Reply

(23 October 2000)

The Council takes every opportunity, particularly in the context of the accession process, to defend the fundamental values on which the European Union is founded and which are enshrined in Article 6 (ex Article F) of the Treaty.

As far as Latvia is concerned, Article 2 of the Europe Agreement between that country and the Union, which entered into force on 1 February 1998, states that 'Respect for democratic principles and human rights, established by the Helsinki Final Act and in the Charter of Paris for a New Europe, as well as the principles of market economy, inspire the domestic and external policies of the parties and constitute essential elements of this Agreement'. The Association Council set up by the Europe Agreement is the political body responsible for seeing that the Agreement is properly implemented, and in that role it may examine any major issue or dispute arising in connection with the implementation or interpretation of the Agreement.

Moreover, Latvia is taking part in the current accession process and, as one of the applicant countries, it must observe well-established criteria, in particular the political criteria laid down by the European Council in Copenhagen. In this context the Union has at its disposal two important instruments enabling it to monitor observance of those criteria: firstly, the Accession Partnerships lay down a number of principles, intermediate objectives and conditions for Latvia’s accession to the Union. These include requirements relating to guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities. Secondly, regular reports produced each year by the Commission enable the Council to follow the progress achieved by Latvia on the road to accession. The last regular report from the Commission found that Latvia fulfilled the Copenhagen political criteria, and in particular that it had stable institutions guaranteeing democracy and the rule of law. That assessment was endorsed by the Helsinki European Council, which would otherwise not have decided to open accession negotiations with Latvia. Nevertheless, the Union will continue to monitor the situation in the applicant countries closely and will certainly take appropriate action if there is evidence of violations of the fundamental principles referred to above.

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2000/00

by Mauro Nobilia (UEN) to the Commission

(21 June 2000)

Subject: The ‘Giardino zoologico di Napoli’ (Naples zoo) company

The ‘Giardino zoologico di Napoli’ company has operated in Naples for the last 50 years, ever since the town first acquired a zoo. A zoo is undoubtedly a cultural asset for a city of this size and importance, especially as the nearest zoos are about 200 km away (Fasano — zoo safari — Rome). Its loss would be a serious blow to those in the city who wish to use the zoo for educational as well as recreational purposes, as has often been the case in recent times for schools and the university. The ‘Giardino zoologico di Napoli’ is a limited-liability company. Fifty years ago, it concluded a lease with the company owning the vast site, the ‘Mostra d’Oltremare S.p.A’, the main shareholder in which was the commune of Naples. The latter company declined to renew the lease, which expired in 1998, and successfully applied to have the company evicted, although the execution of the order was deferred until this year. The various spurious reasons cited do not constitute objective grounds for the lessor’s failure to renew the lease. The Commune of Naples, which is involved in this matter both as the major shareholder in Mostra d’Oltremare S.p.A and as the city’s administrative authority, in which capacity it should be concerned with protecting Naples’ cultural facilities, has not intervened even to propose an alternative site to which the zoo could be moved. The zoo employs 18 people and accounts indirectly for the employment of various others; the future prospects of the 50 or so people whose jobs depend on the zoo are bleak, given the level of unemployment in Naples. The outlook for the zoo’s animals is not promising either.
The Commission:

- Would it, therefore, ascertain whether the facts set out above are accurate?
- Would it consider whether it would be appropriate to approach the Commune of Naples, as the competent body, to ensure the city's zoo is retained, if necessary on a different site, at no cost to the Commune?

Answer given by Mrs Wallström on behalf of the Commission

(8 September 2000)

The Commission notes the Honourable Member's concern about the problems that the 'Giardino zoologico de Napoli' is facing concerning the end of its lease. Unfortunately the Commission has no competence to intervene in a matter concerning a commercial lease between a limited-liability company and another company and it would therefore not be appropriate for the Commission to approach the Commune of Naples regarding an alternative site for the Zoo.

In April of last year Council Directive 1999/22/EC relating to the keeping of wild animals in zoos (1) was adopted. The objective of this Directive is to protect wild fauna and to conserve biodiversity and it is only in this context that the Commission can intervene. The Directive will be implemented by the Member States through the adoption of measures for the licensing and inspection of zoos in the Community, enabling the role of zoos in the conservation of biodiversity to be strengthened.


WRITTEN QUESTION P-2006/00

by María Sornosa Martínez (PSE) to the Commission

(16 June 2000)

Subject: Improper use by the Valencia regional government of Community funds for the development of the information society

On 21 June 1996 the Valencia regional government issued a resolution by means of which the Valencia Office for the Information Society (OVSI) was set up for the purpose, inter alia, of ‘coordinating and supervising the implementation of the project designed to incorporate the Valencia region into the information society in the way described in the Memorandum signed in Brussels on 28 November 1994’.

Since it was set up, however, the OVSI has been challenged in political, economic and business circles for its failure to perform satisfactorily the tasks for which it was established. This has led to the resignation of a regional government minister for alleged perversion of the course of justice and complaints from traders’ associations concerning unfair competition in the ‘Renove’ plan, which is part of the Infoville programme (an aspect of the regional government’s telecommunications master plan).

Is the Commission aware of these facts?

Could the Commission provide information regarding the type and the amount of Community funding which the Valencia regional government has received for the OVSI Foundation and the Infoville programme (or any of the programmes run by the regional government’s Infocentre), with particular reference to headings B5-330 and B5-331 relating to the information society?

Is the Commission intending to open an inquiry in order to establish whether or not the Valencia regional government is using the Community aid in question correctly and in accordance with the Valencia region information society development objectives for which purpose they were allocated?