies as yet, (that are still in transition) and whose income per capita is much lower than the average income in the EU.

Today we are shaping the European constitution. If we want to bring the Union closer to citizens, we have to demonstrate them that the European construction is based on a balance between economic and social progress, competition, solidarity and social justice.

By their nature, services of general interest represent a cornerstone of a sustainable European social model. They play a key role in ensuring the economic, social and regional cohesion in Europe. Every European citizen should have appropriate access to fresh water, sustainable energy, telecommunication, a well-functioning health and school-system, post service, transport, etc.

It is true that through the integration of the Charter of Fundamental Rights in the European Constitution, we accept that access to services of general interest, constitute a fundamental right of the European citizen. But we have to define it better. We have to clearly state that access should be ensured evenly irrespective

of the social status or residence of the citizens and continuously. On the other hand, the services should be efficient, high quality, affordable and acceptable from the social, cultural and environmental point of view.

Ensuring and promoting services of general interest represent an important objective of the Union. This is the reason why I am strongly in favour of the future European Constitution clearly stating, among the objectives of the Union the role held by the services of general interest.

I suggest therefore that Article 16 becomes the explicit legal basis for services of general interest. It could be reformulated , so that it clearly state that:

1. Services of general interest represent a "shared competences" between member states and the Union; with due respect to subsidiarity. Both of them pursue as a common objective to ensure their high quality, accessibility, universability and neutrality of the ownership.
2. There should be a fair balance between the competition rules and those rules that regulate services of general interest at European level. In other words, state aid, special or exclusive rights granted in connection with organization of services of general interest should not be considered as competition-distorting practices, if it is proved that the respective services of general interest cannot be provided fairly unless they are economically supported. Obviously should it be the case, the awarded amounts should be proportionate.
3. Last, but not least, special attention should be given to the increasing liberalization of the services of general interest, even though in some cases that may lead to social decline, meaning less availability to the consumer, higher prices or even lower quality. To conclude, if we want to prove to our citizens that Europe is more than a Single Market, we have to write a constitution which accomplishes the correct equilibrium between the economic and the social dimension.