

Council backs Commission on services

The Council's position is along the same lines as a political agreement reached by the Council on 29 May. The agreement roughly reflected the Parliament's 16 February 2006 vote and an amended proposal presented by the Commission at the beginning of April 2006. It no more contains the disputed country-of-origin principle.

A conflict might arise with the Parliament on the scope concerning services of general interest. The Council and the Commission want to exclude only "non-economic services of general interest" from the scope of the directive, while other services of general interest would remain in the directive's scope. The Parliament, however, voted to exclude all services of general interest.

Like the other two institutions, the Council voted to exclude the application of labour law from the scope of the directive. Healthcare services and other social services, as well as services provided by temporary work agencies are also excluded.

The vote in the Competitiveness Council was almost unanimous, with no 'no' votes and only Lithuania and Belgium abstaining. The francophone Socialist Party (PS), a partner in Belgium's social democrat-liberal coalition, is leading a campaign against the directive. Lithuania as well as Belgium already abstained in the vote on the Political Agreement in the 29 May 2006 Competitiveness Council.

At the time of the political agreement, trade unions reacted reservedly positive, while business and industry associations said they were opposed to a watering-down of the directive's initial ambitions.

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