These priority investment projects include some to be carried out by companies controlled by Águas de Portugal SA. They will be approved subject to compliance with Community legislation.

For the time being, the Commission has not suspended payments on projects already adopted.

The Commission shares the Honourable Member’s concerns, and understands his arguments. It hopes that a solution can be found which will enable the planned investment to be carried out in strict compliance with Community law.


WRITTEN QUESTION E-3548/02
by Cristiana Muscardini (UEN), Antonio Mussa (UEN) and Sergio Berlato (UEN) to the Commission
(11 December 2002)

Subject: European Union assistance to tackle the natural disasters which have hit Northern Italy

The Council recently adopted a Regulation establishing the European Union Solidarity Fund (1), with a budget allocation of EUR 1 billion, to be used for the benefit of European Union populations affected by major disasters. Article 2, paragraph 2, second subparagraph of the Regulation makes provision for assistance from the Fund for regions hit by an extraordinary disaster affecting the major part of their population. The recent exceptional floods, combined with landslides and overflowing rivers, which affected a vast expanse of Northern Italy, including the regions of Liguria, Piedmont, Lombardy, Friuli-Venezia-Giulia and the Veneto, have destroyed bridges, roads, railway lines and farming areas, together with crops and livestock, forcing thousands of people to be evacuated. Housing has been seriously damaged and initial rough estimates indicate that the necessary rebuilding work may cost about EUR 250 million. In view of all this, can the Commission include these regions of Northern Italy among those to benefit from the exceptional aid envisaged under the new Solidarity Fund for natural disasters?


Answer given by Mr Barnier on behalf of the Commission
(24 February 2003)

In response to the recent flooding last summer 2002 that devastated many parts of Central Europe the Commission immediately proposed creation of the European Union Solidarity Fund (EUSF), a new financial instrument with resources of up to EUR 1 billion per annum. The focus is on giving immediate assistance to people, regions and countries affected by major disasters to help them return to normal living conditions as quickly as possible. In close cooperation with Parliament and the Council the new instrument was put in place in record time and came into effect on 15 November 2002 (1).

For the purposes of the Regulation a major disaster is one resulting, in a Member State or a country involved in accession negotiations, in damage estimated at over EUR 3 billion or more than 0.6 % of its Gross National Income (GNI). In the case of Italy the EUR 3 billion threshold would apply.

Under exceptional circumstances a region can also benefit from assistance from the Fund if it is has been stricken by an extraordinary disaster affecting the major part of its population with serious and lasting repercussions on living conditions and the economic stability of the region.

Mobilisation of the EUSF requires submission of an application to the Commission by the national authorities within ten weeks of the date when the first damage occurred. For disasters occurring between 1 August and 15 November, the date of entry into force of the EUSF regulation, applications must be received within two months of the latter date.

In areas with Structural Fund eligibility the Union can also contribute to economic reconstruction through the regional development programme allocations from these Funds already determined for the period 2000-2006.

Moreover, in the Northern Italian regions, the Union can also contribute to economic reconstruction in rural areas through the EAGGF Guarantee section funds if this measure is foreseen in the relevant Rural Development Program approved for the period 2000-2006.


(2003/C161E/105)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-3552/02
by Jean-Maurice Dehousse (PSE) to the Commission
(12 December 2002)

Subject: Workplace discrimination in the European Schools

To the knowledge of the author of this question, the European Schools are governed, subject to the terms of the Staff Regulations, by public law. These establishments employ three categories of staff: teaching staff seconded by a government, part-time teachers and administrative and service personnel.

If the author is correctly informed, the teachers are employed by the heads of the Schools and are subject to the law of the country in which they work.

It seems that in Belgium, where four European Schools are located, the part-time teachers’ working conditions are, from a statutory point of view as well as in terms of daily working practice, in violation of a good many terms of Belgian employment law.

It should also be pointed out that the status of seconded staff is in no way comparable to that of part-time teachers, even though the work and the job description are identical.

1. Is the Commission aware, firstly, of the non-observance of numerous aspects of Belgian employment law by the European Schools and, secondly, of the fact that this kind of situation is contrary to both the principle of equality before the law and that of equal pay for equal work?

2. If so, what does the Commission intend to do to remedy this state of affairs?

3. How, in particular, does it intend to apply the Directive establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation (2000/78/CE) (1)?


Answer given by Mr Kinnock on behalf of the Commission
(10 February 2003)

1. The Convention defining the Statute of the European Schools, signed on 21 June 1994, gives the Board of Governors, the intergovernmental body responsible for the schools on which the Commission has one seat, the decision-making powers in educational, budgetary and administrative matters necessary for application of that Convention.

2. Using these powers the Board of Governors approved on 26 and 27 April 1994 the Regulations for Assistant Teachers and on 23 and 24 April 1996 the Regulations for Personnel Seconded to the European Schools. Both are still in force.