WRITTEN QUESTION E-1643/00
by Sergio Berlato (UEN) to the Commission
(29 May 2000)

Subject: Enel S.p.a and renewable energy sources

Italy is lagging far behind with regard to renewable energy sources, as for the last 10 years at least, in other countries with many fewer hours of sunshine than Italy, photovoltaic roofs connected to the national grid, mostly on a private basis, have becoming increasingly common, and are producing solar energy without taking up any space or causing any environmental damage. Nothing of this kind has occurred in Italy, where obstacles have been placed in the way of this alternative system, partly due to the silence of the successive governments which have left the field open for Enel, which obviously does not welcome the prospect of other companies becoming established in the sector.

According to Italian Law 186 of 1968, responsibility for issuing rules on electrical installations lies with the CEI (Italian electrical commission), which set up an ad hoc committee to draw up the official Italian technical standards to bring the ‘photovoltaic roof’ system into operation; that committee included representatives of Enel, and its deliberations continued for years without achieving any results. Subsequently Enel began conducting its own trials, while excluding any other Italian participants from the project, which gave the impression that it wished to prevent the emergence of expertise and competition in the sector in Italy, and thus preserve its effective monopoly position.

In 1995, Community standard Cenelec EN 61727 on photovoltaic (PV) systems was issued, and was obviously supposed to be incorporated in their national legislation by the Member States. It was not until 19 months later that Italy transposed the rules in question by issuing a third version of regulation CEI 11/20. In fact, however, Enel continued to refuse to allow solar generators to be hooked up to its own network, even if they had the interfaces prescribed by the various rules.

Private operators in the sector suspect that the long delay in adopting effective rules to guarantee competitiveness and achieve economies and energy savings was related to Enel's determination to secure the dominant role in the sector for itself, especially in view of Enel's recent action in setting up (in July 1999) a company called `Erga S.p.a' to develop alternative energy sources.

Can the Commission state its position on this subject?

Answer given by Mr Monti on behalf of the Commission
(28 July 2000)

One of the Community's main priorities is to promote the production of electricity from renewable energy sources. The 1997 White Paper on renewable sources of energy stressed the key role they play with regard to security of supplies and environmental benefits. It suggested as an indicative objective that the share of renewable energy sources in the Community's energy consumption should be doubled by 2010 (1). On 10 May 2000 the Community adopted a proposal for a Directive on the promotion of electricity from renewable energy sources in the internal electricity market (2). The strategic objective of the proposal is not only to encourage a significant increase in the medium-term in the production of electricity from renewable energy sources but also to facilitate access to the internal electricity market. Chapter V of the Directive addresses the issues relating to grid connection highlighted by the Honourable Member.

European standards in the electrotechnical field, like standard EN 61727 to which the Honourable Member refers, are adopted by the European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardisation (Cenelec), which is an independent body. Cenelec members, like the Italian Electrical Committee (CEI) for Italy, have a given period in which to transpose European standards and withdraw diverging national standards. However, it should be noted that application of the standards is voluntary and, as a result, the Commission is not aware of any delays in the transposal of European standards and the withdrawal of national ones.
The concerns expressed by the Honourable Member about the connection of solar generators to the Italian grid have been resolved by the legal framework established by the Bersani Act (Decree-Act No 79, 16 March 1999), which transposed into Italian law Directive 96/92/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 December 1996 concerning common rules for the internal market in electricity (3).

Article 3 of the Italian Act requires the grid manager to link up to the national transmission grid all persons who so request without jeopardising continuity of service or compliance with technical rules, which must be objective and non-discriminatory. Reasons must be given for any refusal to give access to the grid. Article 11 of the Act provides for measures to promote renewables; these include solar energy.

The Commission has no specific information which would reasonably establish whether ENEL abused its position, given the absence of technical rules on grid connection.

(1) COM(97) 599 final.

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(2001/C 89 E/064)  WRITTEN QUESTION E-1644/00

by Adriana Poli Bortone (UEN) to the Commission

(29 May 2000)

Subject: National operational programme

Can the Commission explain why it has referred the national operational programme back to the Italian authorities?

Does it not consider that this will result in considerable delays for the regions (particularly Objective 1 regions) that are supposed to draw up programming supplements, thus seriously jeopardising the use of resources for the 2000-2006 period?

Answer given by Mr Barnier on behalf of the Commission

(11 July 2000)

The information given by the Honourable Member does not enable the Commission to identify the programme in question.

The Community support framework for the Italian Objective 1 areas for the 2000-2006 programming period, approved in principle by the Commission on 14 April 2000, will be implemented through 14 operational programmes, seven regional and seven national.

The need for closer examination of a specific programme, e.g. a sectoral one, does not prejudice approval of the other programmes, regional or sectoral. If the content of an as yet unapproved sectoral programme has a significant bearing on implementation of the regional programmes, these must nonetheless incorporate procedures taking due account of it.