WRITTEN QUESTION E-0537/02
by Stavros Xarchakos (PPE-DE) to the Commission
(28 February 2002)

Subject: Illegal buildings in Greece

The Minister for the Aegean, Mr Sifounakis, recently visited the islands of the Cyclades where he made speeches urging the inhabitants not to erect buildings without planning permission. 21 years have already passed since his party came to power and it has remained in government continuously except for one short break, a period marked by the erection of thousands of illegal buildings which have caused irreparable damage to the natural environment in Greece. The architectural monstrosities built during this period are an insult to Greece's cultural traditions.

Is the Commission aware of the unimaginable degradation and deterioration which the cultural and natural environment in Greece have suffered in recent years? Does it have information on illegal building in the other 14 Member States? Have other Member States encountered similar problems to Greece and managed to resolve them, unlike the Greek Government which yields to short-term party political gain and damages the environment and the architectural heritage?

Answer given by Mrs Reding on behalf of the Commission
(12 April 2002)

The illegal buildings referred to by the Honourable Member would appear to be private dwellings built without planning permission. However, the failure of local authorities to properly apply Greek legislation on urban building is outside the scope of Community environmental law.


Attention is also drawn to Article 151 of the EC Treaty, according to which the Community is not responsible for 'harmonisation of the laws and regulations of the Member States' in the field of culture, which remains the exclusive competence of the Member States.


WRITTEN QUESTION P-0545/02
by Antonios Trakatellis (PPE-DE) to the Commission
(21 February 2002)

Subject: Thessaloniki underground: delays in completing the approval procedure for the project and examining the charges concerning breach of Community law by the Commission

In his latest reply on the delay in completing the Thessaloniki underground project (P-3194/01 (4)), Commissioner Bolkestein stated that 'the national authorities have yet to submit a request to the
Commission to confirm the level of Community co-funding for this major project' and that 'it is clear that compliance with Community legislation is one of the preconditions for ERDF funding of the project in question'. Since then, neither the national authorities nor the Commission have signalled any developments, and the Thessaloniki agencies are protesting at the way they are being made fools of, since a decade has now passed with the project existing only on paper.

In view of Article 232 (ex Article 175) of the EC Treaty, under which an action may be brought for an EC institution's failure to act, what specific steps has the Commission taken (e.g. request for confirmation of the level of co-funding) to advance this project, given that the examination of the charges brought concerning breach of Community rules on state aid and public contracts has still not been completed?

Why has the European Investment Bank not approved the project's financing plan and granted a loan? Is this delay perhaps connected with issues relating to compliance with Community legislation?

Can the project be constructed using co-funding from national and Community resources without the EIB's backing, and what is the explanation for the Commission's granting of appropriations for preliminary work before the project's approval, at a time when the question of its construction is still under consideration?


Answer given by Mr Bolkestein on behalf of the Commission

(22 March 2002)

The Commission would like to inform the Honourable Member that the actual implementation of public works concession projects in the Member States is not the responsibility of the Commission. Furthermore, in the context of infrastructure projects of this type, the Commission is not responsible for the behaviour of the banks, the concessionaire or the Member State concerned in conducting negotiations on how these are financed, nor for the possible success or failure of these negotiations. Given the foregoing, the Commission would query the relevance of the reference to Article 232 of the EC Treaty in the case in question.

In this context, the Commission would like to inform the Honourable Member that according to the information at its disposal, the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the commercial banks have asked that the concessionaire make certain changes in the financial contribution by its shareholders before approving the plan for financing the project in question. The latest information available indicates that these changes have still to be made by the concessionaire's shareholders.

Thus, with respect to the co-funding of this project under the Structural Funds during the 2000-2006 programming period, the Commission can confirm that it has still not received an application from the Greek authorities. It would also refer the Honourable Member to the second paragraph of the answer given by the Commission to his written question No 3194/01 (1).

During the 1994-1999 programming period, the Commission approved a total of € 5,8 million for this project under the Community Support Framework for Greece.

This co-funding was primarily for the preliminary work required before construction could commence, such as geotechnical and archaeological surveys of the site and studies of the public services networks.

In accordance with the provisions of the concession contract, the results of this work remain the property of the Member State and may therefore be used for any future development of this project.