



Quality public services in Europe – quality of life

EPSU campaign for a EU legal framework on public services to put the heart into Europe

Campaign guidelines

1. Introduction

It is worth recalling why EPSU needs this campaign: *“Without specific EU laws protecting public services, the EU will continue to **“open-up” public services to competition** and, when this is done, to strictly limit the public service obligations of the private operators. A proactive strategy that leads to EU action to support solidarity-based public services is needed. However, this **demands pressure from the “bottom up”**, not least as it is often local and regional actors that determine the status and functioning of public services, e.g., awarding contracts, providing services, ensuring employment, promoting democratic participation.... These actors have to be convinced that EU action in this area will strengthen their freedoms.”*

This quote is from the EPSU background paper¹ adopted by the Executive Committee at its meeting on 7 June setting out why action is needed to support public services in Europe.

The Executive Committee also agreed that the Secretariat should draw up a detailed campaign plan for submission to the autumn Executive Committee. A first version of a campaign plan was submitted to the Steering Committee of 20 September and the campaign was endorsed by the Executive Committee at its meeting on 29/30 November. There was strong support for a campaign in favour of public services, but the need for a clear focus was stressed, putting the emphasis on quality public services as part of an alternative agenda to deregulation and liberalisation.

The campaign is urgent as a number of important EU developments are anticipated during 2006, including:

- reports from the European Parliament on the SGI White Paper and on the Green Paper on Public Private Partnerships (PPPs)
- Communication from the Commission on social services of general interest (and also a broader horizontal Communication)
- A new initiative by the European Socialist Party in favour of a legal framework (presentation on 7 February)

These developments provide a key opportunity for EPSU to work towards political recognition of public services in the construction of the EU and to define and promote an alternative policy to the current liberalisation and deregulation drive.

2. EPSU demands

¹ 5 reasons why action is needed now in support of public services in Europe available on the EPSU website at the following link <http://www.epsu.org/a/1219>

An EU legal framework on public services is seen as the instrument through which it would be possible to define a set of primary objectives to be fulfilled, as established in the 'five reasons why action is needed to promote quality public services in Europe'.

- Europe must mean more to citizens than a market.
- Quality public services are key to meeting citizen's fundamental rights.
- Universality, continuity, affordability and democratic control are important principles for public services.
- EU competition must not undermine solidarity.
- A European framework law should safeguard the rights of national, regional and local authorities to meet citizen's needs.

Faced with the exponential influence of internal market regulations and subsequent pressures, we have come to recognise that the incremental creep of market influence will continue at EU level unless a 'protected space' for public services is clearly identified.

In essence EPSU as an organisation has accepted that it is better to call for positive change collectively at the EU level rather than individually act defensively at national level.

EPSU's existing policy says that a legal framework on public services (services of general interest in EU-speak) should establish:

- Common public service principles (see [annex 1](#));
- Legal certainty regarding the prevalence of the general interest over competition rules including exemptions from the latter of social services, healthcare, water, education²;
- The right for local and regional authorities to self-produce essential services without fears of further encroachment from the Commission or Court of Justice;
- An Observatory on public services with participation of trade unions to monitor and evaluate public services and the impact of liberalisation, to promote cooperation, improve standards, monitor changing needs of citizens etc.)
- Financing mechanisms for public services which take into account the need and positive aspects of risk-sharing

3. Outline of campaign and timetable

National activities

National campaigns will address the key developments affecting public services at national and local level and provide examples of how public services principles (e.g., universality, continuity, affordability and democratic control) are being affected by national and EU policies. The aim is to bring together a broad range of trade unions and civil society organisations in order to raise awareness and build support for our demands for a EU legal framework. National coordinators will manage the campaigns (see [annex 2](#) for details of coordinators).

We underline that the aim of the national campaigns is not to provide a scientific overview of all the changes taking place. Rather, it is to stimulate discussion on public service issues at national (and European) level and illustrate how EU, (and national/local) legal frameworks are necessary to ensure that social cohesion and the general interest guide public sector reforms.

² There is an explicit exemption for the manufacture and trade of arms

The national reports do not have to be identical; nor do they have to deal with the whole range of public services.

Questions for the national reports:

1. Are there major public service reforms taking place? If yes, in which areas? (e.g., healthcare, public utilities, public transport, education)?
2. What effects are they having on the financing, organisation, and quality of services?
3. Are any further reforms planned?
4. What are the key policy demands of organisations representing social partners, local government, NGOs, consumer organisations?

Please give one or two examples of positive and negative reforms, using the principles set out in Annex 1³ as a benchmark for the “quality” of service.

The European dimension

The campaign’s timetable (see Annex 3) is intended to allow for an interactive dynamic between the national and EU levels.

The awareness-raising and mobilisation generated by the national campaigns will feed into a renewed European demand for a EU legal framework on public services (or some other form of EU instrument – e.g. an Action Plan). It will also help verify the basis and content of such an instrument.

