Does the Commission agree that this programme should also include the classical languages ancient Greek and Latin, which constitute the cornerstone of European literary culture and civilisation? Does it not agree that such a move would send a positive message in the face of the decline of the teaching of these languages in the Member States? Will it support such a proposal if it is made by the government of a Member State?

Answer given by Mrs Reding on behalf of the Commission

(10 February 2000)

On 13 October 1999 the Commission adopted a proposal for a Decision of the Parliament and of the Council (1) to establish a European Year of Languages in 2001.

The objective of the European Year of Languages is to raise public awareness of linguistic diversity, to encourage lifelong language learning and to disseminate information on learning opportunities.

Knowledge of languages is important particularly in terms of the personal and professional development of the individual, intercultural understanding and the competitiveness of European companies. In addition, it allows us to benefit fully from free movement in the Community.

While the principal message of the European Year should not be directed at specific languages, the target languages are in fact defined in the Decision as the official languages of the Community, Irish, Luxembourgish and the other languages recognised by the Member States.


WRITTEN QUESTION E-2533/99

by Alexandros Alavanos (GUE/NGL) to the Commission

(4 January 2000)

Subject: Harmonisation of Greek maritime law with community legislation

With a view to bringing Greek legislation in line with Directive 75/34 (1) (Article 7) and Regulation 1251/70 (2) (Article 7) and the ECJ judgment of 27 November 1997 the Greek Government recently issued a presidential decree abolishing Article 5 of the Code of Public Maritime Law which states that only vessels which are more than 50% owned by Greek shipowners are deemed Greek vessels.

Seamen’s and shipowners’ union organisations are concerned lest vessels with owners from other Community Member States receive more favourable treatment than vessels with Greek owners.

Given the concerns expressed by these trade union organisations, will the Commission say:

1. Is there any possibility that ‘foreign’ vessels which will be based in Greece may receive more favourable treatment?

2. Will the Greek legal provisions applicable to Greek vessels apply to such vessels without discrimination, such as the provisions on the composition of crews, the establishment of a common working language, the granting of licences, manning, rescue measures etc.?

Answer given by Mrs de Palacio on behalf of the Commission

(1 February 2000)

The draft Presidential Decree amending Article 5 of Order No 187 of 29 September – 3 October 1973 promulgating the code of public maritime law follows up the EC Judgment of 27 November 1997 in Case C62/96 on the conditions attached to ship registration. That draft was submitted for scrutiny by the Commission and considered to be in line with Community law and, once it has been published, will enable the infringement procedure to be filed.

Under Article 43 (former Article 52) of the EEC Treaty, ships belonging to Member State citizens or companies that have been entered in the Hellenic Register, must be subject to the same conditions as those applying to all other Greek ships. The provisions of Greek law relating to crew composition, the introduction of a common working language, the issue of operating licences, safety staff and other requirements of Greek law will also apply, without distinction, to such ships.

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2535/99

by Heidi Hautala (Verts/ALE) to the Commission

Subject: Inequality under the Austrian law on universities

(4 January 2000)

The Austrian law on universities (Hochschulstudiumsgesetz, S. 7(1)) imposes requirements on applicants for a study place coming from other Member States different to those imposed on the country’s own nationals. In order to obtain a place, Austrians are required to show their ‘general’ school leaving certificate. However, a general school leaving certificate issued in Finland, for example, is not regarded as sufficient in Austria, and a ‘special’ school leaving certificate must also be shown. In practice this requirement has been interpreted as meaning that applicants for a study place must show that they already have a place to study in the same field at a university in their home country. Only after five years’ residence in Austria are other EU nationals freed from this requirement to hold two study places, which naturally cannot be demanded of Austrians.

Is the Commission aware of the problems caused by the Austrian law on universities? Does the Commission agree that legislation and practice in Austria hinder the free movement of students instead of encouraging it and accord differing status to different EU nationals? Does the Commission consider that the Austrian law on universities is in conflict with Articles 149 and 12 of the Treaty of Amsterdam? Does the Commission propose to take measures pursuant to Article 226 to remedy the situation?

Answer given by Mrs Reding on behalf of the Commission

(4 February 2000)

The Commission notes that the mobility of students within the Community is based on respect for the principle of equal treatment in access to education in another Member State. This principle is ignored where the conditions imposed are such that, either directly on grounds of nationality or indirectly by other means, they put Community students in a less favourable position than students who hold national certificates, with the result that the former are denied admission to educational institutions.