Railway undertakings are free to set up reservation systems for seats and beds in trains following Article 5 of Council Directive 91/440/EEC of 29 July 1991, on the development of the Community's railways(1) which sets out the principle that 'Railway undertakings shall be managed according to the principles which apply to commercial companies'.

The Commission has not been informed about the changes taken place after change of the timetable on 15 December 2002 and about the changes in reservation systems for trains between Stockholm and Narvik. The information given about these particular cases do not give any indication of violation of Community law.

The Commission is aware of present industry initiatives by the International Union of Railways (UIC) to integrate at European level (national) rail passenger information and ultimately ticketing/reservation systems. Those projects are called Merits and Prifs respectively and should be implemented over the next three or four years. At present more than 30 European railway undertakings are co-operating in these projects. Simultaneously, the Community of European Railways is working on establishing and implementing a Charter for Passenger Services, which contain clear commitments to passengers regarding the provision of travel information.

The recent industry initiatives are in line with the Commission's work. Within the framework of interoperability a Technical Specification for Interoperability (TSI) will be developed for passenger telematics which should facilitate the exchange of information by establishing standards in this respect. A TSI on this issue is expected in 2006. In parallel, the Commission is working on a proposal for rail passenger rights which may also address basic rules for integration of information and ticketing systems. At present, Council Regulation (EEC) No 2299/89 of 24 July 1989 on a code of conduct for computerised reservation systems applies first and foremost to airline reservation systems. It covers rail services' reservation only insofar as integrated in the principal unbiased displays of airline computer reservation systems. With a view to revising this regulation, in depth consultations with stakeholders have been conducted. These have inter alia indicated that once a common standard will have emerged out of the TSI exercise, it is likely that rail services be incorporated on a wide scale in the Computerised Reservation Systems commonly used in aviation. As the case may be, that may require a further revision of the said Regulation by 2006.


WRITTEN QUESTION P-0976/03
by José Ribeiro e Castro (UEN) to the Commission
(20 March 2003)

Subject: The structural and cohesion funds in Portugal

In an interview published in the newspaper Diário Económico on 3 March this year, Commissioner Günter Verheugen, when asked about the future of structural and cohesion measures in Portugal, in view of the enlargement of the European Union and the accompanying rise in Portugal's GDP in relation to the Community average — above the ceiling of 75% — replied that the Commission had made it clear that the statistical effect of enlargement, whereby countries such as Portugal would be rich on paper but not in reality, must not mean the end of cohesion policy. Later on he said that if there were successful programmes which were helping Portugal to prepare itself and to create more growth, more jobs and more opportunities for people, it was in the EU's interest to continue with such programmes.

In conclusion he promised that the Commission would propose that the level of support for Portugal in the forthcoming financial package should remain more or less the same.
Can the Commission:

- clarify in greater detail these important statements made by the Commissioner;
- say whether it already has any policy documents concerning the financial package for Portugal in the context of the structural and cohesion funds after 2006, and when it expects to formalise the proposal to maintain the level of Portugal's financial package after 2006;
- say what specific programmes in Portugal it considers to be ‘successful’ and ‘helping Portugal to prepare itself and to create more growth, more jobs and more opportunities for people’, and hence considers it ‘in the EU's interest to continue with’.

Answer given by Mr Barnier on behalf of the Commission

(15 April 2003)

The programmes financed by the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund in Portugal are intended to make the Portuguese economy more competitive, stimulate growth and job creation, and provide citizens with new opportunities.

The Honourable Member is no doubt aware of the significant results achieved so far thanks to Community assistance, which has enabled Portugal to reduce part of its development shortfall.

It is too soon to evaluate the results of programmes and projects financed for the 2000-2006 programming period. The Directorate-General for Regional Policy has published a macroeconomic impact assessment study for the 2000-2006 period on its Inforegi website (1).

An interim evaluation of programmes financed under the third Community support framework will be available at the end of 2003. It will enable the Commission to draw initial conclusions and to identify the most effective programmes in relation to the objectives sought.

The future shape of Community cohesion policy after 2006 is currently still being discussed. The latest stage in this process was the seminar with Structural Funds managers held on 3 and 4 March 2003.

In the third cohesion report at the end of 2003, the Commission will present proposals for future cohesion policy after 2006. The financial perspective proposals for the post-2006 period will be presented later. It is therefore not currently possible to give an indication of the amounts which Portugal might receive after 2006.


WRITTEN QUESTION E-1119/03

by Roberta Angelilli (UEN) to the Commission

(1 April 2003)

Subject: Use of funds from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) by the municipality of Carrara

In September 2002, the monitoring committee of the Italian Ministry for Economic Affairs issued a report on the spending of EU funds.

The report reveals the alarming slowness and inefficiency with which EU funds are allocated to projects by some regional authorities.

The grave concerns about the inadequate use of European funds by local authorities have frequently been echoed by the Commission.