We will in parallel to the national campaigns start preparatory work for this part of the campaign, e.g. checking out the potential “hooks” (e.g., the Charter of Fundamental Rights) that can support a EU legal instrument.

The campaign will be officially launched on 20/21 April in Vienna and will run until June 2007.

The EPSU Executive Committee will follow the campaign closely.

6.2.06

³ See also the PSI quality public service campaign http://www.world-psi.org/Content/NavigationMenu/English/Quality_Public_Services1/Gaps_Homepage.htm and the background presentation by Jane Pillinger on quality of public services, prepared for the SGI working group on 1 February.

Appendix 1

Examples of public service principles and practices⁴		
Principles / Objectives	What it means	Examples of existing standards / instruments
equal access	the prohibition of discrimination based on social or personal status, or geographical location, or amongst different categories of users	BE right to minimum electricity
Universality	provision of service must be universal, even when runs counter to considerations of a commercial nature or to profitability	
continuity, quality of service	Obligation to maintain supply; long-term maintenance, investment	NL prohibition of privatisation in water
affordability	Price controls / subsidies Limits on profits?	BE prohibition on profit-making companies receiving childcare subsidies
User/consumer protection	Information, redress	Patients' charters
concertation	Information, consultation and participation rights of workers User groups	
democratic control	Transparency, accountability	National regulators for liberalised sectors EU Observatory??
Solidarity	This is illustrated: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ between generations (education for children, care for the elderly); ➤ through the sharing of risks (e.g., healthcare); ➤ towards vulnerable groups (ensuring access to essential services and fostering integration and employment); ➤ between locations and regions (equal pricing). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Collective pension; "Childless" families, ➤ sick and healthy, ➤ access for disabled, quotas for employment ➤ DE constitution "equal living conditions"; EU structural funds

⁴ This is from the EPSU paper "Five reasons why action is needed to promote quality public services in Europe."

Appendix 2

Role and tasks of national coordinators

The coordinator is the main contact person for each country. Ideally, the person should be able to communicate in English or French.

The national coordinator will:

- Participate in the launch of the campaign scheduled for April 20/21 2006 and the (2 or 3) further meetings of the campaign
- Establish and coordinate a national campaign network comprising of interested unions, NGOs, consumer groups, academics...The network should be as broad as possible.
- Draw up a 4-5 page report (in own language) based on the campaign questions and discussions in the network. Coordinators will present a first outline of the reports in the coordinators' workshop which will precede the campaign launch on April 20/21
- Provide input to EPSU on the content of the EU instrument on public services
- Coordinate national activities in support of such an instrument.

Members of the network will also be expected to carry out a number of tasks, and to:

- Inform their members about the EPSU campaign
- Provide active input to the campaign (and stimulate debate on *"What kind of public services do we want for ourselves and our children?"*)
- Support the campaign in favour of a EU legal instrument on public services

EPSU will:

- provide input into the national networks to ensure an ongoing link between European and national issues.
- will contribute to the costs of participation of coordinators in campaign meetings according to usual rules.

Appendix 3

Campaign timetable

What	Who	When	Finance
<p>Draw up list of campaign coordinators</p> <p>Development of framework for 1st phase inventory on public services</p> <p>Workshop for national coordinators and launch of campaign.</p>	<p>Affiliates to appoint one union coordinator per country</p> <p>Preparatory group meeting</p> <p>1st meeting of national coordinators (plus other affiliates for launch)</p>	<p>December-March 2005</p> <p>1 February 2006, Brussels</p> <p>20 – 21 April 06, Austria</p>	<p>National affiliates to provide resources for union coordinator</p> <p>Budget for meeting</p> <p>EPSU Other Projects and Meetings</p>
<p>National networks are set up; reports provide framework for discussion.</p>	<p>National coordinators + other unions + civil society</p> <p>EPSU Executive Committee, Standing Committees, constituencies, GEC to discuss progress</p>	<p>From April – December 2006</p>	<p>National resources for inventories + discussions</p> <p>EPSU Campaign Officer will oversee process and provide input as requested</p>
<p>Mid-term Conference to discuss national inventories (and European developments – e.g. follow up to SGI White Paper)</p>	<p>National coordinators + unions + civil society</p>	<p>December 2006</p>	<p>Budget for EPSU Conference plus for Publication of results</p>
<p>Identification of key EU issues and standards for EU legal framework (or other instrument)</p>	<p>National coordinators</p>	<p>January 2007</p>	<p>EPSU budget for meeting</p>
<p>Discussion on the content of EU legal framework</p>	<p>National coordinators + unions + civil society</p> <p>EPSU Executive Committee, Standing Committees, constituencies, GEC to discuss progress</p>	<p>January- June 2007</p> <p>May 2007</p>	<p>Resources for National debates</p> <p>EPSU Campaign Officer will oversee process and provide input as requested</p>
<p>Discussion and evaluation of results</p>	<p>Everyone</p>	<p>June 2007</p>	<p>Budget for EPSU Conference plus Publication</p>