

- (d) in addition to the standard package offered by De Lijn, municipalities may buy in from a special 'menu' additional services or fare reductions for target groups;
- (e) collective season tickets are sold to firms for their staff as an alternative to the reimbursement of individual travel expenses, with employees' partners also receiving a free season ticket;
- (f) De Lijn plays an active role in preparing policy decisions and in hiring small competitors to provide 50 % of bus services?

4. Is the Commission prepared to draw the attention of other competent authorities in the EU to the success of the Flemish model and to remove obstacles which might prevent such authorities from following the Flemish example?

Source: OV Magazine (Netherlands), 10 July 2003

Answer given by Mrs de Palacio on behalf of the Commission

(12 September 2003)

The Commission is keenly aware of the importance of high quality public transport services. In view of this it undertakes a number of initiatives in this field.

One of the most relevant activities has been its work on the proposal adopted in 2002⁽¹⁾ on action by Member States concerning public service requirements and the award of public service contracts in passenger transport by rail, road and inland waterway. As recent court cases have shown, it is now more urgent than ever to make progress with this dossier.

There are a number of examples of successful growth of public transport use in the Union and the Commission welcomes the success that has been achieved by 'De Lijn'.

Many factors can contribute to desirable developments in this field. Some are matters for the management of public transport operators, while others rely on an appropriate legislative framework. It is appropriate for local authorities to have sufficient freedom to address local issues and encourage public transport development, but they must of course respect the framework of Union rules.

The Commission welcomes also the specific measures for target groups (young people, elderly and people with disabilities).

The Commission is keen to promote examples of good practice in public transport. The European Local Transport Information Service⁽²⁾ is a project which the Union has funded for sharing examples of good practice.

Another way that the Commission is supporting best practice is through its urban transport benchmarking exercise comprising a series of projects. The third project is starting now and the Commission is keen to encourage public authorities to participate.

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 151 E, 25.6.2002.

⁽²⁾ www.ELTIS.org

(2004/C 65 E/186)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2528/03 by David Bowie (PSE) to the Council

(29 July 2003)

Subject: Body piercing

Does the Council consider it necessary to make proposals for minimum common standards for licensing and operation for the commercial provision of the services of tattooing or body piercing in the EU in order to protect the health of the general public and to avoid needless tragedies like the recent death of Daniel Hindle in Sheffield in the UK? If not, why not?

Reply*(17 November 2003)*

The Council would remind the Honourable Member that it is for the Commission to submit proposals to the Council within the scope of the powers laid down by the Treaty.

No proposal in this area has been submitted to the Council so far.

*(2004/C 65 E/187)***WRITTEN QUESTION E-2532/03****by Gabriele Stauner (PPE-DE) to the Commission***(29 July 2003)*

Subject: Conflict of interests for the Commission's Accounting Officer

On 1 January 2003 Mr Brian Gray was appointed Accounting Officer of the Commission. He is also Deputy Director-General for the Budget.

Does the Commission consider that this dual role is in keeping with the provision of the new budgetary rules, which require a strict functional separation between execution of the budget and accounting?

The Directorate-General for the Budget's organization chart on the Internet shows that while a number of heads of division of this Directorate-General report directly to Mr Gray, this is not true of the accounting services.

Will the Commission say whether this is an oversight? If not, to whom do the accounting services report?

The organisation chart also shows that the Secretariat of the Commission's Audit Progress Committee reports to Mr Gray. He thus has a considerable say as regards inspections carried out by the Commission's internal audit service and the evaluation of its findings.

Does the Commission agree that this situation creates a potential conflict of interests for Mr Gray, in particular if the internal audit service wishes to inspect accounting and cash management?

Answer given by Mrs Schreyer on behalf of the Commission*(30 September 2003)*

In recognition of the importance of the role played by the Accounting Officer, the Commission decided that this function should be occupied at the level of A1, and appointed Mr Brian Gray, the Deputy Director-General of Directorate General (DG) Budget. The execution of the budget is the responsibility of the delegated authorising officers in the operational Directorate-Generals. DG Budget is responsible for the execution of own resources and of its own administrative expenses. Mr Gray has no sub-delegations for any revenue or expenditure operations, nor do any staff of the services which report directly to him, namely Directorate C, and Unit 01. The Commission considers therefore that there is a strict functional separation in his respect.

The work associated with the responsibilities of the Accounting Officer, as set out in Articles 61 and 63 of the Financial Regulation⁽¹⁾, is undertaken by Directorate C of DG Budget, the Director of which reports directly to the Deputy Director-General. The organisation chart will clarify this issue.

In order to facilitate the organisation of the Audit Progress Committee meetings, which concern several Commission services and external experts, the Commission decided on 9 July 2003 to transfer the Secretariat of the Audit Progress Committee to the Secretariat General. The organisation chart will be updated in this respect once the administrative procedures to implement this decision have been completed.

⁽¹⁾ Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 1605/2002 of 25 June 2002 on the Financial Regulation applicable to the general budget of the European Communities, OJ L 248, 16.9.2002.