

However, the main maps are presented only in the English version of the report, and the far Western Atlantic edge of Europe is cut off – namely the Autonomous Region of the Azores, which is European not only in law, but by virtue of geography.

Does the Commission intend to publish the other language versions with the maps in their entirety?

Does it intend to cover the European section of the Atlantic in Map I?

Does it intend to disseminate the report as broadly as the importance of the issue merits?

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(<sup>1</sup>) OJ L 375, 31.12.1991, p. 1.

(<sup>2</sup>) COM(2002) 407 final.

### **Answer given by Mrs Wallström on behalf of the Commission**

*(17 October 2002)*

The Commission thanks the Honourable Member for his appreciation of the report on the implementation of Directive 91/676/EEC, published this year and now being printed. It is true that the situation gives cause for concern, but significant progress is beginning to be seen both in the water monitoring systems and in the designation of vulnerable zones, the content of action programmes and the monitoring of their application.

All the language versions of the report may indeed be consulted on the Commission's internet server, but the maps (which take up a lot of server space) have only been included in the English version. The Office for Official Publications of the European Communities (Eur-OP) is including these maps in colour in the other language versions of the paper edition of this report to be published by the end of 2002 in all the languages of the Union.

As far the Azores are concerned, these islands feature in the general map of vulnerable zones (although no vulnerable zone has as yet been officially designated in that area), but not in the maps monitoring changes in water quality, since no data on such monitoring activities in the Azores was forwarded for the year 2000 in the report from Portugal.

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(2003/C 52 E/221)

### **WRITTEN QUESTION E-2693/02**

**by Bart Staes (Verts/ALE) to the Commission**

*(26 September 2002)*

*Subject:* Uniform registration system for weapons

A good number of arms manufacturers have a system for identifying and registering the weapons they produce. Usually serial numbers are put on one or more of the weapon's components. Exchange of information among the EU countries as to the method used is somewhat patchy. In addition, the markings used at present can sometimes be removed very easily. Each of these factors adds weight to the call for a simple, efficient and universally applicable method. The markings can be kept in a national register so that the route taken by arms found in a conflict zone can subsequently be traced.

Will the Commission take steps to draw up appropriate legislation on uniform registration of weapons within the EU? If not, why not?

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

(22 October 2002)

Suitable and generalised marking and registration of firearms are essential elements in tracing them, and the Commission is fully aware of this need.

Article 4 of Council Directive 91/477/EEC of 18 June 1991 on control of the acquisition and possession of weapons<sup>(1)</sup> and of their transfer to another Member State already requires a dealer to keep a register containing information concerning all the main categories of firearms received or disposed of by him, including such particulars as enable any weapon to be identified, in particular the type, make, model, calibre and serial number thereof and the names and addresses of the supplier and the person acquiring the weapon.

This Directive will shortly need to be revised, following the signing by the Commission on behalf of the Community and by the Member States of the UN protocol on the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms. This protocol contains specific provisions concerning the marking of firearms, and the Commission is currently studying their transposition.

It should be noted that one of the provisions of the protocol is that the signatory states will have to encourage their weapons industries to develop measures designed to prevent the alteration or removal of markings. In response to the honourable Member's concern, it should also be pointed out that the protocol increases to ten years, compared with five years in the Directive, the minimum time during which information on firearms should be kept.

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<sup>(1)</sup> OJ L 256, 13.9.1991.

(2003/C 52 E/222)

**WRITTEN QUESTION E-2694/02****by Bart Staes (Verts/ALE) to the Commission**

(26 September 2002)

*Subject:* Simplification of the import and export licensing system for defence equipment within the EU

According to a report of 28 April 1999 by the Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers (Belgian Chamber of Parliamentarians) (doc. 614/4 – 95/96), the Commission was at that time planning to organise a simplified system of import and export licences for defence equipment within (!) the EU.

Can the Commission say whether the information in this report is correct and what the present state of affairs is as regards the development of this licensing system? Can the Commission tell me – if it has not yet taken any steps in this direction – that it is still intending to do this? If not, why not?

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

(25 October 2002)

The Commission has always been in favour of any method which allows progress to be made in simplifying intra-Community transfers of defence equipment which would, in particular, involve a more precise definition of this equipment and an easing of the formalities surrounding their movement, regardless of the instruments used.

Given the particularly sensitive nature of the problems associated with this issue, which also touch on many aspects of European integration, including the Common Foreign and Security Policy, a broad consensus is highly desirable so that any initiative in this field can provide real added value.

It is therefore important for the Commission to have a clear understanding of what the added value of a legislative initiative might be, its chances of success, and any risks involved. This evaluation could be conducted by the Commission and discussed by competent working groups.