Answer given by Mr Monti on behalf of the Commission

(3 July 2001)

The Commission is elaborating a Communication on the impact of enlargement on regions bordering candidate countries and envisaged Community actions. This Communication, which was called for by the European Councils of Nice of December 2000 and Göteborg of June 2001, and which was supported by the Parliament, will analyse the economic situation of the Community’s border regions. The Commission will, on the basis of this analysis, put forward proposals on how to optimise existing instruments and how to ensure better co-ordination in order to strengthen the economic competitiveness of frontier regions.

The existing regulations, guidelines and frameworks concerning State aid control, notably the Guidelines on national regional aid (1) and the Commission Regulations (EC) No 69/2001 of 12 January 2001 on the application of Articles 87 and 88 of the EC Treaty to de minimis aid (2) and (EC) No 70/2001 of 12 January on the application of Articles 87 and 88 of the EC Treaty to State aid to small and medium-sized enterprises (3) already offer a wide range of possibilities to Member States to award aid in order to diminish the impact of the type of problems described by the Honourable Member.


(2001/C 340 E/272)

WRITTEN QUESTION P-1532/01
by Luciana Sbarbati (ELDR) to the Commission

(15 May 2001)

Subject: Safety at work

According to Eurostat (on 31 March 2000) between 1994 and 1996 the risks of accidents at work in the EU fell by 7% (fatal accidents by 13%), men are three times more likely to have accidents than women and firms with more than 250 employees are safer. In 1998 there were 4.7 million accidents, 5,476 of them fatal. According to these estimates the annual costs in the EU (medical expenses, sick pay and compensation paid for permanent invalidity or death) total nearly € 20 billion, not to mention the social costs of accidents (assistance, rehabilitation and reintegration into employment, where possible, etc.). In Italy alone an average of three people die at work every day (not counting domestic accidents, those not reported because people are working unofficially and road accidents involving people who travel in the course of their work).

The European Agency for Health and Safety at Work is trying to show that the introduction of provisions in these areas may help to improve the working environment and reduce the costs of compulsory insurance which firms are obliged to take out to show that safety pays.

Can the Commission say whether in addition to the EU’s legislative role — to offer workers social protection and employers economic protection — it might be appropriate to step up its non-legislative role by publishing information material, promoting comparative studies and providing better training for workers and employers?

The European Week for Safety and Health at Work to be held in autumn at the end of an information campaign involving all the Member States, the Commission and Parliament, trade unions and employers’ organisations may be a good start.

Does the Commission not consider that it is wrong to accept different minimum safety levels in different Member States or in firms of different sizes? If one understood exactly what the competences of the EU and of the Member States are, the Community’s objectives would be better defined and the compliance with them required of the Member States could be regulated by periodic inspections and checks to be carried out by the competent authorities.
Does it not consider that more space should be given to issues of health and safety at work in the future guidelines for employment on the basis of an analysis of the best practices in the Member States?

Answer given by Mrs Diamantopoulou on behalf of the Commission

(28 June 2001)

The Commission fully agrees with the Honourable Member's concern regarding accidents at work in the Community.

Nevertheless, the data for 1998 (1), which are the most recent available, show that the improvement at European level has continued both in terms of the rate of accidents at work involving more than three days' absence (4,089 accidents per 100,000 employees in 1998, compared with 4,229 in 1996 and 4,539 in 1994) and in terms of the rate of fatal accidents at work (5.0 fatal accidents per 100,000 employees in 1998, compared with 5.3 in 1996 and 6.1 in 1994, including traffic accidents and accidents on all means of transport during work).

These statistical indicators show that the application at European level of Community legislation on safety and health protection of workers at work has had a positive effect in terms of improving working conditions by reducing accident rates. The legislation thus improves the health and safety of workers at work when correctly applied.

