

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

(31 January 2003)

As regards the reference of the Honourable Member to the alleged deliberate destruction of hamster colonies, the Commission considers such a practice in principle to be contrary to Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1991 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (the 'Habitats Directive'). This Directive prohibits the deliberate disturbance of these species and the deterioration or destruction of breeding sites or resting places.

The issue of the protection of the hamster in the Netherlands is the object of an ongoing infringement procedure. Within the context of this procedure, the Netherlands have communicated the hamster protection plan for the period from 2000-2004. This plan includes an annual survey of hamster populations, information and communication measures, the purchase of agricultural land in the most important hamster areas, as well as management agreements promoting hamster friendly cultivation methods.

Article 12, Article 4, of the Habitats Directive provides for the monitoring of the incidental capture and killing of animals and the need to take measures to ensure that this does not have a significant negative impact on the species concerned. Article 16, Article 1, allows for derogations from the obligation to establish a system of strict protection for species like the hamster as provided for in Article 12. In this context, the Commission considers it permissible to take compensatory measures if a habitat is destroyed or if its quality deteriorates, provided there is no satisfactory alternative and that it is in one of the interests listed in Article 16, Article 1 (for example, in the interest of protecting wild fauna and flora and conserving natural habitats).

With a view to determine the further possible course of action, the Commission is currently examining the information provided by the Netherlands in reply to the additional letter of formal notice in which it concluded, inter alia, that the Netherlands had failed to properly apply the provisions of Article 12, Article 4, and 16, Article 1, of the Habitats Directive.

(2004/C 11 E/065)

**WRITTEN QUESTION E-3869/02**

**by Sérgio Marques (PPE-DE) to the Commission**

(10 January 2003)

*Subject:* Territory of the Madeira archipelago

The 18 December 2002 edition of the Portuguese daily 'Diário de Notícias' reported that the maps of the European Union produced by the Commission's cartography department represent the 'Ilhas Selvagens', which belong to the Portuguese autonomous region of Madeira, as being part of the Spanish territory of the Canary Islands. That report includes an official EU website reference ([http://www.europa.eu.int/abc/maps/regions/spain/canarias\\_en.htm](http://www.europa.eu.int/abc/maps/regions/spain/canarias_en.htm)), a visit to which confirms this decidedly anomalous circumstance.

According to the same source, this is not the first time that the EU's official maps have contained an error of this kind concerning the exact location of the Portuguese/Spanish border.

The Commission:

1. Can it explain how such a serious error was allowed to appear on the EU's official maps, and indicate those responsible? Can it state when the error will be corrected?
2. Can it confirm that the relevant official in the cartography department in which the maps were, presumably, prepared is of Spanish nationality?
3. What action does it consider should be taken to ensure that errors of this nature will not occur in the future?

**Answer given by Mr Barnier on behalf of the Commission***(12 February 2003)*

The map referred to by the Honourable Member could indeed lead to an incorrect interpretation of the position of the border between Spain and Portugal. This technical mistake was corrected as soon as the Commission became aware of it. The new map clearly shows the 'Ilhas Selvagens' as belonging to Portugal.

(2004/C 11 E/066)

**WRITTEN QUESTION E-3872/02****by Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL) to the Commission***(10 January 2003)**Subject: Defence of employment and social inclusion*

The Portuguese branch of the Danish footwear-manufacturing multinational ECCO, which operates a plant in São João de Ver, in the municipality of Santa Maria da Feira (Portugal) that currently employs about one thousand workers, has announced via an internal circular that it intends to close a production unit, thus making some 180 workers redundant.

This follows on the heels of earlier restructurings which made some 300 workers, both male and female, redundant.

The Commission:

1. Can it state whether the ECCO group has received Community aid in Portugal or in any other EU Member State in order to set up factories, develop production, provide training, etc?
2. Is it aware of other restructurings accompanied by redundancies in companies belonging to this group in other EU Member States?
3. Can it state what information exists on the economic and financial evolution of the ECCO group? What measures will be taken to prevent unemployment in Portugal from rising further, in the context of the European Employment Strategy and the vital importance of social inclusion?

**Answer given by Mrs Diamantopoulou on behalf of the Commission***(20 February 2003)*

In accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, the Council Regulation (EC) no 1260/1999 of 21 June 1999 laying down general provisions on the Structural Funds<sup>(1)</sup> for the period (2000-2006) assigns the responsibility of implementing and monitoring of structural funds assistance to the Member States.

Therefore, the decision to approve projects submitted by private companies for Community funding is the responsibility of the Member State, through the power assigned to the management authorities of the various operational programmes.

The Commission has, however, been informed by the Instituto de Gestão do Fundo Social Europeu (IGFSE), that the company ECCO'LET (Portugal) — Fábrica de Sapatos, Lda. has benefited from the following incentives for training their staff:

*(In euro)*

Programme	Project number	Data approved	Total incentive approved	Payments to date
PEDIP II <sup>(1)</sup>	43.0621	26.05.1996	102 244	102 243
PEDIP II	43.11222	31.12.1999	70 446	43 273
POE <sup>(2)</sup>	00.9979	04.10.2002	168 744	0

<sup>(1)</sup> Programa específico para o Desenvolvimento Industrial Português (specific programme for the development of Portuguese industry).

<sup>(2)</sup> Programa Operacional Económico (operational programme for the economy).