

December Council', and the Member States 'to apply procedures for the issue of visas with maximum rigour and to this end step up local consular cooperation'. The Council has also invited the Commission 'to submit proposals for establishing a network for information exchanges concerning the visas issued'. The Commission has confirmed that it will submit such a proposal, as well as proposals to reinforce the security features of visas modifying the proposal for a Council Regulation amending Regulation 1683/95 laying down a uniform format for visas currently under examination in the Council.

Council bodies are also examining the possibility of establishing common visa issuing offices.

(2002/C 93 E/201)

WRITTEN QUESTION P-2599/01

by Antonios Trakatellis (PPE-DE) to the Commission

(19 September 2001)

Subject: Operation of Olympic Airways: privatisation and State aid

After the failure of the two programmes aimed at restructuring a debt-ridden Olympic Airways through the provision of Drs 3 trillion in State aid, the Greek Government has gone back on its original decision to privatise the company by declaring it bankrupt and splitting it into two companies (one profit-making, the other loss-making) and in May 2001 invited offers for a majority stake in the company. Although the highest bidder was selected following an assessment of the offers, negotiations on the sale of the company have yet to be opened. There are a great many unclarified aspects of this case relating to Community law and the continued operation of Olympic Airways under these circumstances is creating further debt.

Will the Commission, therefore, say:

1. whether Greece has fulfilled its obligations to the European Union under the two restructuring programmes and, if not, which obligations it has yet to fulfill,
2. what amount of State or other aid the company received for operations in 2000 and 2001 and whether such aid, e.g. payment of Olympic Airways' dues to the Spata airport authority by means of interest-free loans from the Greek Government, was notified to and approved by the Commission in accordance with Community rules, and
3. what representations it has made to the Greek authorities to speed up the privatisation process, establish transparent rules for the sale of the company and produce data such as the official accounts for 1999 and 2000?

Answer given by Mrs de Palacio on behalf of the Commission

(25 October 2001)

The Commission has been closely following the ongoing privatisation process of Olympic Airways since its starting point in December 2000. In this context, it has stressed to the Greek authorities that the privatisation procedure has to fully observe the principles of transparency, neutrality and non-discrimination and that both the process as well as the transaction itself cannot contain any state aid. The Greek authorities have stated that the privatisation deal will be duly notified to the Commission.

On the basis of a complaint the Commission has asked the Greek authorities for clarifications of various aspects relating to the compatibility of the current situation of the company with the Commission's passed decisions relating to state aid matters and, in a more recent correspondence, it inquired about the state of payment of various amounts since its 1998 decision. Following a first reaction from the Greek authorities in August, the Commission expects to receive such detailed information before the end of October. Therefore, the Commission will be only thereafter in a position to respond to the Honourable Member's detailed points.
