WRITTEN QUESTION E-2524/00
by Adriana Poli Bortone (UEN) to the Commission

(2 August 2000)

Subject: Migration in the Salento region

Some time ago Lecce Apulia applied to host a ‘peace conference’ and to be the headquarters of a monitoring centre for migration.

Furthermore, Salento has had to tackle the difficult problem of immigration for the last ten years and will continue to do so for who knows how many more years.

Can the Commission say whether, in order at least to counterbalance the choice of Salonica as the location for the agency for the reconstruction of Kosovo, it intends to comply with the requests of Lecce, a town synonymous with immigration from the countries of south eastern Europe?

Answer given by Mr Vitorino on behalf of the Commission

(17 October 2000)

The Commission recognises that Puglia, due to the geographical situation, is particularly affected by some effects of movements of people in need of international protection and by irregular migratory movements, like other border regions of the Union.

The Commission is currently examining the technical requirements to set up an information network on migratory flows and all aspects of immigration and asylum, based on internet technology. There is no intention to create an observatory in a particular location.

WRITTEN QUESTION P-2528/00
by Bart Staes (Verts/ALE) to the Commission

(25 July 2000)

Subject: cutting of programmes to assist the most deprived

According to a recent study by ADE (Aide à la Décision Economique — Aid to Economic Decision-making), the programme to assist the most deprived groups, ‘the food banks’, has been of proven value in combating poverty in Europe.

A cut in the programme would mean that recognised charities in the fifteen EU Member States could no longer obtain the quantities of meat, dairy products and cereals they would like to have for the most deprived. In the light of Agenda 2000, charities have good reason to fear that such a cut may be imminent. In order to ensure that the food banks can continue to operate long-term, the Commission should clarify its intentions as soon as possible.

1. Does the Commission intend to cut the total budget for programmes of assistance to the most deprived? If so, how does the Commission intend to implement this cut? How can the Commission justify this decision, in view of the unmistakably positive impact of the programmes of assistance in combating poverty in Europe (cf. the ADE study)? How does the Commission reconcile its anti-poverty objectives with the cut in the budget for the food banks?

2. Will the Commission in future apply the amendment of 1995 in order to allow the Member States to adjust their intervention stocks to include more of the products required for the assistance programmes, in accordance with the regulation? If not, why does the Commission refuse to apply the 1995 amendment, bearing in mind its importance for the long-term operation of the food banks?
3. What alternative proposals does the Commission have for ensuring that the programmes of assistance to the most deprived continue to have access to meat, dairy products and cereals in the same proportions as hitherto? Why does the Commission not have alternative proposals, in view of the unmistakably positive impact of the assistance programmes in combating poverty in Europe (cf. the ADE study)?

Answer given by Mr Fischler on behalf of the Commission

(27 September 2000)

1. Between 1988, when the first annual programme to assist the most deprived people in the Community was launched, and 1995 the budget for this measure rose from €100 to 200 million. It has remained at that level since 1995 and the preliminary draft budget sent by the Commission to the budget authority proposes the same for the 2001 financial year.

2. With the aim of operation of the measure in the most satisfactory way for the charitable organisations involved, the Commission in 1995 amended its Regulation (EEC) No 3149/92 of 29 October 1992 laying down detailed rules for the supply of food from intervention stocks for the benefit of the most deprived persons in the Community (1) so that products can be distributed intervention storage of which is provided for in Community law but which are for the time being not in storage. Since 1996 the Commission has not hesitated to use this option when circumstances permit and has no intention of repealing or ceasing to use the provision.

When the programme for 2000 was examined in the management committee at the end of 1999 some delegations asked whether the Commission intended to apply the provision to beef, no longer available from intervention stocks following the big sales by tender the Commission had initiated changes to the market rules. The Commission stated that since unavailability was now permanent owing to these changes the 1995 amendment of Regulation (EEC) No 3149/92 was no longer applicable to beef. The stock trend during the year confirmed the Commission’s assessment.

