5. If Member States so wish, the Commission will gladly examine — in the context of Member States' annual forest-fire protection plans and within the limits of the appropriations available — proposals for improving forest-fire protection measures, and particularly forest-fire monitoring, in storm-affected areas at risk. The Commission has just developed a new system for daily notification of the forest-fire risk level. The system, which uses satellites to identify risks, is undergoing trials from 15 June to 30 September 2000. On the basis that parameters relating to plant stress and evapotranspiration of wooded areas play a predominant role, the system constitutes a highly reliable instrument.

(2) Within the meaning of Article 2 of the Regulation.

(2001/C 113 E/084) WRITTEN QUESTION E-2330/00
by Daniel Hannan (PPE-DE) to the Commission
(11 July 2000)

Subject: German backdated pensions tax

The German Government has recently requested of freelance teachers that they backpay 19.5% of their income for the past four years into the state pension fund.

While recognising that it should be up to Member States to determine their own tax rates, can the Commission confirm whether in its opinion:

1. freelance teachers have been discriminated against unfairly in this process, and
2. retrospective taxation rises are not in breach of Community law?

Answer given by Mrs Diamantopoulou on behalf of the Commission
(12 October 2000)

The Commission was not aware of the issue raised by the Honourable Member.

However, there is no prima facie evidence that Community law has been infringed. This could be the case if this request for contributions was discriminatory, either on the grounds of nationality or of sex.

It should be noted that the German authorities are requesting the payment of pension contributions which should give rise to benefit entitlements.

(2001/C 113 E/085) WRITTEN QUESTION E-2366/00
by Alexandros Alavanos (GUE/NGL) to the Commission
(13 July 2000)

Subject: Economic viability of Spata airport

According to Greek press reports, the Vice-President of the European Investment Bank which is co-funding the construction of Spata airport has expressed his concern about the economic viability of the project in letters to the management of Athens International Airport.