like to specify that, on its part, it does not dispose of indications concerning possible anticompetitive agreements or collusion between insurers in the Italian market that would be contrary to European competition law (Article 81 of the EC Treaty).

The Authority’s analysis in addition shows that other factors external to the insurance undertaking contributed to the tariff increases and their high level, such as the high costs of the compensation granted for personal damages and the uncertainty of the criteria determining such compensation in Italy.

Only in 2002 did most insurance companies reach a situation where motor insurance premiums income exceeded cost of claims plus expenses. In 2003 tariffs have apparently started to decrease for some categories of drivers, as confirmed by the data from the Italian Authority for the Supervision of the insurance sector (ISVAP).

In the conclusions of the ISVAP report in 2002 it is stated, with regard to the survey of the Italian Competition Authority, that the Italian system is not entirely comparable with the one existing in countries like France or the United Kingdom. These Member States have had freedom of tariffs for many years and, unlike in Italy, there was no obligation for insurance undertakings to provide coverage to all policyholders.

In addition to the above considerations, the Honourable Member is invited to consider also the relatively high cost and frequency of accidents in Italy as pointed out by the Commission in its reply to the question E-1522/03.

According to the European insurance legislation the tariffs of motor insurance should be determined by market forces. The Commission believes that, in the future, a more competitive and efficient European insurance market will lead to more competitive tariffs for the benefit of consumers in the Union.

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(2004/C84E/0068) WRITTEN QUESTION E-3448/03

by Mihail Papayannakis (GUE/NGL) to the Commission

(20 November 2003)

Subject: Operation of quarries in a protected area

The Strofylia-Kotychi cluster of habitats in the western Peloponnese (Achaia and Illeia prefectures) is protected by the Ramsar Convention and by Directive 79/409 (1) and has been included in the Natura 2000 network (serial number 128, code GR 2320001). At its north-eastern edge, in the Mavra Vouna ('Black Mountains') area (which supplies the habitat with fresh water and where, inter alia, at least 100 species of birds find shelter, of which 27 are protected by Community directives) aggregates quarries have been operating since 1964, and in recent years they have intensified their activities, causing serious damage to the Black Mountains and Kalogria lagoon. In addition, they give rise to unbearable living conditions in neighbouring Araxos (through which many hundreds of lorries pass each day, starting at 4 a.m., accompanied by clouds of dust — as the lorries are very often uncovered — deafening noise, and damage to the foundations of buildings). All the above facts constitute multiple violations of both Community law and many national provisions.

Is the Commission aware of the above-mentioned facts, complained of by the residents, environmental non-governmental organisations and local government bodies? Does the Commission intend to check to what extent the above-mentioned directives are being complied with, and whether the quarries in question have permits and approvals relating to environmental conditions and whether they are complying with them? What measures will be taken to ensure compliance with the law for the period up to 2005, when it is believed that the quarries will close definitively?

The Strofylia and Kotychi biotopes have been classified by Greece as special protection areas (codes GR2320001 and GR2330009) under Council Directive 79/409/EEC of 2 April 1979 on the conservation of wild birds (1) and proposed as sites of Community importance (codes GR2320001 and GR2330006) in accordance with Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (2).

Under Article 7 and Article 6(2) of Directive 92/43/EEC, the Greek authorities must ensure that activities in the area do not lead to deterioration of habitats on the sites or significantly disturb the species found there. Article 4(1) and (2) of Directive 79/409/EEC require Member States to give these special protection areas an appropriate legal status.

The Commission would inform the Honourable Member that on the basis of the facts reported in question E-3204/01 by Mr Papayannakis (3) it opened an own-initiative case, in order to check whether there was a system of protection for the sites. Its investigations showed that Greece had not taken the necessary measures to establish and implement a coherent, specific and comprehensive legal framework ensuring the sustainable management, conservation and effective protection of the sites, having regard to the conservation objectives of Directives 79/409/EEC and 92/43/EEC. Considering that Greece had failed to fulfil its obligations under Article 4(1) and (2) of Directive 79/409/EEC and Article 7 and Article 6(2) of Directive 92/43/EEC, the Commission initiated infringement proceedings under Article 226 of the EC Treaty in October 2003.

In the light of the above, it is clear that the Greek authorities must set up an appropriate system for protecting and managing the sites. This must establish the conditions under which existing activities and new activities may be carried out on protected sites, having regard to the conservation objectives of Directives 79/409/EEC and 92/43/EEC. Under Greek law, such a system must include approval of a specific environmental study (management plan), adoption of a joint ministerial decision specifying environmental protection measures tailored to the site and its implementation by a management body specifically set up for the purpose.

Once it has seen the comments of the Greek authorities, the Commission will check for any incompatibility with the abovementioned Community provisions and will take all necessary measures to ensure that Community environmental legislation is complied with.


(2004/C 84 E/0069) WRITTEN QUESTION E-3491/03 by Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL) to the Commission

(24 November 2003)

Subject: Single payment within the reform of the COM in olive oil

The Commission Communication on 'accomplishing a sustainable agricultural model for Europe through the reform of the CAP — the tobacco, olive oil, cotton and sugar sectors' (1) final states that 'adhesion to the single farm payment' — instead of the existing production-linked payments — 'enables low input olive oil producing regions to maintain their overall level of income support'. But the Communication also states that this single payment 'could bring problems to certain traditional producer regions' and that 'there exists a significant risk of widespread disruption to olive tree maintenance', particularly 'where such areas manifest a high dependency on the olive sector in their local economies'. In its previous attempts at reform, the Commission tried to abolish the current production aids against the wishes of the producer countries, who resisted the attempts, pointing out the significant risk of 'production abandonment'. The current proposal, forming part of the recent CAP reform, goes further still, by uncoupling production subsidies.