4. The Commission stated in its recently published White Paper on Transport Policy(1) that the transport system as a whole should be sustainable from an economic, social and environmental point of view. Air transport poses some specific environmental problems and these should be addressed at European and international level, however absolute capacity limitations on airlines may not be appropriate. The objective should be to give airlines freedom to operate efficiently within a broader framework of general rules designed to promote higher environmental standards.

5. Taxation of aviation fuel and other market based measures with similar effect must be examined through the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) since the current exemption for kerosene is long-established policy, agreed at international level. These policies have been incorporated into some 3 000 bilateral air services agreements. In the shorter term the Commission is looking at how emission related levies or voluntary mechanisms might be used to reduce the environmental impact of aviation. For the longer term, it is studying how it could be part of an emissions trading programme under the Kyoto protocol.

6. Community legislation provides for capacity to be handled through competitive forces in the air transport market. Returning to a policy of regulating passenger shares between airlines by government intervention would remove incentives for airlines to improve their services or to compete with one another on price. This would not be in the interest of European consumers or the European economy.

Reply
(14 February 2002)

The Informal meeting of finance ministers in Liège on 21 September 2001 issued guidelines for any insurance cover that governments might choose to provide to airlines as a result of the short-term failure in the commercial insurance market subsequent to the atrocities of 11 September. The developing situation in respect of such insurance cover was again discussed by the Ecofin Council on 16 October 2001, while the Transport/Telecommunications Council on the same day discussed the general situation in the airline sector and adopted Council Conclusions on the issue.

The Council confirmed that the provision of insurance cover by Governments must remain a short-term intervention in reaction to a specific failure in the commercial market, and that an absolute limit of the end of December 2001 should be set for the end of such intervention. The Council also agreed that steps should be taken to encourage a return to normal operation of the commercial market. These steps should include the charging of market-related premium substitutes by Governments, reflecting the risks insured, and monthly review of all Government measures.

Within these guidelines, it will be for the Member States to decide on the measures to be taken in accordance with their national procedures, while respecting the provisions of the Stability and Growth Pact with regard to their budgetary impact.

The Council noted that if the abnormal situation in the airline insurance sector recurs after the expiry of the year-end deadline for the end of Government intervention, the Commission should make proposals to cover by alternative means risks for which commercial cover is not available.

With respect to the general economic situation in the air transport sector, after a broad debate at the Transport/Telecommunications Council on 16 October 2001, and noting that control of state aid is a matter for the Commission, the Council took note of the Commission’s Communication on the repercussions of the terrorist attacks in the United States on the air transport industry.

Moreover, the Council has also taken note of the resolution on environmental questions adopted by the ICAO Assembly, and of the intention of the Commission to present in the near future a proposal for a replacement for the 'hushkits' Regulation. The Council has undertaken to give this proposal the necessary priority to facilitate its adoption before April 2002.

WRITTEN QUESTION P-2804/01
by Fiorella Ghilardotti (PSE) to the Commission
(2 October 2001)

Subject: Discrimination in terms of equal opportunities in Competition COM/C/01

Is the Commission aware that, contrary to normal practice until now, Competition COM/C/1/01 (1) makes no provision for a derogation to the age limit in respect of women who have stopped working for a number of years following the birth of one or more children?

Does the Commission not consider that this is an obvious case of discrimination against working women, clearly infringing Community law and at odds with the policy of respect for equal opportunities which all the Community institutions have been promoting in recent years?

Does the Commission agree that it should intervene rapidly to remedy this discrimination problem, taking account of the fact that the deadline for applications to take part in the competition is 19 October 2001 and that, in the absence of prompt action to clarify the situation, many women who would be interested in taking part in the competition might be discouraged from doing so, thinking that they do not meet the age requirements, as set out in the notice of competition?