- higher expenditure on immovable property due to rents being fixed in US dollars and to the multiannual programme for the security and renovation of buildings;
- costs related to the rotation of officials in delegations;
- new staff training measures;
- the information technology programme to ensure that tools in delegations are compatible with those at headquarters.

The level of appropriations under Title A-7 (Decentralised expenditure on support staff and administration) requested by the Commission in the 2000 preliminary draft budget broadly matches the 1999 level.

The 12.4% increase (€ 23.2 million) increase as compared with the 1998 implementation is due to the following:
- the 1999 adjustment (last revision in 1991) of daily subsistence allowances for officials and subsistence allowances for national experts seconded to the Commission (impact over a full year: € 6.7 million);
- the transfer, within the 1999 budget, of ancillary expenditure relating to conferences and congresses from Part B to Part A (Title A-7) (€ 17 million), decided by Parliament.

(2000/C 225 E/012)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-1713/99
by Jonas Sjöstedt (GUE/NGL) to the Commission
(29 September 1999)

Subject: Sweden’s competitive disadvantage in egg production

Both carcass meal and colouring agents are allowed in egg production in Finland. The same substances are banned in Sweden. Cages are also allowed to be smaller in Finland. Finnish producers, therefore, have lower costs than their Swedish counterparts. Is it fair that Swedish producers should be at a competitive disadvantage because they take greater account of consumers and animal welfare?

Answer given by Mr Byrne on behalf of the Commission
(1 December 1999)

The Commission is not aware of a general ban in Sweden on feeding any farmed livestock, including laying hens, with mammalian meat-and-bone meal.

Since 1986 Sweden has banned the use of certain animal material (i.e. animals which have died of natural causes or coming from parts of carcasses of slaughtered animals presenting pathological modifications) in the manufacture of animal feed. This derogation from the Community legislation was negotiated in the Act of Accession at the time of Sweden’s accession. The Commission is now reflecting on the possibility to introduce a similar ban in the Community.

According to the information received by the Commission, the use of substances for the colouring of eggs in accordance with the provisions of Council Directive 70/524/EEC of 23 November 1970 concerning additives in feedingstuffs (1), has been authorised in Sweden.

In relation to the protection of laying hens the Commission is very concerned about the welfare of the animals and gives it a high priority.

Council Directive 1999/74/EC of 19 July 1999 (1) which will replace Council Directive 88/166/EEC, and which provides that Member States may, while respecting the general rules laid down in the EC Treaty, maintain or apply within their territories provisions for the protection of laying hens which are more stringent than those envisaged by the Directive.

It is clear that the aim of the Directive is to set up minimum standards for animal welfare and, therefore, Member States may go further if they wish provided that they respect the general rules laid down in the Treaty. This is in conformity with the judgement of the Court of justice of 19 October 1995, in case C-128/94, Hönig.

It cannot be disputed that some aspects of enhanced animal welfare standards such as provisions of superior housing arrangements may influence production costs but actually, the protocol No 33 of the Amsterdam Treaty requires the Commission and Member States to consider animal welfare a priority when drawing up transport, single market and research policies.

It does not therefore appear, on the basis of the information available, that the existing legislation which the Honourable Member has mentioned, infringes Community law applicable either to animal welfare or the common organisation of the agricultural market.


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by Jonas Sjöstedt (GUE/NGL) to the Commission

(29 September 1999)

Subject: Climate subsidy for egg producers

To offset the disadvantages of a cold climate and long distances, a special Norrland subsidy is paid to egg producers in northern Sweden. The subsidy is paid per hen. The EU has insisted that the subsidy be reduced on competition grounds. Is that a reasonable requirement given that production in the region is lower than consumption?

Answer given by Mr Fischler on behalf of the Commission

(9 November 1999)

In accordance with Article 142 of the Act of Accession, the Commission has authorised Sweden to grant long-term national aid with a view to ensuring that agricultural activity is maintained in specific regions covering the agricultural areas located north of the 62nd Parallel and some adjacent regions affected by a comparable climatic conditions rendering agricultural activity particularly difficult.

These aids are to be granted, in particular, to maintain traditional methods of primary production and processing, to facilitate the disposal of those products and to ensure that the environment is protected and the countryside preserved. These aids must not lead to an increase in production (physical limits) or in the level of overall support (monetary limits) recorded during a reference period previous to accession.

The long-term national aids were not authorised on the basis of Articles 87 and 88 (ex-Articles 92 and 93) of the EC Treaty but in accordance with Article 142 of the Act of Accession.

The Commission by its Decision No 97/557/EC of 17 July 1997 amending Decision 96/228/EC on a long-term national aid scheme to assist farmers in northern areas of Sweden (1), determined the Nordic areas of Sweden, fixed the reference period to be used to ensure that Nordic aid does not lead to an increase in production or in the level of overall support and also determined the form and level of the aid and fixed the level of the agricultural production that may not be exceeded without the level of aid granted being reduced.