

- an additional EUR 12 million for studies and works on the Lyon-Montméria section;
- EUR 29 million for studies and works concerning the Turin node and the future freight ring.

The Community support is therefore substantial, in particular for the study phase⁽¹⁾. Taking into account the complexity and the cost of completing the Lyon-Turin project, the Commission has also proposed to raise the maximum Community co-financing rate for works to 20% (compared with 10% under the current Regulation) for trans-frontier rail projects crossing natural barriers. The amended proposal⁽²⁾, on which Parliament gave its opinion on first reading in July 2002 is still on the Council table, and it is impossible to anticipate when the 20% rate will become effective.

⁽¹⁾ COM(2001) 370 final.

⁽²⁾ Figures rounded off.

⁽³⁾ The overall budget provided for in Parliament and Council Regulation (EC) No 1655/1999 of 19 July 1999 amending Regulation (EC) No 2236/95 laying down general rules for the granting of Community financial aid in the field of trans-European networks, OJ L 197, 29.7.1999, amounts to EUR 4 170 million for the TEN-T for the period 2000-2006.

⁽⁴⁾ COM(2003) 38 final.

(2003/C 268 E/176)

WRITTEN QUESTION P-0924/03

by Jorge Moreira Da Silva (PPE-DE) to the Commission

(18 March 2003)

Subject: Funding the Natura 2000 network

The Natura 2000 network is a basic instrument of national and European nature conservation policies. Although the list of Natura 2000 sites is not complete, it already counts for 18% of the territory of the Union. 22% of Portuguese territory is covered and adequate financial arrangements are required to guarantee the protection of the sites included in the Natura 2000 network. Furthermore, in order to meet the objectives established by the Gothenburg Strategy and the Johannesburg Implementation Plan, a Natura 2000 network needs to be extended to cover the marine environment.

1. When will the new rules for funding Natura 2000 be submitted? What is the total amount earmarked for it?
2. How does the Commission intend to extend the Natura 2000 network to the marine environment?

Answer given by Mrs Wallström on behalf of the Commission

(14 April 2003)

Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora⁽¹⁾ includes, in Article 8, a provision for Community co-financing of the management of Natura 2000, within the framework of the existing financial instruments. A preliminary assessment of the financial needs and of the possible options for Community co-financing was prepared in 2002 by a working group composed of experts from several Member States, including Portugal. The final report of the working group is available on the Internet, and indicates three possible ways to proceed.

The Commission is presently analysing the above-mentioned report of the working group and will present a Communication to the Council and the Parliament in September 2003 on possibilities to finance the Natura 2000-network.

Concerning the marine environment, the Commission is aware that the implementation of the relevant provisions of Directive 92/43/EEC for the protection of marine species as well as the establishment of the Natura 2000 network in the marine environment is making slow progress. The delays are mostly linked to

a lack of scientific knowledge and the high costs of carrying out research and surveys in offshore marine areas. To accelerate this implementation, the Commission created a Marine expert group, with the participation of experts from most Member States, including Portugal. The aim of the expert group is to establish a European common approach to deal with the problems of full implementation of Natura 2000 in the marine environment, and its first meeting took place in Brussels in March 2003.

(¹) OJ L 206, 22.7.1992.

(2003/C 268 E/177)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0927/03

**by Monica Frassoni (Verts/ALE), Miquel Mayol i Raynal (Verts/ALE),
José Mendiluce Pereiro (PSE), Alexander de Roo (Verts/ALE)
and Chris Davies (ELDR) to the Commission**

(24 March 2003)

Subject: Proposed transfer of water from the River Ebro to Barcelona

According to a press release published by Europa Press on 6 March 2003, the European Commission is soon to approve cofinancing for the 'Catalonia mini-transfer' (diversion of water from the River Ebro to metropolitan Barcelona).

The Catalonia mini-transfer, which is also known as the 'Interconexión de Redes CAT-ATLL' (interconnection of the water supply systems for Tarragona and Ter Llobregat) is the first step in the process of water transferral from the Ebro to Catalonia's internal river basins, and will constitute the first section of all the Ebro transfers envisaged under the Spanish National Hydrological Plan. Presenting it as an interconnection of the water supply systems for Tarragona and Ter Llobregat is unjustified from a technical standpoint, given its hydrological and geometric characteristics, and circumvents the environmental and economic checks on all transfers from the Ebro.

This plan for the interconnection of water supply systems, which the Government of the Autonomous Region of Catalonia made available to the public in August 2002, is not yet a consolidated plan since the 40 000 complaints submitted by various organisations still have to be resolved. Once this has been done, a definitive plan would have to be drawn up, with this being the plan that could in principle receive Community funding.

1. Can the Commission indicate whether the press release published by Europa Press is accurate?
2. If it is accurate, how is it that the Commission can authorise the cofinancing of a project for which the administrative approval process has not yet been completed?
3. Is the Commission aware that neither a section-by-section environmental impact study nor a global study have been carried out for this interconnection plan?
4. Does the Commission not feel that it should have at its disposal a joint global assessment that takes into account the impact of the various projects to transfer water north and south from the lower reaches of the River Ebro before authorising cofinancing for them?

Answer given by Mr Barnier on behalf of the Commission

(21 May 2003)

The Commission has not yet taken a decision on the project 'Conexión de las redes regionales de abastecimiento de agua potable del CAT y ATLL' (Interconnection of the water supply systems for Tarragona and the Ter-Llobregat), as this project is still in the study phase. All decisions approving support for projects under the Cohesion Fund must respect the requirements of the Regulation as well as with all relevant Community legislation.

The Spanish authorities have informed the Commission that they consider that this project falls under the exceptions set out in annex II of Council Directive No 85/337/CEE of 27 June 1985, on assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment(¹), as amended by Council Directive No 97/11/EC(²), and, accordingly, an environmental impact assessment is not required. Furthermore,