It should be added that Regulation (EEC) No 3149/92 falls under the common agricultural policy and, as underscored by the consultant ADE’s study, permits disposal of surplus products of Community origin in intervention storage for a social purpose, namely helping the most deprived persons in the Community (Council Regulation (EEC) No 3730/87 of 10 December 1997 laying down general rules for the supply of food from intervention stocks to designated organisations for distribution to the most deprived persons in the Community (2)).

If a product, in this case beef, is permanently absent from the stocks or is not or no longer to be considered as purchasable by intervention, the share of the appropriations devoted to it can be assigned to supplying larger quantities of the products that are available. Other sources of supply — which the charities have never ceased to use, in parallel to products available under the measure — can therefore be exploited less for the products of which greater intervention supplies are available and more for the products not or no longer available under Regulation (EEC) No 3149/92.

3. It must be pointed out that the products available under the measure are made over to organisations that were operating in the Member States before it was introduced and hence independently of it. The source of free supply thus established was added to the other sources of supply of these charities and generally accounts for some 25% of their supplies.
Other initiatives to combat poverty in Europe or exist or can be envisaged at Community level within the scope of the Treaty and with respect for the subsidiarity principle. The Commission recently sent the Council and Parliament a proposal for a programme of Community action to encourage cooperation between Member States to combat social exclusion (3). Once accepted this should allow questions relating to poverty and social exclusion in the various fields where these arise to be addressed with the Member States and provide support for the attainment of common objectives to be defined by the Nice European Council in December 2000.


(2001/C 113 E/119)  
WRITTEN QUESTION P-2529/00  
by Rijk van Dam (EDD) to the Commission  
(25 July 2000)

Subject: levy on fuel in trucks by the Polish customs authorities

Since Tuesday, 4 July 2000, Poland has been operating a levy on fuel in the fuel tanks of trucks crossing the border into Poland. If a truck entering Poland has more than 200 litres of fuel in its tank, the customs levy DEM 2 per litre on the excess quantity. This violates the bilateral agreements which various EU countries have concluded with Poland on this subject. Moreover, it is doubtful whether a levy of this magnitude accords with the decision by Poland's Ministry of Finance. The checks involved are causing unacceptably long tailbacks at the border, so that hauliers face a twofold extra cost.

1. What is the Commission's view of the measure adopted by Poland, bearing in mind, inter alia, that Poland is a future member of the EU?

2. Will the Commission take action against this measure?

3. If so, what action?

Answer given by Mr Verheugen on behalf of the Commission  
(11 September 2000)

As long as Poland is not yet a Member State, only the stipulations of the Europe Agreement are applicable, which do not contain specific rules about the case in question. Nevertheless, as concerns the allowances for petrol in tanks of vehicles, Poland has brought its legislation already in line with Community standards. The maximum volume of fuel that can be imported free of charge corresponds to the quantity foreseen by Council Regulation (EEC) No 918/83 of 28 March 1983, setting up a Community system of reliefs from customs duty (1). Article 113 allows Member States to limit the application of the relief in respect of fuel contained in the standard tanks of commercial motor vehicles to 200 litres per vehicle per journey. Any stipulations in bilateral agreements, e.g. between the Poland and the Netherlands, which might permit higher volumes, are not a matter for comment by the Commission in this context.

In the field of customs duties, excises and VAT, which are, in any case applicable to quantities of diesel oil that exceed 200 litres, to the knowledge of the Commission, Poland is at present applying the following rates: 4% customs duties in the trade with Member States, between PZL 0,830 and 0,908 (Zloty) of excise per litre (depending on the content of sulphur), and 22% of VAT. This would sum up to a charge of about PZL 1,50 (about DEM 0,73). The levy of DEM 2 (more than PZL 4) — as mentioned by the Honourable Member — would be much higher.

However, the Commission will continue monitoring this issue.