

However, even though it is considered important that non-profit-making bodies should tender for and run EU projects, such bodies find it difficult to secure access to programmes co-financed by the EU on account of the procedural problems they encounter and, in particular, the fact that they cannot implement projects without having money to spend in advance.

In view of the above, is the Commission intending to propose a scheme whereby funding could be made available in advance, subject to the performance of qualitative and quantitative checks on the bodies concerned and the status thereof?

Answer given by Mrs Reding on behalf of the Commission

(1 September 2003)

The Commission agrees with the Honourable Member on the fact that bodies active at European level in the field of youth are essential in the socio-cultural development of European society and therefore considers that participation by young people in civil society should be encouraged. More generally speaking, the Commission's administrative and financial procedures, in conformity with the Financial Regulation and the relevant legal basis, allow for support to youth groups through appropriate grant schemes and payment mechanisms (e.g. simple application forms, prefinancing payments up to 80 %, use of lump sums).

The Youth Programme has five application deadlines per year with the objective of ensuring that grants are paid before the start of the projects concerned.

Regarding the support for operating costs to bodies active at European level in the field of youth, prefinancing payments are in fact made on a regular basis. The Commission also makes every effort to ensure that organisations receive the grants as soon as possible in the year they are going to incur the expenditure. In 2003 all pre-financing payments to non-governmental youth organisations were made before April.

(2004/C 33 E/232)

WRITTEN QUESTION P-2149/03

by Astrid Lulling (PPE-DE) to the Commission

(24 June 2003)

Subject: Eurostat

The debates conducted and the statements made concerning Eurostat in recent months have highlighted a number of examples of incorrect practice: criminal proceedings are opened against individuals without their knowledge and without them first being heard by the judicial authorities, the press prints serious accusations which seem to go well beyond the information available, and the staff of Eurostat see their professional competence called into question and their work disrupted by stringent checks which are in some cases out of all proportion to the alleged actions which prompted them.

What steps is the Commission taking to ensure that the rights of the persons involved are properly respected in the proceedings now under way?

What measures does it intend to take if departments are shown to have breached the rules on the protection of those rights, despite their obligation to observe them?

Does it take the view that the reporting of the case has blown the accusations up out of all proportion to the facts?

Answer given by Mr Solbes Mira on behalf of the Commission

(3 September 2003)

The intense media interest in the Eurostat investigations even before their completion does not help to provide an objective picture of the situation, particularly as some aspects have been taken out of context. To this extent, certain press articles may, regrettably, have compromised full compliance with the principle of the presumption of innocence.

At the same time, the investigations currently under way within Eurostat represent a response both to Parliament's request in the context of the follow-up to the 2001 discharge procedure and to the Commission's desire to clarify the situation completely and establish that the problems identified have been definitely addressed and that, if necessary, further action can be taken. This is not in any way to question the competence of Eurostat staff. Moreover, the rules governing investigations offer all officials or staff means of redress pursuant to the provisions of Article 90 of the Staff Regulations.

Lastly, with regard to recent developments relating to the situation in Eurostat and the action this calls for, the Commission would refer the Honourable Member to the series of measures adopted at its meetings on 9 and 23 July 2003.

(2004/C 33 E/233)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2168/03

by Jean Lambert (Verts/ALE) to the Commission

(30 June 2003)

Subject: Violation of safety conditions in the Olympic Stadium in Marousi, Greece

Preparations for the 2004 Athens Olympic Games are now under way. Construction work is taking place in Marousi, the town where the Olympic Stadium is located.

Is the Commission aware of the following serious breaches of Greek law:

- The ignoring of safety conditions because of time pressure. We are told that, to date, 10 people have died and many others have been seriously injured.
- The prolongation of working hours: The law provides for a maximum seven-hour working day for building work. In this instance, workers often work 9-10 hours per day and seven days a week without proper overtime pay.
- The infringement of workers' rights: Workers were pressurised into agreeing to give up the right to strike because of the major national importance of this edifice.
- Lower pay than that set out in the national agreement: Many foreign workers are forced to accept lower pay.
- The misappropriation of pension funds: That most frequently affects foreign workers. Exploiting the fact that those workers do not know their rights, the employers pay pension-fund contributions covering only 7-10 working days in respect of workers who worked 26 days in a month.
- Lack of control: Despite complaints, government controls are not properly carried out. Employers are informed in advance of the inspection visits, and they have the opportunity to cover up most of the infringements. Even those infringements that are proven are not punished. Because of the threat of a possible delay that might jeopardise the success of the Olympic Games, the government appears to ignore infringements.

What measures will the Commission take in order to put an end to these infringements relating to working conditions and to guarantee the employees' health and safety at work, given the fact that their work will be intensified as the date for the 2004 Olympic Games approaches?

Answer given by Mrs Diamantopoulou on behalf of the Commission

(14 August 2003)

The Commission has not received any complaints concerning the breaches of Greek law pointed out by the Honourable Member, but shares her concerns over them. Thus, the Commission will invite the Greek Authorities to submit their observations on the safety conditions in the Olympic Stadium in Marousi.