

Will the Commission say:

1. Is the expulsion of Greek doctors for the reasons given above at odds with the positions adopted by the European Union on humanitarian aid? How does it intend to respond to this move, and what measures does it intend to take?
2. The Greek section of 'Médecins sans Frontières' has submitted for approval (ECHO) a humanitarian aid programme for the psychiatric hospital of Toponica (near the City of Nis). In view of the above, how does the Commission intend to deal with this application so as to endorse the principle that humanitarian non-governmental organisations should intervene in crises purely on the basis of humanitarian criteria without regard for any political or other considerations?

Answer given by Mr Nielson on behalf of the Commission

(7 December 1999)

1. In its relations with its partners, the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO) scrupulously respects their independence, as is laid down moreover in the Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA) governing their mutual relations..

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) is one of ECHO's most important partners, whose work at international level was recently recognised with the award of the Nobel Peace Prize. MSF is a non-governmental organisation, currently represented by 18 sections throughout the world. Six of these sections have been set up and recognised within MSF International as operational sections, i.e. MSF France, MSF Belgium, MSF Netherlands, MSF Spain, MSF Switzerland and MSF Luxembourg. The operational sections of MSF have signed the FPA with ECHO.

Section MSF Greece implements its own projects, a fact which might appear to generate some conflict within the association. This is an internal matter for the organisation and concerns it alone.

2. MSF Greece submitted an application to sign the FPA in March 1997, at a time when the FPA was undergoing a review. ECHO nonetheless recorded the application with a view to examining it in detail once the review was complete.

Since January 1999, the date when the new FPA came into force, ECHO has given priority to signature with its established partners. ECHO has now signed the new FPA with 159 non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Pending the enlargement of the network of partners, whenever one of ECHO's operational units expresses interest in taking action on a measure proposed by an NGO which has not signed the FPA, ECHO requests the Member State in which the organisation's head office is located to certify the NGO's compliance with the criteria set out in Article 7(1) and (2) of Council Regulation 1257/96. The action that ECHO then takes will depend on the reply received from the Member State concerned.

At present, ECHO is assessing a proposal from MSF Greece concerning the tuberculosis ward of the Toponica psychiatric hospital near Nis, which is urgently in need of assistance. Assuming that it endorses this proposal, ECHO will then apply the above-mentioned procedure to determine whether MSF Greece can be accepted as a partner.

(2000/C 203 E/208)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2272/99

by Alexandros Alavanos (GUE/NGL) to the Commission

(13 December 1999)

Subject: Financial support for the activities of consumer organisations

Article 6(2) of Decision No 283/99⁽¹⁾ of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a general framework for Community activities in favour of consumers states that: 'unpaid work or donations in kind, if properly documented, may be taken into account, up to a level of 20% of total eligible costs when assessing the organisations' revenue and costs'.

In view of the 'difficulties' raised by government bodies concerning 'properly documented' expenditure can the Commission say:

1. What criteria will it use to assess whether unpaid work or donations in kind have been properly documented?
2. Has it sent to consumer organisations information (what is the document reference?) setting out the criteria regarding properly documented unpaid work or donations in kind?

(¹) OJ L 34, 9.2.1999, p. 1.

Answer given by Mr Byrne on behalf of the Commission

(16 December 1999)

Setting sound and transparent standards for the management of Community grants has been a priority of the Commission from the very outset. A vade mecum was adopted by the Commission in 1998 (¹) and is applicable to all the grants in any policy area since 1 January 1999. This vade mecum provides the Commission with a common framework for awarding and monitoring direct grants.

As a general rule, contributions in kind are not eligible costs, but are taken into account in calculating the rate of Community co-financing. However, Decision No 283/1999/EC of the Parliament and of the Council of 25 January 1999 establishing a general framework for Community activities in favour of consumers, lays down, in Article 6.2 that 'unpaid work or donation in kind, if properly documented, may be taken into account, up to a level of 20%, of total eligible costs, when assessing the organisations' revenue and costs.'

The criteria for the evaluation of 'in kind expenditure' are foreseen in the vade mecum. Article 6.1.5 stipulates that 'In particular, contributions in kind include: land, immovable property whether in its entirety or in part, durable capital goods, raw materials, unpaid charity work by a private individual or corporate body. The following conditions must be met: the amount declared by the beneficiary as contributions in kind must be valued either on the basis of objective factors or on the basis of official scales laid down by an independent authority or by an outside independent professional; the cost of private charity work must be valued in accordance with the national rules regarding the calculation of hourly, daily or weekly labour costs, if such rules exist.'

This information was included as an annex to the application form which all proposers received. It was also put on the Directorate general for health and consumer protection web site. Moreover, the Commission also organised, in July 1999, a teleconference, during which the representatives of the consumer organisations were able to ask questions to Commission officials about the year 2000 subsidy exercise. Furthermore, it was announced during this teleconference that Commission staff specialised in the financial aspects of grants were available to answer any questions. Their phone numbers were also mentioned on the grant application form.

(¹) <http://www.cc.cec/home/dgserv/serv19/icon/documents/subventions/index.htm>.

(2000/C 203 E/209)

WRITTEN QUESTION P-2295/99

by Brigitte Langenhagen (PPE-DE) to the Commission

(29 November 1999)

Subject: Imports of hucho and hucho fry into Finland

Fish may be imported into Finland only from EU-authorized fish hatcheries. This authorisation covers establishments which have closed systems, i.e. which do not come into contact with open waters so that the risk of disease is reduced.