Answer given by Mr Verheugen on behalf of the Commission

(28 January 2000)

The Commission refers to its reply given to the Honourable Member's Written Question E-3958/98 (1) which indicated that the Commission is closely monitoring the evolution of intellectual property protection in Central and Eastern Europe.

In this context, the Commission considers that in the large majority of the Central and Eastern European countries (CEEC) substantive progress in the harmonisation of the legislation with the acquis has been achieved. However, certain shortcomings in the establishment of an adequate legal framework still exist. In addition, the administrative capacity relating to the enforcement of intellectual property rights still needs significant improvement and better administrative co-operation between the authorities is also needed.

Most of the CEEC countries are heading in the right direction and, on the whole, levels of piracy are decreasing, even though they remain high.

Bulgaria can be mentioned as a country which has achieved significant results in the fight against piracy during 1999.

The Commission will continue to give high priority to the fight against piracy in the framework of the enlargement negotiations.


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WRITTEN QUESTION E-2493/99

by Dominique Souchet (UEN) to the Commission

(16 December 1999)

Subject: Export refunds for processed food products

Export refunds are essential for ensuring that some EU food sectors are able to continue exporting European processed agricultural products on international markets. They constitute a logical and legitimate form of compensation for the difference in raw material prices in the EU compared with international prices, and are an essential component of the principle of Community preference.

The Commission proposal aimed at reducing the refund budget by 4,5 % for products not included in Annex I had just been submitted at the time of the last meeting of the management committee. The proposal failed to obtain a qualified majority with 53 votes against, 28 abstentions and no votes in favour.

1. In view of this, does the Commission intend to adopt the proposal?

2. In the run-up to the WTO negotiations due to begin shortly in Seattle, does the Commission not consider that it is sending out a political signal that could undermine the maintenance of the principle of Community preference, which is a fundamental part of the CAP?

Answer given by Mr Liikanen on behalf of the Commission

(26 January 2000)

The Honourable Member refers to the fixing of export refunds for products not covered by Annex I (ex Annex II) to the EC Treaty, which have been reduced by a flat-rate of 4,5 % as of 1 November 1999. This reduction is intended to ensure that spending on refunds for the sector not covered by Annex I remains within the appropriations set by the budgetary authority.

This measure does not undermine the principle of Community preference but is simply intended to ensure that, when refund rates are fixed, both the constraints that maintain substantial differences between agricultural product prices within the Community and worldwide and the discipline imposed on the Community budget — and, in particular, on its agricultural component — are taken into account.
Furthermore, the Commission has presented a communication (1) to the Council proposing certain specific measures, such as economy measures and the creation of an additional facility authorising easier access to inward processing. This will enable the Community processing industry to remain competitive in external markets.

(1) COM(99) 673 final.

(2000/C 280 E/056)  
WRITTEN QUESTION E-2505/99
by Caroline Jackson (PPE-DE) to the Commission
(22 December 1999)

Subject: Water fluoridation

Can the Commission state whether it is prepared to review the existing legislation on drinking water so as to include a prohibition on water fluoridation, in line with fears raised by some of my constituents?

Can the Commission list the principal scientific studies which may underlie its decision not to address the fluoridation issue at EU level or to propose a prohibition on this process?

Answer given by Mrs Wallström on behalf of the Commission
(17 January 2000)

Drinking water quality is regulated in the Community by Council Directive 80/778/EEC of 15 July 1980 relating to the quality of water intended for human consumption (1), which will be replaced by 25 December 2003 by the recently adopted new drinking water Directive 98/83/EC (2). Both directives limit the maximum admissible concentration of fluoride in drinking water, regardless of its origin, i.e. naturally present or artificially added. The matter of fluoridation of water supplies lies within the Member States’ responsibility. The Member States, however, must respect the maximum limit set out in the directive. Member States policies on this matter depend on a number of factors, including local customs and habits which differ from one Member State to the other. Unquestionably, fluoridation is a controversial issue because of the positive or negative effects fluoride might have, depending on the concentration of the substance in the drinking water.

The limit set out in the drinking water Directive is 1,5 milligrams per litre (mg/l), which according to the view of the World health organisation (WHO) as expressed in its drinking water quality guidelines represents a good balance between the positive and negative effects of fluoride. Positive effects start around 0,5mg/l up to 2 mg/l. The more the concentration shifts upwards from 2mg/l the more the risk of negative effects is increased i.e. dental fluorosis or even skeletal fluorosis at very high concentrations.

Therefore, the answer to the first question is that the Commission is not considering a revision of the legislation, as the new drinking water Directive was adopted on November 1998 and it has to be implemented.

As for the second question, the principal reference is the WHO publication: ‘Guidelines for drinking water quality, second edition volume 2, Geneva 1996’. In this volume, information on fluoride can be found in pages 231-237 including a list of 18 relative references.