

Accordingly, the Framework Programme for research and technological development, and its Non-Nuclear Energy programme in particular, has supported a significant number of projects on the production and storage of hydrogen or the development of fuel cells. Up to now, support given by the Commission in the Fifth Framework Programme amounts to more than € 95 million, basically allocated to fuel cells, the production and storage of hydrogen from different sources, the development of norms and standards, safety, the distribution infrastructure, and the development and demonstration of fuel cell vehicles.

The Commission is currently supporting several large-scale research and technological development projects:

- the FUERO project (total cost € 38 million, Community contribution € 21,3 million), is developing components and systems for fuel cells and hydrogen-powered vehicles. 67 European organisations from 13 countries (Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Greece, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Austria, Sweden, Great Britain, Norway, the Czech Republic and Israel) and several European motor manufacturers are actively participating in FUERO;
- the CUTE and ECTOS projects: 10 European cities (Amsterdam, Barcelona, Hamburg, London, Luxembourg, Madrid, Oporto, Reykjavik, Stockholm, Stuttgart) are to introduce hydrogen as a fuel for their public transport buses (using fuel cells). Each city will produce the hydrogen locally, build hydrogen service stations and have three buses in commercial operation in their public transport systems for two years;
- the Commission is in the process of setting up several actions to study the feasibility of a Europe-wide infrastructure for supplying hydrogen as fuel and the legal, economic, environmental, social and organisational problems of setting up such a cross-border infrastructure.

(<sup>1</sup>) COM(2000) 769 final.

(2002/C 40 E/082)

**WRITTEN QUESTION E-1702/01**

**by Philip Bushill-Matthews (PPE-DE) to the Commission**

(14 June 2001)

*Subject:* Funding for demonstration

Could the Commission confirm whether or not any funds from any EU budget line were used to finance any activity associated with the demonstration in May in London protesting about proposed Marks & Spencer closure?

**Answer given by Mrs Diamantopoulou on behalf of the Commission**

(31 July 2001)

The Commission has not granted any subsidy under budget line B3-4000 (Industrial Relations and Social Dialogue), B3-4002 (Information and training measures for workers' organisations) or B3-4003 (Information, consultation and participation of representatives of undertakings) for any activity which had the aim to organize or support a demonstration in May 2001 in London protesting about proposed Marks & Spencer closure.

(2002/C 40 E/083)

**WRITTEN QUESTION E-1705/01**

**by Fernando Fernández Martín (PPE-DE) to the Commission**

(14 June 2001)

*Subject:* Means of payment

The incidence of payment by credit card may be expected to increase considerably in the future: such payment will be a key instrument in the transition to the euro, since it will be vital for consumers' payments and movements within the EU. However, in practice the banks oblige retailers to bear the costs

of credit card transactions, while the rates of commission charged vary considerably from one Member State to another.

Can the Commission provide information on the different rates of commission charged by the banks in the Member States, and on any specific plans it may have for EU-wide harmonisation in this field?

Does the Commission intend to adopt, or has it already adopted, any special measures to alleviate the losses which will arise from the large-scale use of credit cards following the transition to the euro, for those retailers whose profit margin is non-elastic and who are therefore unable to pass on to the consumer the costs arising from credit card transactions (e.g. petrol pump operators and service stations)?

Can the Commission supply information on the compatibility with Community law of the rates of commission established by credit card companies and banks for each transaction and of the circumstance that these companies are in practice forcing retailers to bear the costs of credit card transactions?

**Answer given by Mr Bolkestein on behalf of the Commission**

*(20 September 2001)*

If a retailer wishes to accept payment by credit card, he has to enter into a contract with an acquiring bank. This contract specifies the rates to be charged to the retailer for the service (retail transaction fee).

In determining the retail transaction fee, the acquiring bank takes account of its costs (transaction processing costs, interchange fees, payment terminal maintenance costs, etc.) and its profit margin in the local competitive context. The actual retail transaction fees can therefore vary considerably from one Member State to the next.

The fact that acquiring banks charge a retail transaction fee for a service does not conflict with Community rules. The Commission does not intend to intervene in that competitive commercial process to regulate the amount charged to retailers for the service, nor is it the Commission's aim to harmonise the situation within the Community.

Nonetheless, the Commission feels that the introduction of the euro should also lead to a single payment area and therefore, on 25 July 2001, proposed a draft regulation laying down a principle of non-discrimination in charges for payments in euros. The implications of this, as far as the Honourable Member's question is concerned, are that the retailer must pay the same fee for all transactions, whether domestic or cross-border.

(2002/C 40 E/084)

**WRITTEN QUESTION E-1709/01**

**by Olivier Dupuis (TDI) to the Council**

*(15 June 2001)*

*Subject:* Mount Kailas

A number of press agencies and specialist magazines have recently reported that the Chinese authorities have given permission for a Spanish expedition, led by Mr Jesús Martínez Novos, to climb Mount Kailas in Tibet. This mountain, which is over 6 000 metres high and which the Tibetans also call Gang Rinpoche, is a sacred place for three religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, and Tibetan Buddhism). The Dalai Lama has responded by condemning the Chinese decision and declaring the attitude of the Chinese authorities and the members of the Spanish expedition to be an affront to the feelings of those who practise the three religions concerned.