

WRITTEN QUESTION E-3112/03

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to the Commission

Subject: EU information policy - legal basis for the European 'Carrefours ruraux' and 'Info-Points Europe' - urgent need for operational subsidy for 2004

Parliament has on numerous occasions stressed the importance for information and communication policy of the networks created by the EU in the Member States, including the European 'Carrefours ruraux' and the 'Info-Points Europe' (IPEs).

The position is expressed in communications COM(2001) 354 and COM(2002) 350 that the networks' 'experience, flexibility and immediate proximity to the representatives of civil society and the general public make them invaluable'.

The Commission has consistently displayed its commitment to this policy, as in President Prodi's reply of 27 September 2002 to a written question by a number of MEPs (E-2357/02¹), in which he stated that 'knowledge and understanding of the policies pursued and projects implemented by the Union are gaining ground thanks to the information ... networks'.

A letter sent out by DG PRESS on 29 September 2003 informed the national organisations that host the networks - contrary to previous announcements - that the renewal of the agreement for 2004 will no longer carry the right to a subsidy; for the future, the Commission will consider new forms of cooperation, in the light of the entry into force on 1 January 2003 of the Financial Regulations 1605/2002² and 2342/2002³.

These new and unforeseen circumstances are such as to jeopardise the very survival of the networks, and will, at all events, drastically reduce their capacity to engage in dialogue with the public, at a crucial moment in the Union's history which calls for such capacities to be developed further.

Can the Commission state:

- whether it believes it necessary to act as soon as possible in order to prevent the dispersal of the existing fund of relationships, contacts, expertise and material and non-material assets which has been built up over the many years of activity of the EU's information networks, by drawing up a proposal for a legal basis for the granting of legal personality to, or, at least, the recognition of the 'Carrefours' and the IPEs as delegated bodies or Community bodies pursuant to Articles 54, 55 or 185 of Council Regulation 1605/02;
- whether it intends, for 2004, to execute the budget heading (16 5 01) traditionally dedicated to the funding of the information points in such a way as to reward, rather than penalise, those who have made a long-term investment in them?

¹ OJ C 92 E, 17.4.2003, p. 158.

² OJ L 248, 16.9.2002, p. 1.

³ OJ L 357, 31.12.2002, p. 1.