The initial budget of the programme was € 1 165 million for the ESF and € 221 million for the ERDF. Another € 25 million were allocated to the ESF budget through the deflator. At the mid-term review in 1998 the ESF budget was reduced by € 190 million and became € 1 000 million, while that of the ERDF was increased by € 49 million and became € 270 million. The Community participation was 75 % for both Funds before the mid-term review and became 80 % for the ESF and 55 % for the ERDF since 1 January 1998.

Overall, the Commission believes that, despite the difficulties encountered, this programme of great strategic importance for Greece will be fully implemented and will adequately achieve a good part of the objectives set. The effort should be adapted and strengthened in the next programming period, if Greece is to reduce the distance separating it in this field from more developed Member States.

(2001/C 174 E/083) WRITTEN QUESTION E-3567/00 by Konstantinos Hatzidakis (PPE-DE) to the Commission (17 November 2000)

Subject: The current system of car taxation and its inconsistency with the Internal Market and free trade

In several Member States the existing taxation system treats imports of cars unfairly, especially when the importer is a private citizen. The taxes levied on imported cars are frequently not based on the real value of the car, especially in cases where the car is a used one. The excessively high taxes act as a barrier to intra-EU trade and prevent the establishment of competitive markets in the European Union. Article 25 of the Treaty Establishing the European Community forbids customs duties on imports and exports between Member States as well as charges having equivalent effect.

What does the Commission intend to do in order to correct the distortions caused by arbitrary car import rules in the Member States? What will the Commission do to achieve transparent car imports which are in harmony with Community law?

Answer given by Mr Bolkestein on behalf of the Commission (18 December 2000)

The Commission would refer to the answer it gave to the similar Written Question P-3479/00 from Mr Vatanen (1), in which it informed the Honourable Member that it is concerned about the problems raised in his question and that it is doing its best to ensure full application of Community law in this sphere.

On the subject of the calculation of the taxable value of cars, the Commission has already initiated infringement proceedings against various Member States for their failure to comply in full with the Court of Justice ruling requiring tax to be levied on the real value of the vehicle. There are also infringement proceedings in progress in relation to tax exemptions for the temporary use of a vehicle in a Member State other than that in which it has been registered and to exemptions relating to the transfer of vehicles on changing residence between Member States (Council Directive 83/182/EEC of 28 March 1983 on tax exemptions within the Community for certain means of transport temporarily imported into one Member State from another (1) and Council Directive 83/183/EEC of 28 March 1983 on tax exemptions applicable to permanent imports from a Member State of the personal property of individuals). These procedures may lead to the matter being put before the Court of Justice in accordance with Article 226 (former Article 169) of the EC Treaty.

As regards Article 25 (former Article 12) of the EC Treaty and the prohibition of customs duties and charges having equivalent effect, the Commission would inform the Honourable Member that the basis of its action on tax matters is the ban on discrimination contained in Article 90 (former Article 93) of the EC Treaty, not Article 25.
In addition to its action on monitoring compliance with Community law, the Commission submitted a proposal to the Council in February 1998 on amending Directives 83/182/EEC and 83/183/EEC to adapt them to internal market requirements. The Council has not yet adopted that proposal. Lastly, the Commission is currently preparing an overall communication on vehicle taxation.

The Commission believes that its action will significantly improve the situation of the European citizen in this area.


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WRITTEN QUESTION P-3573/00
by Stavros Xarchakos (PPE-DE) to the Commission
(13 November 2000)

Subject: Cultural Olympiad

In conjunction with the extremely important winter and summer Olympic Games, from 2000 to 2004 Greece is promoting the institution of the Cultural Olympiad. Can the Commission say what its position is with regard to this institution, whether it intends to fund it and whether a suitable legal basis exists? If so, what appropriations does it propose to allocate?

Answer given by Mrs Reding on behalf of the Commission
(22 December 2000)

The Commission welcomes the idea of a programme of European cultural events to accompany the 2004 Olympic Games. However, the Commission has so far neither been informed of any specific programme nor received any application for financial support and cannot therefore, at this stage, voice any opinion on the subject of the ‘Cultural Olympiad’.

The Commission would, however, like the Honourable Member to be aware that it is able to offer support for cultural initiatives within the framework of, and subject to the criteria of, the ‘Culture 2000’ programme, which is the Community’s single financing and programming instrument for cultural cooperation, and which is based on Article 131 (ex Article 128) of the EC Treaty.

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WRITTEN QUESTION E-3581/00
by Ria Oomen-Ruijten (PPE-DE) to the Commission
(17 November 2000)

Subject: Letter of 23 March 1998 from Commission Member Leon Brittan to Thabo Mbeki concerning the TRIPS agreement

There are reports of long-running conflict between many developing countries and the pharmaceutical industry on the production and/or purchase of low-cost medicines by developing countries. In accordance with the TRIPS agreement, concluded under the WTO Agreement in 1994, and which is binding on all WTO member states, such countries can, in certain circumstances, switch to producing or purchasing low-cost medicines.