

to contribute towards the reconstruction of areas affected by the 1997 earthquake. Those decisions granted additional financial resources amounting to EUR 500 million, of which EUR 325 million was for the SPD for the Umbria Region and EUR 175 million for the SPD for the Marche Region. Those resources were made available in particular through the solidarity of the other Italian regions, which agreed to reduce their share of the Community funds originally allocated to them. In the Region of Umbria alone, the contribution from the Guidance Section of the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF) amounts to EUR 190 million and that from the ERDF to EUR 102 million. The remainder, which is contributed by the European Social Fund (ESF), is for targeted training measures.

In the two Regions, assistance part-financed by the EAGGF is used for rebuilding the production potential of agriculture, reconstructing farmers' principal dwellings and rural infrastructure and restoring the architectural heritage in rural villages. Assistance part-financed by the ERDF is used in part for rebuilding non-agricultural production potential and reconstructing infrastructure for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and in part for rebuilding and restoring the public and private architectural heritage (integrated projects). Such operations are eligible solely in areas affected by the earthquake.

The Commission is kept constantly up to date on the way the Structural Funds are used thanks to the partnership system and in particular through Monitoring Committee meetings attended by its officials. At its latest meeting on 9 December 1999, the Monitoring Committee for the Umbria Region was told that the Region was in a position to commit the whole allocation within the time limit laid down.

Since reconstruction work will not be completed before the deadline on 31 December 2001, details of progress can be neither exhaustive nor final. However, according to a recent estimate, the Region has now selected and financed approximately 3 000 reconstruction projects, about one third of which are now under way. At this stage the Commission does not intend setting up a committee of inquiry and regards these measures as having been adequately monitored and inspected in accordance with the regulations governing the operations of the Structural Funds.

(2000/C 303 E/077)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2627/99

by Francesco Speroni (TDI) to the Commission

(12 January 2000)

Subject: Seat belts in cars

The benefits of car seat belts are all too often rendered meaningless by the failure to comply with the statutory obligation to fasten them.

Does the Commission not believe that the time has come for it to issue rules obliging car manufacturers to install mechanisms to prevent cars from being driven if the seat belts are not fastened?

Answer given by Mr Liikanen on behalf of the Commission

(24 February 2000)

The technical standards for safety belts with which motor vehicles must comply are contained in Council Directive 77/541/EEC of 28 June 1977 on the approximation of the laws of the Member States relating to safety belts and restraint systems of motor vehicles⁽¹⁾ and the successive amendments.

The use of safety belts, in particular their compulsory use, are governed by Council Directive 91/671/EEC of 16 December 1991 on the approximation of the laws of the Member States relating to compulsory use of seat belts in vehicles of less than 3,5 tonnes⁽²⁾, which stipulates that Member States shall ensure that the driver and passengers occupying the seats of vehicles on the road do wear safety belts.

The Commission shares the Honourable Member's view that failure to wear a belt makes it impossible to derive the full benefits from the additional road safety provided by such retention systems. Recent studies carried out in the Member States have shown that, even with a rate of use of seat belts close to 85 % in the front seats, half of accident victims are among the 15 % who did not fasten their belt.

However, the solution proposed by the Honourable Member is likely to be difficult to implement at the moment. It would require a system which is able to detect which seats are occupied, which could not be bypassed, e.g. by fastening the belt without passing it around the body, and which did not in itself pose a serious accident risk, e.g. by causing the engine to switch off automatically if the belt is unfastened while the vehicle is in motion.

Manufacturers are studying other ways of increasing seat belt use, notably through the use of particularly irksome visual and audible warning systems, which could be widely introduced within a relatively short period of time.

The Commission does, however, believe that, as Directive 91/671/EEC indicates, the Member States already have the legislative instruments necessary to ensure stricter control of the wearing of seat belts throughout their territory.

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 220, 29.8.1977.

⁽²⁾ OJ L 373, 31.12.1991.

(2000/C 303 E/078)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2637/99

by Alexandros Alavanos (GUE/NGL) to the Commission

(12 January 2000)

Subject: Democratisation and the changing of priorities at the World Trade Organisation

A constantly growing movement (1 200 organisations, from an original 85) is opposed to the Seattle talks, and considers that the structure of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) is particularly undemocratic, damaging for the environment and runs counter to employment law etc. In the view of this movement, human rights, multilateral agreements on the environment and employment law should not be subordinated to 'free' market trade, but vice versa.

The WTO's practice to date and the decisions of the Dispute Settlement Body (the United States' appeal against the European Union's embargo on beef containing hormones, the appeal of Venezuela oil companies against environmental protection bodies, and others) do indeed raise question marks over the body's democratic nature. The same is true of the agreement on trade-related intellectual property rights (TRIPS), on the subject of which this year's UN report on human development states that after signature of the agreement, traditional production methods are subject to strict international rules, with negative consequences for Third World countries and to the benefit of multinational companies.

Does the Commission intend to place the democratisation and the changing of priorities at the World Trade Organisation at the forefront at Seattle?

Answer given by Mr Lamy on behalf of the Commission

(16 February 2000)

The Honourable Member raises the issue of the opposition from a number of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to the World trade organisation (WTO). The Commission is well aware of the concerns expressed by parts of civil society regarding the impact of WTO rules on sensitive issues such as the environment, social standards, or health. This is why the Community has proposed a broad agenda for