In order to avoid consumers being misled, the Commission takes the view that they should be placed in a position to check the composition of foodstuffs labelled as ‘vegetarian’ in order to satisfy themselves that this corresponds to their own conception of ‘vegetarianism’.

Manufacturers using the product designation in question should therefore indicate precisely on the label all the ingredients that a product contains.

The Commission’s recent proposal to Parliament and the Council(1) providing for the listing of all foodstuff ingredients on labels will eliminate any uncertainties about labelling of the products under consideration here.


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WRITTEN QUESTION E-2716/01

by Brice Hortefeux (PPE-DE) to the Commission

(3 October 2001)

Subject: Opening local transport markets

I would like to draw the Commission’s attention to the proposal for a Regulation (COM(2000) 7 final)(1) of the European Parliament and of the Council on action by Member States concerning public service requirements and the award of public service contracts in passenger transport by rail, road and inland waterway.

Under this regulation local authorities would be required to put out for tender all public transport services with a turnover exceeding €400 000 per annum, thus putting an end to direct municipal control and placing services in the hands of specialised multinationals, as well as calling into question the management choices of elected representatives.

Above and beyond transport, this principle could be extended to all the public services, which might in the long term be forced to open themselves to competition, thus losing their principal attribute — their non-profit-making status.

Against this background:

1. Does the regulation safeguard the essential role of public transport as a general-interest service?
2. Meeting public-service requirements sometimes calls for financial compensations. Will their compatibility with the Treaty be clearly stated?
3. Does the Commission plan to build important social and environmental aspects into the contract-awarding mechanism?
4. What measures does the Commission intend to take to guarantee the safety of passengers after local public transport markets have been opened?


Answer given by Mrs de Palacio on behalf of the Commission

(20 November 2001)

The Commission’s proposal for a Regulation on public service requirements in public passenger transport recognises the importance of public passenger transport services and the central role of public authorities. This draft Regulation reinforces the role of authorities, by placing them under an obligation, when applying the Regulation’s provisions, to ‘secure adequate public passenger transport services that are of high quality and availability’. The proposal also requires authorities to take into account a series of quality
criteria when assessing adequacy and awarding contracts. These criteria cover consumer, employee and environmental interests. The Parliament’s Regional Policy, Transport and Tourism (RETT) Committee has proposed a number of amendments to reinforce this part of the draft Regulation, many of which the Commission can support.

One of the quality criteria specifically referred to in the Commission’s proposal is ‘passenger health and safety’. Safety will continue to be of prime importance and the authority will be able to spell out the requirements and standards it is placing on operators through contract conditions, general rules or both. Safety is often closely related to the quality and maintenance of the infrastructure and the vehicles: again, where these are the responsibility of the operator, the authority is able to set standards, however stringent, through contract conditions and general rules. In the case of rail services (including metro and light rail), the proposal includes an exception from competition in cases where an authority concludes that this is the only way that national and international safety standards can be met. Evidence from Member States that have already introduced controlled competition along the lines of the Commission’s proposal is not consistent with the view that this reduces safety.

The Commission recognises that many public transport services are dependent upon public funding and that authorities often wish to provide reduced-fare or free public transport for some or all of their citizens. Existing Community law (Regulation (EEC) No 1191/69 of the Council of 26 June 1969 on action by Member States concerning the obligations inherent in the concept of a public service in transport by rail, road and inland waterway (1), as amended by Council Regulation (EEC) No 1893/91 of 20 June 1991 (2)) seeks to ensure that money paid to undertakings for such reasons is compatible with State aid rules. In particular, financial compensation should not exceed the additional costs borne by the operator for fulfilling public service obligations laid down by the authority. The proposed Regulation on public service requirements does not impose any additional restrictions on the amount of money that authorities can pay to public transport operators for the fulfilment of public service obligations.


(2002/C 134 E/088)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2718/01

by Cristiana Muscardini (UEN) to the Commission

(3 October 2001)

Subject: Reasoned opinions and the situation in Sardinia

On 9 February 2001 the Commission delivered a ‘reasoned opinion’ on an alleged infringement relating to a tourist development area in Sardinia. This opinion, which was promptly refuted by the Sardinia Region (Prot. No 4534 of 2 April 2001) takes no account of the documents submitted by the Region as evidence of the project’s legality and compliance with environmental protection standards and ignores the existence of an environmental all-clear given by the competent authorities. However, what is surprising is the Region’s statement that the Commission opinion is based on inaccurate information.

Will the Commission state:

– from what source it draws its information before drawing up documents which hamper economic activity and throw suspicion on the legitimate and legal action of local authorities?

– why it has refused to dialogue with the regional authorities before delivering opinions which, in the view of those concerned, do not accurately reflect the local situation?