3. and 4. The EC Treaty does not contain any express requirement to identify the views of individuals or their elected representatives. This subject remains a constitutional matter for the Member States.

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2907/00
by Nicholas Clegg (ELDR) to the Commission
(14 September 2000)

Subject: Homogenised milk

It has been reported that homogenised milk can lead to increased sensitivity to milk in children and that it aggravates arthritis.

Potentially more serious, homogenisation appears to increase the dangers posed by the chemical xanthine oxidase (which is directly attributable as a cause of heart disease).

Since homogenisation seems to be carried out for cosmetic as opposed to hygiene reasons, does the Commission take the view that it should seek to limit interference with milk production in the form of homogenisation? If not, what action does it propose to take, perhaps in the form of new labelling requirements?

Answer given by Mr Byrne on behalf of the Commission
(29 November 2000)

The Commission is not aware of any established scientific proof that the reported effects (increased sensitivity in children, aggravation of arthritis, and heart disease) could be linked particularly to the homogenisation of milk.

The research programme on the relation between food, health and nutrition deals, among other things, with different aspects of allergy. It may be that these projects will provide more accurate information on the relation between milk and allergy in the future.

If evidence is provided in the future that the process of homogenisation poses a threat to public health, the Commission will examine what course of action should be followed.

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2909/00
by Erik Meijer (GUE/NGL) to the Commission
(14 September 2000)

Subject: National systems of collecting waste glass disrupted by the functioning of the European market

1. The sale of collected waste glass in the Netherlands is currently facing competition from firms in Germany where the ‘green point’ system operates, whereby industry contributes towards the cost of collection. One effect of this competition is that German glass recycling firms are increasingly offering their waste glass on the Dutch market. For example, the firm of Heije of Moerdijk imports glass from Berlin while there is the glass recycling firm of Maltha in the immediate vicinity at Fijnaart, 10 kilometres away. There is now a risk of the Dutch waste glass being dumped. There is also a threat to stop collecting waste. Is the Commission aware of this problem?

2. Does the Commission agree that it is absolutely unacceptable for recycled materials to be transported over such distances, and that the basic principle should be that recycled materials are used at as short a distance as possible from the point where they are collected?
3. Can the Commission provide figures on the volume of cross-border recycled waste glass between the Netherlands and Germany and between other Member States?

4. Does the Commission agree that the German system of collecting waste glass tends to distort competition compared with the Dutch system, thereby creating major problems? Furthermore, while Germany does not permit Dutch waste glass on its own market, at the same time it dumps cheap surpluses on the Dutch market. Is the Commission prepared to take action to prevent the dumping of waste glass from Germany, e.g. by drawing a distinction on the market between collection systems or through more uniform rules for the collection of glass at European level? If so, what action does the Commission have in mind, not least to prevent the Dutch collection firms from acting on their threat to stop collecting waste from 1 January 2001 and to maintain the Dutch waste collection structure?

5. Are there similar problems between other Member States or in respect of other recycled materials? If so, what is the nature of these problems and what action is the Commission considering taking to solve the problems in the interests of the environment and reusing raw materials?

(1) ‘Grensoorlog om de Nederlandse glasbak’ (Frontier war over glass containers), De Volkskrant of 28.8.2000.

Answer given by Mrs Wallström on behalf of the Commission

(6 November 2000)

The Commission is aware of this issue which also concerns other Member States, though there is currently no official data concerning the quantities of glass packaging waste which arise in one Member State and are processed in another.

However, Community law establishes that recoverable waste is subject to the principle of free circulation of goods within the Community. In this context, even if it is correct that transporting recoverable waste over long distances increases the environmental impact, it is not possible to introduce limitations to such trade (except in a few exceptional cases listed in Article 7 of Council Regulation (EEC) No 259/93 of 1 February 1993, on the supervision and control of shipments of waste within, into and out of the European Community (¹)). The fact that Germany exports recyclable waste to the Netherlands is not per se different from the export of products. This could depend on the collected materials being of better quality as well as other market reasons.

Nevertheless, this practice can not affect drastically the current national waste management options from recycling to landdilling of glass packaging waste. Indeed, Directive 94/62/EC of the Parliament and the Council, of 20 December 1994, on packaging and packaging waste (¹) includes specific minimum targets to be achieved for the recovery and recycling of national packaging waste. A minimum of 50 % and a maximum of 65 % of the packaging waste must be recovered. Within this target between 25 % and 45 % must be recycled, with a minimum of 15 % for each packaging material, including glass. As an illustration, the Netherlands reported, pursuant to Commission Decision 97/138/EC of 3 February 1997 establishing the formats relating to the database system pursuant to Parliament and Council Directive 94/62/EC on packaging and packaging waste (¹), a recycling rate of 78 % for the recycling of glass packaging waste in 1997, one of the highest of the Community.

No data have been brought to the attention of the Commission to justify the assumption that the collection systems for glass packaging waste pursuant to Article 7 of Directive 94/62/EC induce competition distortion between Member States. However, the Commission recognises that the existing structure of collection and recycling systems could be optimised in the light of the current experience. This issue might be a point for consideration in the frame of a broad revision of the Directive in future.
The suggestion of isolating the national market according to the collection system for glass packaging waste would be contrary to the general objective of the current Directive on packaging and packaging waste, which is to harmonise national management systems for packaging waste.


WRITTEN QUESTION E-2915/00
by Michl Ebner (PPE-DE) to the Commission
(19 September 2000)

Subject: Common Pension Policy

With its increasingly ageing population, Europe must lend more practical measures and greater awareness to dealing with the issue of a Common Pension Policy.

The various aspects of all the social security systems and the pension systems in particular in the individual EU countries are extremely varied due to differences in institutional structural conditions, budgetary and economic situations, social attitude and demographic development. Reforms are being discussed in all Member States. It may be that at European level it does not suffice to hold these discussions on the basis of a few general fundamental principles; rather efforts must be strengthened towards gradually creating a Common Pension Policy.

Therefore, does the Commission already have any practical suggestions to make regarding this matter or does it have any idea of the practicability and nature of such a Common Pension Policy?

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

The Commission agrees that pensions are a major policy issue in the light of ageing populations. In its communication of 14 July 1999, ‘A concerted strategy for modernising social protection’ (1), it identified making pensions safe and pension systems sustainable as one of four key objectives. This has since been endorsed by the Council, and the Lisbon European Council mandated the newly created ‘High Level Working Party on Social Protection, taking into consideration the work being done by the Economic Policy Committee, (…) as its first priority, to prepare, on the basis of a Commission communication, a study on the future evolution of social protection from a long-term point of view, giving particular attention to the sustainability of pensions systems in different time frameworks up to 2020 and beyond, where necessary.’

The communication requested by the European Council will be adopted shortly and will present a framework for future cooperation with a view to making pensions safe and pension systems sustainable. However, the Commission will not be proposing a ‘common pensions policy’. The responsibility for reforming pension systems will remain with the Member States, although they could clearly benefit from an exchange of information at Community level.

Nevertheless, the Commission firmly believes that a European debate on the future of pensions should not only take place among governments and invites all interested parties to make their contribution.