Africa. However, in absolute terms this is less than previously because the total allocated to the region under the ninth EDF is lower and because the Republic of Congo is now part of the regions of East Africa (Comesa (1), IGAD (2), COI (3), EAC (4) and Southern Africa (SADC (5)). But the various NIPs will also be contributing, namely EUR 3.3 million to Gabon, EUR 4 million to Cameroon and EUR 2 million to the Republic of Congo — although the latter has yet to be confirmed. Then, given the importance of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) for the forests of the Congo river basin, it cannot be left out of any regional programme, and this means contributing to the regional funds for which the DRC is eligible. The DRC requested support totalling some EUR 10 million from the Regional Indicative Programmes (RIPs) for East Africa and Southern Africa. Whilst the IRCC (6) for East Africa agreed to provide EUR 5 million on condition that SADC did the same, the SADC regional body has so far refused, which means that the DRC cannot participate in the regional programme. The DRC has therefore resubmitted its application to SADC and a SADC Council decision is expected early in March. If this Council hands down a favourable decision, the global amounts allocated to further work on the conservation of Central African forest ecosystems will be roughly the same as those granted for earlier phases of the programme and will enable the DRC to rejoin the local actions and partnership processes inherent in the political initiative that is the Congo Basin Forest Partnership.

(1) Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa.
(2) Intergovernmental Authority on Development.
(3) Indian Ocean Commission.
(4) East African Community.
(5) Southern Africa Development Community.
(6) Inter Regional Co-ordinating Committee.

(2004/C 84 E/0333)

WRITTEN QUESTION P-4035/03
by Helena Torres Marques (PSE) to the Commission

(5 January 2004)

Subject: Implementation in Portugal of the regulation on automobile distribution

1. At a meeting held on 9 December 2003 in Brussels by the Association of European Automobile Constructors, the chairman of that association (Mr Louis Schweitz, chairman and CEO of Renault) said that, in the wake of the new regulation on automobile distribution, manufacturers would harmonise the basic prices of motorcars sold in the various EU countries.

2. It was pointed out to Mr Schweitz (who agreed) that this would lead to an increase in the price of motorcars sold in Portugal.

3. Since the purpose of the new regulation on automobile distribution is the precise opposite (i.e. to bring about a reduction in the consumer price of motorcars, to increase the volume of sales and to cause old cars to be replaced by newer models, with all the implications which that would entail in terms of vehicle safety and a healthier environment), would the Commission give its views on this matter, which is naturally causing the greatest concern amongst consumers and Portuguese automobile distributors?

Answer given by Mr Monti on behalf of the Commission

(5 February 2004)

The Commission’s policy on competition in the motor vehicle sector has always been that motor vehicle distributors, whether or not they are based in the same EU Member State, should be subject to free competition. This approach, which is enshrined in the new block exemption regulation (7) which entered into force on 1 October 2002, helps to create a single market in the motor vehicle sector and enables today’s European consumers to take advantage of the best prices in the EU. For some manufacturers, this process of integration of national markets is reflected in a policy of convergence of basic tax exclusive prices for vehicles of the same make and model throughout the European Union.
As regards the point made by the Honourable Member concerning the increase in the basic price of cars in Portugal, the Commission would point out that a pricing policy determined on an independent basis by a motor vehicle manufacturer is strictly the business of that manufacturer. The Commission has no mandate to intervene in respect of manufacturers’ business decisions.

However, price increases decided by joint agreement between a manufacturer and its independent dealers, or between competing manufacturers, are generally prohibited under European competition law. If evidence were found of concerted price increases the Commission would not hesitate to take action in accordance with its role as guardian of fair competition in the internal market.

To date, however, no information of concerted price increases on the Portuguese market has come to light.


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(2004/C 84 E/0334) WRITTEN QUESTION E-4045/03 by Joan Colom i Naval (PSE) to the Commission (12 January 2004)

Subject: Contamination of groundwater in Catalonia

According to the 2003 risk report produced by the foundation 'Instituto de Estudios de Seguridad', a third of all Catalan municipalities (306 out of 946) experience a high level of groundwater contamination owing to nitrates originating from excess slurry.

On 1 October 1998, Spain was found guilty by the Court of Justice, in Case C-71/97, of failing to comply with Directive 91/676/EEC (1). The Court of Justice subsequently found Spain guilty, in its ruling of 13 April 2000 on Case C-274/98, of failing to comply with Article 5 of Directive 91/676/EEC.

Can the Commission indicate what types of control procedure have been followed to verify the implementation of the directive in question? How does the Commission explain the fact that the number of communities affected by nitrate contamination of groundwater has increased by over 50%? What measures will the Commission take to solve this problem, which affects a third of all Catalan municipalities, without endangering their populations? Does it consider these circumstances to square with transferring water from the Ebro to other parts of Spain?


Answer given by Mrs Wallström on behalf of the Commission (24 February 2004)

Pursuant to the judgements of the European Court of Justice in cases C-71/97 and C-274/98, Spain has adopted different measures to ensure compliance with the provisions of Council Directive 91/676/EEC of 12 December 1991 concerning the protection of waters against pollution caused by nitrates from agricultural sources, hereafter 'Nitrates Directive'. Nonetheless, the Commission, in exercising its controlling powers, has subsequently observed that these measures might be insufficient.

Regarding the situation in Catalonia, it should be noted that the Spanish authorities designated six Nitrate Vulnerable Zones (NVZs) in 1998 (1) within this Autonomous Community. According to the Commission Assessment, further designations were required in Catalonia.

The proper designation of NVZs represents the first step to controlling nitrate pollution. Appropriate action programmes should be established in NVZs, ensuring the implementation of a comprehensive set of measures for fertilisation, soil management, livestock manure management and the compulsory application of the Code of Agricultural Practice.