The proposal is currently pending before Council, where unanimity is required. No final decision can be expected before October 2001.

The Commission proposal lays down that parties must cover at least 25% of their budgets from own resources, that is to say from any resources other than the Community Budget. This own resources component could be covered by contributions or subscriptions from national member parties or from individuals or organisations.

The total amount that a party can receive from the Community Budget will depend on the resources made available by the budgetary authority and the application of the distribution provisions set out in Article 7(a) and 7(b) of the draft Regulation. It is conceivable that this amount might represent less than 75% of a party's total budget.

Control of financing under this regulation shall be exercised in accordance with the Financial Regulation and its implementing rules and also on the basis of an annual certification by an external independent audit.

European political parties may not contribute financially to purely national political activities with resources from the Community Budget.

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(2001/C 364 E/276)  
WRITTEN QUESTION P-2231/01  
by Hans Kronberger (NI) to the Commission  
(18 July 2001)

Subject: Liberalisation of shop-opening hours

In its economic policy guidelines, the Commission called on Austria to further liberalise shop-opening hours. At present, Austria's 66-hour per week limit is indeed the lowest in any Member State, and this is having adverse effects not only on purchasing power, tourism and the country's attractiveness as a business location, but also in terms of employment in the distributive trades and creating jobs in related sectors. Border areas are particularly badly affected. In addition, petrol stations are increasingly selling food and thus distorting the market. A government agreement extending shop-opening hours to 72 hours per week has been signed by the government but has not yet been implemented.

What steps does the Commission propose to take to prevent distortion of competition owing to shop-opening hours being liberalised to different extents?

Will it take action in respect of those Member States which fail to liberalise in good time? If so, what action will it take?

Answer given by Mr Bolkestein on behalf of the Commission  
(5 September 2001)

The Commission is aware of the difficulties raised by differences in the national legislation on shop-opening hours. It should be remembered that, although this is a matter for the Member States, they must deal with it in compliance with Community law. The problem of shop-opening hours has, moreover, given rise to case law on the part of the Court of Justice. It is clear from that case law that the Court has refused to declare incompatible with Article 28 (ex Article 30) of the EC Treaty national rules on shop-closing arrangements (1), but that is not the case as far as the compatibility of such measures with Article 49 (ex Article 59) of the EC Treaty on the freedom to provide services is concerned. Moreover, the Court has recognised the applicability of Article 43 (ex Article 52) of the EC Treaty on the freedom of establishment to regulations on the closure of retail outlets on Sundays and public holidays, although it felt that, in this
In this context, the Commission will examine the problem of shop-opening hours as part of the follow-up to its Communication to the Council and the Parliament on an Internal Market Strategy for Services (1). The Commission in fact recently adopted a new strategy with a view to improving the operation of the internal market in services which will be split into two phases: the first phase will involve identifying the obstacles hindering cross-border activities in the field of services; the second phase will involve proposing measures aimed at removing those obstacles.