

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.

4. The information provided by the Member of the provincial parliament has helped the Commission to ask precise information on aspects of the case on which the Dutch authorities had initially not given full information. It appeared that the Dutch authorities did not consider a number of measures as State aid in the meaning of Article 87.1 of the EC Treaty. In the final decision the Commission partly came to an opposite conclusion.

5. Almost the whole of the three northernmost provinces forms part of the Dutch regional aid map, which defines the regions that are eligible for regional aid under Article 87(3)(c) of the EC Treaty. In these regions the Dutch authorities may grant regional aid (e.g. on the basis of the 'Investeringspremieregeling'-scheme), but also the level of aid for training, Research and Technological Development (R & D) and environment can be higher than the level that can be allowed in other, more prosperous regions in the Netherlands. More information can be found on the Commission's website ⁽²⁾.

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 301 E, 5.12.2002, p. 21.

⁽²⁾ http://europa.eu.int/comm/competition/index_en.html.

(2003/C 28 E/014)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0089/02

by Erik Meijer (GUE/NGL) to the Commission

(24 January 2002)

Subject: Adverse impact of the use of the euro as a parallel domestic currency for the purchase of luxury services and durable consumer goods

1. Does the Commission anticipate that the acceptance of payment in euro outside the territory of the EMU Member States and other areas where the euro has been generally introduced will remain confined to department stores, tourist shops, hotels, cafés and restaurants frequented by people from the euro zone in centres of tourism in the three EU Member States which are not participating in EMU, or does it expect that the euro will soon be widely used on a large scale as a domestic currency in other states with considerably lower standards of living than the EU average and weak national currencies?

2. On 7 January 2002, Commissioner Verheugen stressed the expectation that candidates for membership of the EU would naturally introduce the euro after accession to the EU, despite the fact that at present most candidate countries cannot meet the Stability Pact criteria relating to annual government deficits and ceilings on state debt. Was this intended to increase the scope for using the euro as a domestic currency in those countries without their participating in EMU?

3. As a result of the replacement of twelve national currencies with the euro, is it likely that areas will come into being outside the EU and EMU territories where the wages of most low-paid workers will for a long time continue to be paid in the traditional local currency but prices — particularly those of expensive consumer goods and luxury services — will increasingly be quoted and charged in euro?

4. Does the Commission agree that, if people are compelled to change money for domestic consumption purposes, they will constantly run the risk of fluctuations in the exchange rate between their local currency and the euro, as a result of which their purchasing power will decline, a situation comparable to that which exists in some Third World countries where the American dollar has long played a similar role as a parallel currency?

5. What will the EU institutions do to prevent a widening gulf between rich and poor in third countries which are influenced by the euro and to prevent situations arising similar to that which occurred around New Year in Argentina due to the increasing use of the dollar instead of the peso?

Answer given by Mr Solbes Mira on behalf of the Commission

(16 April 2002)

As is the case with other major international currencies, such as the American dollar, it can be expected that the euro will be accepted as means of payment in many areas outside the euro zone (for example: in