

Speaking notes by Mikhail Kuzmenko, EPSU Vice-President
Resolution nr 2, agenda item 7
'Quality Public Services at the heart of Europe' (15 May)

It is with great pleasure that I move this resolution. The heart of Europe is not a physical place but a commitment to put social justice at the core of a Europe of peace, human rights, the rule of law and solidarity.

This resolution recaps on why - and how - public services foster economic and social development and cohesion, equal opportunities, job creation, as well as the fair distribution of income and wealth.

EPSU and PSI have for many years called for European and international frameworks to promote and protect public services and to 'bring to life' the EU Treaties and Council of Europe provisions on fundamental rights: the right to education, the right of children to protection and care, the right to social and housing assistance, to healthcare, to justice, the right to a good administration and so on. Action plans and targets for the development of public services are also needed. In my region of Russia and Central Asia unions have proposed a healthcare Charter to:

- Improve access to healthcare and increased funding
- Improve infrastructures
- Tackle staffing problems in rural areas
- Improve employment conditions (wages for example are only 60% of average salaries) and staffing levels

These demands are reflected in the work of EPSU.

In many countries in Europe and around the world public services are either under attack, or just not on the agenda.

The lack of investment in quality public services, accessible to all, explains to a large extent why income disparities are growing everywhere, irrespective of economic growth rates. According to a recent Oxfam report, the 85 richest individuals in the world have as much wealth as the poorest half of the global population!

In this resolution EPSU's long-standing commitment for quality public services as a counterweight to the rise in inequality and to lay the ground for a fairer, greener, and more prosperous societies.

The resolution also raise questions around the place of private companies in public service provision. This 'place' is not always easy to identify, for example, public-private partnerships contracts are complex and the costs may be hidden. How can public service principles apply to all providers so that we do not 'privatise the profit and socialise the risks'? Public-private partnerships continue to be promoted in spite of evidence of their failure; evidence gathered over many years for example by PSIRU.

While many consider that profit-making is fundamentally at odds with quality public services, others are more neutral, especially regarding the role of non-profit making companies, which in a number of countries have a long tradition of providing public services. All agree that it is necessary to ensure good employment conditions apply to all public services workers irrespective of who is the employer.

And all would agree that quality is paramount and that money should be well spent. In the USA for example, an enormous amount of money is spent on healthcare (18% of GDP) in return for only mediocre health outcomes - the prestigious scientific publication 'The Lancet' reported for example that in 2010 43% of US women did not receive necessary care,

compared to 7% in the UK. It will be a struggle for President Obama's Affordable Care Act to change this in the face fierce opposition from the vested interests that have 'traded' health and profited from a fundamentally unequal system.

And, then given the poor outcomes of US healthcare, why are so many European health systems are under pressure to be more like the US?

In the resolution EPSU opposes strongly policies to liberalise healthcare and other public services, including through international trade agreements and within the framework of the World Trade Organisation. We call for evidence-based research and policy and for evaluation of the impact of liberalisation in the different sectors. A report from the UK Institute of Government (July 2013) noted that after 30 years of liberalisation, there is "*still little evidence that the market - a more diverse and competitive landscape - has improved public service provision.*" (Institute of Government July 2013). EPSU's Public Services Monitor has published similar findings. And we do see signs that citizens and local public authorities begin to question liberalization.

Remunicipalisation (in-sourcing) of services is taking place and in all parts of Europe there are calls for quality municipal services that are democratically controlled. EPSU has been successful in ensuring that the new EU public procurement and concessions Directives uphold this right to direct provision.

In terms of the 8 amendments not supported by the Executive Committee, all of these have been withdrawn by the movers, so after the debate we will vote on the resolution as a whole and including all the amendments and rephrasing that the Executive Committee proposes to adopt.

To conclude, there are sound economic, political and social reasons in support of QPS. We need to continue to 'make the case' for QPS so that all countries – inside and outside the EU – can protect existing services, develop new ones and/or expand provision according first and foremost to the needs of people.