WRITTEN QUESTION P-2524/99
by Hiltrud Breyer (Verts/ALE) to the Commission

(16 December 1999)

Subject: Sellafield and Cap de la Hague reprocessing plants

Substantial data from university clinics, public monitoring bodies and reliable environmental organisations show that nuclear contamination of European seas and the north-east Atlantic is continuing. The Commission is also aware of a petition (No 393/95) on this subject which sets out the figures concerned. In 1998, the 12 countries bordering the north Atlantic and the European seas undertook to take rigorous measures, in accordance with the OSPAR Convention, and set themselves the target of zero measurements of synthetic nucleotides by the year 2020.

1. How is this to be achieved, when radioactive pollution of the sea off Sellafield and Cap de la Hague by many hazardous substances has massively increased over the last decade?

2. What steps have the Commission and the Member States taken to date to implement the above objectives?

3. What further steps will be taken, and when?

4. (a) How often did the Commission inspect the two plants between 1989 and 1999?

(b) Is it true that each was only inspected once?

(c) Does the Commission consider that a single inspection in ten years fulfils the requirements of Article 35 of the Euratom Treaty?

(d) When did the Commission establish that the resources for meeting such an important obligation were insufficient? When were the appropriate resources requested (indicate date)?

5. Why does the Commission, in its assessments of both plants, rely solely on measurements and interpretations provided by the operators of the plants and on public authorities in the operators’ countries?

6. Why has the Commission not listened to the alarm bells rung by independent bodies (e.g. the University of Wales) and ignored their findings?

7. What does the Commission intend to do to prevent any further flouting of the principles underpinning the OSPAR Convention and of the obligations stemming from the Euratom Treaty?

Answer given by Mrs Wallström on behalf of the Commission

(10 January 2000)

At the time of the Sintra statement in 1998 the Oslo-Paris (OSPAR) Commission also produced a strategy with regard to radioactive substances. The Commission has been working, along with other contracting parties and the OSPAR secretariat, on the detailed interpretation and implementation of that strategy. A working group, established under OSPAR (OSPAR RAD) is producing a document for discussion at the next OSPAR RAD meeting to be held in Luxembourg in January 2000, hosted by the Commission. This document discusses trends in radioactive discharges and other factors relevant to the implementation of the strategy. The Commission is also in the process of updating the Marina project on the radiological exposure of the population of the Community from radioactivity in Northern European marine waters (EUR 12483), having already begun a pilot study. It will be receiving the views of OSPAR RAD on the conclusions of the pilot study to ensure that the subsequent work contributes effectively to the implementation of the OSPAR strategy on radioactive substances.
The Commission performed verifications under Article 35 of the Euratom Treaty at Sellafield in December 1993, and at Cap de la Hague in July 1996. At the time of the decision to reactivate the verifications (December 1989) it was envisaged that reprocessing plants would be visited once every three years. The effort is thus less than was originally considered sufficient. The Commission has started to make available the necessary resources in 1998. A communication to the Council and to the Parliament is being prepared which will provide an overview of the verifications carried out in the period 1990-1999, together with an estimate of the resources required to establish a systematic programme.

The Commission maintains a watching brief on the situation with regard to levels of radioactivity in the environment on the basis of the information received under Article 36 of the Euratom Treaty, site specific data provided by Member States authorities, which may include results of measurements carried out by the operators, and other sources of information brought to the Commission's attention. In this context, the Commission has had no specific representations about the work undertaken by the University of Wales.

The Commission is undertaking actions appropriate to the OSPAR strategy with regard to radioactive substances. It is, however, a matter for the OSPAR commission to coordinate and ensure implementation of the OSPAR strategy through the establishment of an action plan and the development of procedures for review of progress achieved through the strategy. The Commission is committed, along with other contracting parties, to continued involvement in the work of the OSPAR commission and is participating in the relevant fora established by that commission to ensure proper support and direction.

(2000/C 280 E/065)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2530/99

by Alexandros Alavanos (GUE/NGL) to the Commission

(4 January 2000)

Subject: Safety at European Union ports

The recent tragic accident involving the passenger vessel Superfast III in which 12 people were killed in a fire which broke out 14 nautical miles from the port of Patras highlights the inadequacy of Community directives and regulations which make provision for safety during sea passages, but fail to provide for the safety and health of passengers and workers at ports and controls on the embarkation and disembarkation of passengers and vehicles.

Will the Commission say:

1. Does safety at ports constitute part of the common policy on maritime safety?

2. Given the enormous annual movement of passengers through EU ports, has it taken any measures to protect the safety and health of passengers and workers at ports, and, if so, what measures?

3. Does it intend to take measures to ensure adequate controls on freight vehicles so that they do not constitute a threat to the safety of vessels while at sea?

4. As part of the follow-up to the Green paper on EU ports, does it intend to provide for mandatory minimum standards at community ports regarding the safety and health of passengers, bearing in mind that more than 1 million persons travel annually through EU ports?

Answer given by Mrs de Palacio on behalf of the Commission

(8 February 2000)

1. Safety in ports has not been specifically addressed in the Commission communication on a common policy on safe seas (1), which primarily focused on identifying, based upon the international maritime safety conventions adopted within the International maritime organisation, possible Community measures to