The Commission believes that non-legislative measures are essential to the correct and effective application of European legislation on health protection and safety of workers at work. To this end, several non-legislative measures had been provided for in its Community programme concerning safety, hygiene and health at work (1996-2000) (2). These took the form of 'non-binding guides', for example to address the needs of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), information, education and training measures, and studies on changes in the working environment, i.e. the emergence of new risks to health and safety, such as stress, musculoskeletal disorders, repetitive work, violence in the workplace, psychosocial problems or new forms of work such as teleworking.

The Commission is aware of this issue and has since 1992 supported several initiatives to boost awareness among the various social partners, at European level and in close cooperation with the Member States, with a view to improving the effectiveness of the measures adopted in this field.

These included:

- the European Year of Health and Safety at Work in 1992;

- 'PRevent' actions (3) in SMEs as part of the Safety Actions for Europe (SAFE) Programme in 1997 and 1998, which will continue under the new initiative for SMEs that has been allocated a specific heading in the Community budget and will be managed by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work in Bilbao;

- several 'European Weeks', which the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work in Bilbao is now responsible for organising. In 2000 the subject of the European Week was musculoskeletal disorders, and in October 2001 the theme will be the prevention of accidents at work;

- several publications have also been promoted by the Commission, such as an internal audit manual for SMEs (4), guidelines on work-related stress (5), recommendations on exposure limits to chemical agents (6), guidelines on training in risk sectors (7) or the results of research in the ECSC industries (coal and steel) (8), in order to promote greater knowledge and better training among all the social partners.

The Commission feels that it is the task of the Member States to promote and ensure the correct and effective application of national provisions implementing the Community directives. The Commission is also concerned that there may be differences in minimum safety levels across Member States, and it is always prepared to examine situations of this kind, within the limits of the powers conferred on it by the Treaties.
The Commission fully agrees with the Honourable Member on the need to give issues relating to health and safety at work a greater role in employment policy, and would like to draw her attention to the new guideline 14c) of the guidelines for Member States’ employment policies for the year 2001, which deals with this question.

Finally, the Honourable Member’s attention is drawn to the fact that a new Community strategy on safety and health at work is being drawn up. This strategy will establish a framework for future action to achieve an ongoing improvement in the quality of work and thus in health and safety conditions for European workers in the workplace.

(1) ESAW data (European Statistics on Accidents at Work) from Eurostat.
(3) Awareness actions on safety and health at work in general as well as the promotion and exchange of best practices in SMEs.
(4) Internal audit manual for SMEs — Luxembourg 1995.

WRITTEN QUESTION P-1544/01
by Raina Echerer (Verts/ALE) to the Commission
(14 May 2001)

Subject: EU regulation on unbundled access to the local loop — situation in Austria

Regulation (EC) 2887/2000 (1) of 18 December 2000 on unbundled access to the local loop took effect on 2 January 2001, is binding in all its parts and took effect in every EU Member State. The aim of this regulation is to create fair competition in Internet services in local access networks. The designated operator in each country, Telekom Austria in the case of Austria, is required to provide an offer in keeping with this aim.

According to information from Austria, Telekom Austria is not complying with the regulation. Access is still insufficiently unbundled, so that network components or facilities unnecessary for the provision of the service still have to be paid for. Administrative and technical access to the local loop is too time-consuming and complicated. There are not enough collocation possibilities for all those who need them. Tariffs have not yet been adjusted to actual costs. The calculation is insufficiently transparent. Interested parties with little economic clout still have problems in accessing the local loop.

What is the Commission’s source of information on Austria? Can the Commission be sure of receiving an objective assessment of the situation in Austria?

What does the Commission propose to do in order to achieve full implementation of the regulation in Austria?


Answer given by Mr Liikanen on behalf of the Commission
(21 June 2001)

According to Article 3(1) of Regulation (EC) No 2887/2000 of the Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2000 on unbundled access to the local loop (2), notified operators shall publish from 31 December 2000, and keep updated, a reference offer for unbundled access to their local loops and related facilities (RUO), which shall at least include the items listed in the Annex. The offer shall be