

2. Natural gas prices worldwide have also started to rise. The (market) value of gas in the Community is based on the costs which consumers would incur if they were to use a different fuel (principle of substitutability). This relation is reflected in most of the supply contracts concluded between the European gas industry and producers. Gas is therefore in most cases priced on the basis of oil products, the price of which on the world market is expressed in dollars. This means that the value of the dollar is also a factor in the price ultimately paid by the consumer for each cubic metre. As a consequence, rising oil prices push up prices of gas prices as well. The gas pricing calculation formula applied by the European gas industry takes into account the average oil price over the preceding two quarters, which explains the delay of around half a year before gas prices are adjusted (see chart no 2 sent direct to the Honourable Member and to Parliament's Secretariat), but also makes the increase less pronounced than that of oil prices. It should be noted, however, that in the context of gas market liberalisation, gas prices may — due to increased supply competition in the market place — become less influenced by oil prices.

Rising world market prices for gas have started to translate into higher end user prices for gas in the Community. In July and August 2000, consumer prices for gas were nearly 11 % higher than a year earlier, after a steady rise starting in mid 1999 (see chart No 3 sent direct to the Honourable Member and to Parliament's Secretariat). Yet, this inflation rate for gas is considerably lower than for petroleum.

(2001/C 113 E/241)

WRITTEN QUESTION P-2974/00

by Carmen Fraga Estévez (PPE-DE) to the Commission

(13 September 2000)

Subject: The Commission's criteria for allocating fishing opportunities in the waters of the Svalbard archipelago

In its reply of 20 July 2000 to my question E-2196/00 ⁽¹⁾, the Commission stated that with regard to allocating opportunities for the Community fleet to fish for shrimps in Svalbard waters, at a meeting held on 30 June the Member States involved agreed to a fishing plan for this year. This development, which I already knew about, can only be welcomed, but in view of the Commission's initial proposal to the Member States — even though it did not reach the stage of a formal proposal to the Council, — which was subsequently amended by the Member States, doubts remain as to the Commission's criteria when allocating these fishing opportunities. This being so, and given that the aforesaid agreement applies only to this year:

What are the Commission's criteria for proposing reference periods, and particularly, in the case under consideration?

Does the Commission continue to hold the view, upheld in various international fora, that a single year's fishing activity cannot be used as a historical maximum?

Can the Commission tell me what its intentions are with regard to its proposal for the year 2001, the reference period it intends to use for this proposal, and the arguments on which it will be based?

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 89 E, 20.3.2001.

Answer given by Mr Fischler on behalf of the Commission

(6 October 2000)

It is the responsibility of the Commission to propose reference periods on an ad hoc basis in conformity with the detailed circumstances applicable to fisheries of various characteristics. This applies equally to fisheries by Community vessels for shrimps in the Svalbard area.

In that context, the possibility to refer to some maximum value within a range of years proposed by the Commission for each Member State is not precluded. Indeed, this approach was used when establishing allocation keys in 1998 for various fish stocks in the North Sea.

At present, the Commission has not decided whether a proposal dealing with 2001 will be required. Discussion has been initiated with the concerned Member States. It is possible that a further non-legislative solution may be found.

(2001/C 113 E/242)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2979/00

by Charles Tannock (PPE-DE) to the Commission

(20 September 2000)

Subject: Access to information

Following the agreement concluded between the Commission and Parliament in July, will the Reasoned Opinions sent by the Commission to Member States now be available either to Members of Parliament or to the general public?

Answer given by Mr Prodi on behalf of the Commission

(31 October 2000)

The Framework Agreement concluded by the Commission and Parliament in July governs relations between the two institutions. Annex III to the Agreement is specifically concerned with the transmission of confidential information from the Commission and its handling in the context of Parliament's powers of scrutiny.

At the same time, the Annex expressly excludes the provision of information on infringement procedures, in so far as they are not covered by a final Commission decision on the date when the request from a parliamentary body is received.

As a result, the Commission can transmit Reasoned Opinions to Parliament only after taking a final decision and pursuant to the general rules of Annex III which call, in particular, for respect for fundamental human rights, including the right to a fair trial and the right to protection of privacy; provisions governing judicial and disciplinary procedures; the protection of business secrecy and commercial relations; and protection of the interests of the Union, particularly those relating to public safety, international relations, monetary stability and financial interests.

The notification of Reasoned Opinions to the general public is not covered by the Framework Agreement, which is exclusively concerned with relations between Parliament and the Commission.

(2001/C 113 E/243)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2982/00

**by Raffaele Costa (PPE-DE), Antonio Tajani (PPE-DE),
Jas Gawronski (PPE-DE), Gianfranco Fini (UEN), Umberto Bossi (TDI),
Pier Casini (PPE-DE), Rocco Buttiglione (PPE-DE)
and Francesco Turchi (UEN) to the Council**

(25 September 2000)

Subject: The fall in the value of the euro

The reports received over the last few weeks, and more particularly in the last few hours, concerning the declining value of the euro in relation to the dollar and other currencies have given rise to serious concern in the European Parliament.