

Answer given by Mr Monti on behalf of the Commission

(31 July 2001)

On 1 June 2001, the Commission has decided to undertake a full, second phase investigation of the proposed acquisition of joint control over Spanish utility Hidroeléctrica del Cantábrico S.A. (Hidrocantábrico) by Spanish Group Villar Mir and Energie Baden-Württemberg (EnBW). The Commission considers that the proposed operation raises serious doubts, as it could consolidate the existing collective dominant position in the Spanish electricity market. It will also examine the extent to which the dominant position of Electricité de France (EdF), which jointly controls EnBW, could be strengthened. The Spanish government has asked referral of the case, but as the Commission is starting an in-depth probe, according to article 9 of the Merger Regulation⁽¹⁾ it does not need to take a decision on the request made by the national authorities at this stage of the procedure.

The Commission has from the date it decided to open a second phase investigation, a maximum of four months to reach a final decision.

⁽¹⁾ Council Regulation (EEC) No 4064/89 of 21 December 1989, on the control of concentrations between undertakings (OJ L 395, 30.12.1989), as last amended by Council Regulation (EC) No 1310/97 of 30 June 1997 (OJ L 180, 9.7.1997).

(2001/C 364 E/212)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-1751/01**by Carlos Ripoll y Martínez de Bedoya (PPE-DE) to the Commission**

(15 June 2001)

Subject: Aid for dried fruit

Agriculture plays only a small part in economic activity on the island of Majorca. Nevertheless, agriculture is a key element in its social structure and in regional planning and environmental protection policy on the island.

Dried fruit accounts for the bulk of agricultural production in Majorca, and the reduction or abolition of European Union aid would therefore deal a heavy blow to social cohesion on the island, since virtually all farming activity would disappear and farms would be abandoned.

1. What is the Commission's policy on dried fruit?
2. Will aid policy for dried fruit be continued?
3. Will the Commission draw a distinction between possible types of aid in line with their social impact in the various areas?

Answer given by Mr Fischler on behalf of the Commission

(30 July 2001)

1. The policy of the Commission on nuts (almonds, hazelnuts, walnuts, pistachios and carobs) since 1989 has been to support the nut sector through specific and temporary measures. In this context, specific aid has been granted to the nut sector for 10 years under the provisions of Title IIa of Regulation (EEC) No 1035/72 of the Council of 18 May 1972 on the common organization of the market in fruit and vegetables⁽¹⁾ (improvement plans). The aim of the measure has been essentially to improve productivity and competitiveness.

A temporary specific flat-rate aid for hazelnuts was granted between 1997 and 2000.

2. Community expenditure from 1990 to 2000 was over € 800 million. Further expenditure of nearly € 200 million is foreseen until 2006 for improvement plans still in operation. In addition to this, producer organisations whose improvement plans were approved in 1990 were able to request continued financing of their plans for up to one year.

However such specific aid was always intended to be temporary and digressive, in order to allow a shift of financial responsibility on to the growers. On this basis, the Commission considers that a prolongation of improvement plans to provide economic support for the sector is not the most appropriate method to address this issue. The issue of nuts therefore has to be looked at in a wider context.

As for all other products in the fruit and vegetable sector, aid is available for nuts through the operational fund scheme of Council Regulation (EC) No 2200/96 of 28 October 1996 on the common organization of the market in fruit and vegetables⁽²⁾, which provides financial support for all fruit and vegetables marketed through producer organisations.

3. Finally, taking into account environmental and social aspects of nut production, Member States can of course include nuts in their rural development plans under the conditions of Council Regulation (EC) No 1257/1999 of 17 May 1999 on support for rural development from the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF) and amending and repealing certain Regulations⁽³⁾.

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 118, 20.5.1972.

⁽²⁾ OJ L 297, 21.11.1996.

⁽³⁾ OJ L 160, 26.6.1999.

(2001/C 364 E/213)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-1754/01

by Alexander de Roo (Verts/ALE) to the Commission

(15 June 2001)

Subject: Electricity from renewable sources in the Netherlands

No fewer than 40% of households in the Netherlands are considering switching to electricity from renewable sources. As from 1 July 2001, consumers in the Netherlands will be able to select their own supplier of renewable ('green') electricity, no matter where they live. Essent BV is already offering green electricity at prices which undercut those of electricity from non-renewable sources. The price differential has been made possible by the Regulatory Energy Tax, which is not levied on green electricity. In order to meet the rapidly growing demand, Dutch suppliers wish to buy in green electricity from abroad.

The Netherlands Ministry of Economic Affairs wishes to limit imports of green electricity because it fears the loss of revenue from the Regulatory Energy Tax if large numbers of people switch to green electricity. The sum at stake is said to be € 1,8 billion (NLG 4 billion).

The Regulatory Energy Tax (commonly referred to as the EcoTax) was introduced with the aim of curbing energy consumption and encouraging consumers to switch to green electricity. The revenue is intended to enable income tax to be cut and labour made cheaper in relation to energy.

Surely this is a senseless turn of events?

To what extent are the plans of the Ministry of Economic Affairs incompatible with the liberalisation of the energy market?