

(2003/C 28 E/012)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0006/02**by Luis Berenguer Fuster (PSE) and Joan Colom i Naval (PSE) to the Commission**

(17 January 2002)

Subject: Electricity shortages in Spain and the Commission's attitude

In reply to a question by one of the authors of the present question (9 November 2001, E-2560/01 ⁽¹⁾), Commissioner Monti said that the Commission is not at present in possession of evidence which would enable it to conclude that the interruptions in electricity supply in certain regions of Spain are the result of abusive practices by one or several of the operators on the Spanish electricity market.

The power cuts have occurred persistently and have become worse in the last few days, especially in Catalonia and in other regions affected by a cold wave.

The situation has been debated in the Spanish press, but it appears unlikely that any solution will be forthcoming from the Spanish government, which nonetheless bears the responsibility for the creation of an oligopoly in the electricity sector.

All the experts agree that one of the causes of this situation is underinvestment by the electricity companies, which have chosen to do as little as possible, in an attitude typical of those occupying a dominant position. The consumers would be grateful if the Commission acted to end this situation.

Does the Commission intend to initiate any action to ascertain whether this situation is the result of abusive exploitation of a dominant position by the electricity companies?

Does the Commission not believe that the reports published in the Spanish press provide sufficient evidence for the belief that signs exist of anti-competitive practices?

Does the Commission believe that these power cuts may be the result of the characteristics of the electricity sector in Spain?

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 115 E, 16.5.2002, p. 119.

Answer given by Mr Monti on behalf of the Commission

(7 March 2002)

As stated in its answer of 9 November 2001 to Written Question E-2560/01 from the Honourable Member, the Commission has no evidence enabling it to conclude that the interruptions in electricity supply in certain regions of Spain are the result of abusive practices by one or more operators on the Spanish electricity market. The articles published in the Spanish press are not such as to cause it to change its position.

The Commission considers that it is for the Spanish electricity regulator to investigate the real causes of the interruptions in electricity supply in certain regions.

It does not therefore intend to conduct an investigation under the Community competition rules into the problems of the continuity of electricity supplies by the companies responsible for transporting and distributing electricity via high, medium and low voltage cables in Spain.

Generally speaking, the Commission continues to believe, as it stated in its reply of 9 November 2001, that regulation by the national authorities seems to be the best method of ensuring continuity of electricity supply.

It considers, however, that security of supply has a significant Community dimension in the internal electricity market. That is why, in its March 2001 proposals for completing the internal energy market, it suggested that Member States be required to ensure that a balance is maintained between production and consumption and, if necessary, to issue invitations to tender for the construction of new power plants.

In addition, in its Communication on European energy infrastructure adopted on 20 December 2001, the Commission underlined the importance of an adequate level of interconnection between networks in order to benefit from the single market in the Union and improve energy security. It made specific proposals, in particular as regards interconnections between Spain and its neighbours.

(2003/C 28 E/013)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0011/02

by Erik Meijer (GUE/NGL) to the Commission

(17 January 2002)

Subject: Discovery of the roundabout financial means used to attract a business to the economically and geographically disadvantaged Netherlands province of Friesland

1. Does the Commission recall that in its answer of 3 September 2001 to my question No E-1473/01 ⁽¹⁾ it said, inter alia, that a certain case of 'confidentiality' in the Netherlands province of Friesland could involve the European Social Fund (ESF) and that the matter had been referred to the relevant department, the Directorate-General for Employment and Social Affairs, so that it could carry out the necessary checks?
2. Has it since become aware that the abovementioned case seems to have no link to the ESF, but to an attempt made at the end of 1997 by the government of the province of Friesland to bring into the Megapark business park in Heerenveen, with the help of considerable government support and a low land price, the American company Space Crafts Incorporated (SCI), which is known for its low wages and hard corporate culture and which, following the collapse of the space industry, assembles computer equipment for, among others, Hewlett Packard?
3. Did the Commission know that as early as February 1999 a public debate took place in the Friesland provincial assembly concerning the confidentiality surrounding the roundabout financing of the founding of the company referred to in point 2, whereby the province set up an 'acquisition fund' in late 1998, under which the Noordelijke Ontwikkelings Maatschappij (Northern Development Company), which is not subject to the Netherlands Open Government Law (Wet Openbaarheid van Bestuur), was to receive the sum of approximately EUR 3 million to provide temporary accommodation for the company? If so, what did the Commission do with this information?
4. Did the province of Friesland, following the submission of a question by the Commission to the Netherlands in spring 1999, deny that money from the 'acquisition fund' had been promised to SCI, and did it have to be left to a member of the provincial assembly, in an effort to ensure ethical government, to inform the Commission of this state of affairs on 1 June 1999, in order to be able to forward the decision to the Netherlands Government (reference number SG(2001) D/286182) in which the Commission ruled that too much had been paid in subsidies and that this should be reimbursed?
5. What ways are open to the northern Netherlands provinces of Friesland, Groningen and Drenthe, which for decades have been able to compensate to some extent for their unfavourable economic and geographical situation vis-à-vis the densely populated west of the Netherlands by means of State subsidies to help attract businesses with favourable conditions, to maintain their population levels and protect employment opportunities without resorting to concealing information and circulating disinformation?

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 81 E, 4.4.2002, p. 28.

Answer given by Mr Monti on behalf of the Commission

(4 March 2002)

1. and 2. The Commission refers the Honourable Member to the answer it gave to his written question E-0010/02 ⁽¹⁾.
3. The information to which this question refers was known to the Commission partly before, partly after initiating the procedure of Article 88(2) of the EC Treaty. The Commission has requested detailed information and based its decision on the information that was received from the Dutch authorities.