Furthermore, the answer mentions practices which are common in 3 out of the 15 Member States of the European Union. Whilst the description of the situation in these 3 countries may be true, this does not mean that in many other cases the situation is not different.

In particular the situation described does not apply to the Autonomous Region of the Azores. In view of the fact that European Union regulations apply throughout EU territory and that no exemption is envisaged for any geographical area, does the Commission not consider that it is incomprehensible that the CAP should encourage the castration of bovine animals, thereby promoting the suffering of animals for no valid reason?

When does the Commission intend to propose the revision of Regulation No 1254/1999 (1), so as to stop encouraging cruelty to bovine animals?


Answer given by Mr Fischler on behalf of the Commission

(28 April 2000)

The Commission asks the Honourable Member also to refer to its reply to Written Question E-0876/00 (1) on the same topic.

While common agricultural policy schemes take account of traditional farming practices, the Commission gives due consideration to questions of animal welfare. Available information gives no grounds, however, for proposing the regulatory change desired by the Honourable Member.

(1) See page 125.

(2001/C 26 E/160) WRITTEN QUESTION P-0910/00

by Margot Keßler (PSE) to the Commission

(21 March 2000)

Subject: Aachen-Heerlen cross-border industrial estate

The Avantis cross-border industrial estate between the cities of Aachen and Heerlen on the German-Dutch border has been recognised and supported by the EU as a European model project. Work on its construction began in September 1998, and € 30 million has been spent on it. In the meanwhile, various legal proceedings against the industrial estate are pending, both in the Netherlands and in the Federal Republic of Germany. Moreover, a petition on this subject has been lodged with the European Parliament (no 685/96).

The party which has brought the legal proceedings, as well as taking the initiative politically and lodging the petition, against the Avantis cross-border industrial estate is the Nature Conservation Association of Germany — NABU, Stadtverband Aachen.

Can the Commission answer the following:

1. Is it true that, in accordance with German law on nature conservation, NABU was involved in the planning procedure as a recognised nature conservation association and should therefore be regarded as a party to the procedure?

2. Is it true that the official responsible for administration of the Avantis project at DG XI D 02, Oliver Schall, is also a member of NABU, and does not the Commission regard this as:
   (a) in case of bias,
   (b) incompatible with the guidelines on transparency adopted by the Commission?
3. Is it true that DG XI D 02 has commissioned an expert opinion on environmental issues relating to the Avantis industrial estate, and that:
   (a) the expert who is to deliver it was given the assignment at the proposal of the above official,
   (b) the expert, who is regarded as objective, Professor Stubbe of Halle, is himself a member of NABU, and has he made this clear?

4. Does the Commission agree that for an objection by NABU to be dealt with by a member of NABU and assessed in the light of an expert opinion delivered by a member of NABU, who has been given the assignment at the proposal of a member of NABU, does not constitute an impartial and transparent procedure?

Answer given by Mrs Wallström on behalf of the Commission

(18 April 2000)

1. The Honourable Member's first question relates to German law. The Commission does not have the authority to answer it.

2. The Commission would recall that all European citizens have the fundamental right to join any association or to belong to any religion of their choice. That freedom also applies to European officials, inasmuch as the rules of the Staff Regulations for officials of the European Communities guarantee that they perform their duties impartially, independently, objectively and competently. The Commission therefore does not have to know to which organisations its officials belong. The Commission would stress that its decisions are the result of a collective assessment involving several departments and hierarchical levels. It therefore has no reason to doubt the integrity and impartiality of the official referred to by the Honourable Member.

3. In choosing an expert to formulate a scientific opinion on the Avantis case, the Commission sought a person who had recognised expertise on hamsters, was a university professor, had an excellent knowledge of German and/or Dutch, and was not involved in the regional debate surrounding the Avantis project. The Commission chose Professor Stubbe on the basis of these four criteria, which are reflected in the study contract referred to by the Honourable Member.

The Commission will question the professor about any activities within the NABU. It believes a large number of professors of biology and ecology are members of the principal nature conservation associations in their respective Member States.

4. On the basis of the information available to the Commission, in view of the freedom of European citizens to join the associations of their choice and given the internal procedures for the control and assessment of the information which it receives, the Commission does not believe that there was any conflict of interest in the procedure for the study of the Avantis case.

The Commission has not yet considered Professor Stubbe's report. It has not adopted a position on the complaint concerned and has not considered which points it feels should be taken into consideration.

(2001/C 26 E/161)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0913/00
by Michl Ebner (PPE-DE) to the Commission

(29 March 2000)

Subject: Potentially dangerous developments on French farms

Since 1994 the French agriculture ministry has been making considerable efforts to harmonise agricultural installations (livestock housing, slurry pits etc.). These installations are built to low-level specifications and are of inadequate quality, and have the potential to cause considerable environmental damage. In the foreseeable future these structures, which can no longer be restored, are in danger of collapsing. They are