As far as the conditions of transport are concerned, the Commission should reach the highest possible standard in order to ensure that the welfare conditions are fully implemented and controlled. In this respect the Commission is in the process of reinforcing the conditions for the granting of the export refund. The strengthening of these conditions is specifically aiming at eliminating the unacceptable circumstances of the cases that were reported.

The Commission will also undertake new initiatives in the light of the opinion adopted on 11 March 2002 by the Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare. The scientific opinion addresses a number of important issues such as travelling times and space allowances. The future proposal of the Commission in this field will aim to improve the welfare conditions of all transported animals but with a particular attention for the ones transported over long distances.

The Commission has however not the power to impose the European standards on animal transport, husbandry and slaughter within the purchasing countries. Cultural, religious, as well as economic conditions lead to fundamental differences in the way these countries produce meat.

Moreover, competitors in international trade, such as Australia, have today operational vessels that can transport 25,000 cattle in one journey and towards any destination. Since bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) occurred in 1996, Egypt turned its purchases of slaughter cattle towards Australia. More than 200,000 heads of cattle are imported yearly in Egypt and come from this exporting country.

Despite its limited margin of manoeuvre, the Commission has constantly pursued, in the context of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), its efforts to obtain acceptance of welfare principles in the international context. The Commission will continue to work in this direction during the next round of negotiations.

For the Commission, it is important to decide on this matter taking into consideration all aspects, including the position of its farmers, among which an important number depend on trade, and in particular on export.

Therefore, any decision must strike the right balance between all these different aspects. One of the consequences of the policy followed is that the export refunds for live slaughter cattle have already been reduced substantially during recent years (in 1995 the rate was €78.5 per 100 kilogram (kg); today this rate equals €41 per 100 kg; i.e. a reduction by 48%).

The Commission's approach as regards export of cattle is aiming to limit subsidisation to the level of what is strictly necessary, bearing in mind the request made by the Parliament to end, as soon as possible, the payment of export refunds for slaughter cattle and to seek the establishment of binding international guidelines governing the treatment of live animals during long-distance transport.

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0901/02
by Alexander de Roo (Verts/ALE) to the Commission
(4 April 2002)

Subject: Environmental impact of the N-430 road in Extremadura, Spain

The execution of the project to build the Puerto Pena – Puerto de los Carneros section of the N-430 road from Badajoz to Valencia is having an extremely serious impact on the environment in Extremadura. The project constitutes an infringement of the Directive on wild birds (Council Directive 79/409/EEC (1)) since it affects the special protection area ‘Orellana dam and Sierra de Pela’ and the habitats of the following species: griffon vulture, black stork, Egyptian vulture, Bonelli’s eagle, peregrine falcon, eagle owl, etc. The project also infringes the habitats Directive, in particular because it affects the site of scientific interest ‘Sierra de El Escorial’ and a large number of habitats classified as being of Community interest in Annex I of Directive 92/43/EEC (2). The Spanish lynx (individual examples in la Sierra de El Escorial) and the otter (a stable population beneath the rocks of Puerto Pena), species mentioned in Annex II of the Directive, will also be affected by the project.
We also take the view that the Directive on the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment has also been infringed, in view of the serious shortcomings in the environmental impact study carried out on the project. The study contains a very rudimentary description of the environment, without defining the area’s geomorphology or mentioning the areas of potential or actual erosion, or the repercussions on the water supply and water quality. The maps are very basic. The description of the soil barely mentions its potential uses. The vegetation is analysed very superficially, with a list of indicative or codominant species, without any qualitative or quantitative assessment. Nor does the study mention the existence of a special protection area (SPA) for birds or indicate the importance of the species in the area, many of which are classified as being of special interest or even in danger of extinction. Furthermore, for the nine alternatives presented, the identification, description and quantification of impacts is confused and the study does not list them in order of importance or make a distinction between significant and insignificant impact.

What is the Commission doing to ensure that Community law is respected in this case, in particular the birds, habitats and environmental impact directives?

Has Community funding been earmarked for managing the special protection area and/or the site of scientific interest affected by the project?

Has structural funding been allocated for the construction of the road in question?

Can the Commission withhold this funding until the environmental dispute is settled?


Answer given by Mrs Wallström on behalf of the Commission

(24 May 2002)


The said Directives could indeed be applicable here. The Commission will therefore contact the Spanish authorities as soon as possible to ensure that Community law is correctly applied in this particular case.

With regard to the allocation of Community funds for management of the Special Protection Area for birds (SPA) and the Site of Community Importance (SCI) concerned, it should be noted that the following LIFE projects have been approved for these areas:

- 96/507: ‘Protection of the little bustard, great bustard and lesser kestrel in Extremadura (Spain)’;
- 97/250: ‘SPA management in Extremadura’. Conservation of the cinereous vulture and Bonnelli’s eagle;
- 98/463: ‘Conservation of the Spanish lynx in SCIs in Extremadura’.

To date, the road construction project in question (the Puerto Peña – Puerto de los Carneros section of the N-430 road from Badajoz to Valencia) has not received any cofinancing from the Structural Funds. Under Council Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999 of 21 June 1999 laying down general provisions on these Funds(2), if the said project were to receive cofinancing, it should be in conformity with Community law, including the rules on environmental protection.