Answer given by Mr Fischler on behalf of the Commission

(11 March 2004)

The Commission is certainly aware of the facts raised by the Honourable Member, concerning the presence of Spanish fishing vessels in Azorean waters. There seems, however, to be a certain misunderstanding as regards the applicability of the Council Regulation (EC) No 1954/2003 of 4 November 2003 on the management of the fishing effort relating to certain Community fishing areas and resources and modifying Regulation (EC) No 2847/93 and repealing Regulations (EC) No 685/95 and (EC) No 2027/95. The conditions for fishing activities in the waters up to 100 nautical miles from the baselines of the Azores, Madeira and the Canary Islands are laid down in Article 5 of the above-mentioned Regulation which entered into force on the seventh day following its publication in the Official Journal of the European Union (cf. Article 16), i.e. on 14 November 2003. Consequently, the special conditions for fishing in the waters of the Azores and Madeira are applicable from that date onwards. It is up to the national authorities to verify that these rules are followed.

Finally, the Commission is in constant dialogue with the Member States concerned in order to ensure as smooth an application of the new rules as possible.

(2004/C 84 E/0470)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0456/04

by Ioannis Marinos (PPE-DE) to the Commission

(23 February 2004)

Subject: Increase in consumer complaints in Greece

According to a press release (14 January 2004) issued by the ‘Consumers’ Protection Centre (KEPKA), which is based in Thessaloniki and a member of the European Consumers’ Organisation (BEUC) and the Consumers’ International, the number of complaints received by the organisation from thousands of Greek consumers increased in 2003 by 40%. Whereas, in 2002, the organisation received 10,000 complaints, in 2003 the figure rose to 14,000. The main type of complaints concern price rises (15.60%), credit cards and loans (15.05%), and faulty goods (10.46%). The percentage of complaints rose in 2003, particularly in the ‘credit card-loan’ category, by two and a half times compared with 2002 (from 6.68% to 15.05%), and in the ‘food unfit for consumption’ category there was almost a doubling (from 4.33% to 7.5%). Significantly, complaints against Greek public services more than doubled (from 2.06% in 2002 to 4.68% in 2003).

Is the Commission satisfied that Community law adequately protects consumers against such developments? Have all the relevant provisions of Community law in this respect been incorporated into Greek national law and to what extent are they implemented?

Answer given by Mr Byrne on behalf of the Commission

(31 March 2004)

Community law contains a set of rules aiming at guaranteeing a high level of protection for consumers throughout the internal market. A broad legal framework has been developed over a period of more than twenty years for both food and non-food consumer products. In the areas mentioned by the Honourable Member, there has been legislation on the indication of prices (Directive 98/6/EC), consumer credit (Directive 87/102/EEC as amended), product liability (Directive 85/374/EEC as amended) as well as numerous directives on food safety. This legislation includes rules on consumer protection. Services of general interest are regulated by sector specific legislation such as directives on postal services, electricity, gas and telecommunications whereas the Public Utilities Directive 93/38/EEC, as amended, covers important public services.
Furthermore, the Commission has proposed a Directive on unfair commercial practice(s) (5) to ensure that consumers are adequately protected from rogue traders. The Commission has also undertaken to review and update the consumer acquis communautaire in its Consumer Policy Strategy 2002-2006 (6).

The increase in the number of consumer complaints in Greece may be taken as a sign that consumers are becoming more aware of their rights. They are turning to consumer organisations for assistance to enforce these rights. The Commission does not consider this as a sign that Community legislation inadequately protects consumers but rather as proof that the awareness of consumer rights is increasing, a development that the Commission strongly supports. In order to further spread information to consumers a European Consumer Centre (EEC) opened in Athens (7, Akadimias Street, GR-10671 Athens) on 7 May 2003.

Greece has transposed all the consumer protection directives related to the issues mentioned outside the area of food safety. It is up to the national authorities in Greece to ensure that EU consumer directives, as transposed into national law, are properly enforced for the benefit of Greek consumers.

In the area of food safety, the Food and Veterinary Office of the Commission carried out three inspections to Greece during 2003 and made recommendations to improve the functioning of the official control systems in place and to correct the deficiencies noted. Many of these deficiencies arise as a result of a shortage of staff, and this issue is being actively pursued with the Greek authorities. The reports of these inspections will be made available on the Directorate General Health and Consumer Protection Internet site (http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/sfp/oc_index_en.html) in due course.


(2004/C 84 E/0471) WRITTEN QUESTION E-0458/04

by Brian Simpson (PSE) and Catherine Stihler (PSE) to the Commission

(23 February 2004)

Subject: Avian flu and the ban on poultry from Thailand

Following the outbreak of avian flu in Asia the EU has banned all fresh poultry imports from Thailand. The ban has now been extended to 15 August 2004. The ban does not extend to poultry meats treated to a very high temperature (70°C). What reassurance can the Commission offer on reducing the risks of infection from cooked Thai poultry available in ‘ready meals’?