

EU2009.CZ

„The Future of Services in the Internal Market“ Conference

Prague, 2nd February 2009

CONCLUSIONS OF THE PRESIDENCY

**EUROPE
WITHOUT
BARRIERS**

„The Future of Services in the Internal Market“ Conference

Prague, 2nd February 2009

CONCLUSIONS OF THE PRESIDENCY

The conference reflected both the motto of the Czech Presidency “Europe without barriers” and the importance which the Presidency gives to the services sector. Member States, Commission representatives, Members of the European Parliament as well as stakeholders and think tanks discussed in particular the challenges of proper transposition of the Directive and the current state and future development of the services sector in general. The event was moderated by Mr. George Parker from the Financial Times. Mr. Jörgen Holmquist, Commission Director General for Internal Market and Services, and Mr. Martin Tlapa, Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade, opened and hosted the conference.

■ The key role of the Internal Market in the current economic situation

The conference reiterated that free movement of services and freedom of establishment for services activities are fundamental principles that should form the basis of policy-making at EU level. In this climate of economic uncertainty it is not global competition that we should be most afraid of, but a return to protectionism within the EU. Europe needs the Services Directive all the more today in the face of the economic crisis. The Services Directive has the potential to reinvigorate the EU economy and deliver real tangible benefits to our businesses, small and medium sized enterprises in particular, and consumers. Now it is up to Member States to step up their implementation efforts so to turn the Directive’s potential into reality.

■ The key tools of the Services Directive

It was emphasised that Member States should allocate adequate resources to implementation of the Directive to make sure that proper and timely implementation is achieved by the end of 2009 deadline. The surveys that have been organised by certain professional associations have clearly shown that there is uneven pace in transpositions process in individual Member States. The adoption of implementing legislation, at national, and when applicable at regional and local level, needs to be speeded up. Special effort is also required to ensure that the fundamental projects of the Directive are pursued with a high degree of urgency. These are, for example, the setting up of effective and fully operational Points of Single Contact, interoperability of electronic procedures, and the putting in place of an operational network of administrative cooperation through the IMI system. These tools are the cornerstone of the Directive and it was also stressed that stakeholders have a key role to play in this context. Member States were invited to commit to testing their Points of Single Contact concepts with stakeholders to ensure they are accessible, useful and user friendly.

■ Benefits for business and consumers

The Conference emphasised that the Services Directive will only deliver its expected benefits if businesses and consumers are fully aware of the rights and opportunities it can offer them. The Commission, the European Parliament and Member States, in cooperation with stakeholder organisations, should make their best efforts to raise awareness of the Directive and its tools. A common branding/logo for the Points of Single Contact across the EU should also be considered. In addition, Member States were strongly encouraged to set up Points of Single Contact accessible to service providers and recipients in multiple languages.

■ Removing barriers – a continuous process

The conference underlined the importance of the work ahead, beyond the end 2009 implementation deadline of the Services Directive. This should include continuous monitoring and development of the Services Directive's implementation tools. The large-scale mutual evaluation process which the Directive requires the Commission and Member States to carry out in 2010 was highlighted as an innovative instrument of transparency and peer review. It will be a fundamental tool to gauge the state of the Internal Market for services following implementation of the Directive. The conference invited the Commission and Member States to take all necessary measures to make sure that this process is carried out in an effective way so that it may bring real added value to the development of the Internal Market.

■ Looking ahead

The conference noted that the Services Directive has already led to an important result which goes even beyond the services sector. Working at its implementation has considerably increased Member States' administrations understanding and ownership of the Internal Market.. Efforts at EU level should continue after implementation to identify and remove the remaining barriers to services activities. In the future, the possibility of applying innovative tools such as the Points of Single Contact and IMI to sectors or aspects not covered by the Services Directive should also be taken into consideration.

Finally, the conference stressed that the next Commission should take „an integrated approach to internal market issues“. This would ensure consistency of action taken in different policy areas with the aim of ensuring a true „Europe without barriers“.

Czech Presidency
of the European Union

www.eu2009.cz