

WRITTEN QUESTION E-1834/08

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to the Commission

Subject: Relocation and closure of the Marconi-Ericsson research centre in Rome

The Ericsson multinational company developed, at the former FATME site in Rome, a research and development centre which was at the forefront of broadband telecommunications technology thanks to the 300-plus research workers employed by Marconi, the British company bought by Ericsson, whose assets and know-how included a work force of whom two-thirds were graduates and 20% were women.

Marconi occupies several sites in Italy, and employs 150 people in Milan, 650 in Genoa and over 200 in Pagani, all of which are in danger of being downsized except for the branch in Genoa, which is to receive a total of €29 million in funding from the region of Liguria, the Italian Ministry of Telecommunications and the EU Structural Funds under the regional operational programme; all the other Marconi branches are likely to face redundancies or switch to outsourcing.

The company has proved profitable and efficient, and is a centre of excellence for telecommunications research and the electronics industry in the Rome region, in line with the development objectives agreed by the summit meeting of heads of state and government of 13-14 March 2008.

Ericsson, however, has informed its employees at the Rome site that their activities will be relocated to Croatia or India by the end of the current year, and that there is little prospect of some 300 graduate employees being offered satisfactory alternative employment with the group's other branches or affiliates in Italy or in the Lazio region.

Over the last few months the European Union has seen, instead of the encouragement of a coherent industrial research and development strategy in line with Commission objectives, as recently endorsed by the Council, the closing down of firms in technologically advanced sectors which are of crucial importance to individual Member States, as in the recent case of Nokia and the threatened closure of operations in Germany which are due to be relocated to another EU country for the sole purpose of saving labour costs, and with no regard for respect for social rights, employment quality and promoting social cohesion for workers.

Would the Commission state whether it intends to put a brake on such relocation by obliging companies such as Ericsson to uphold existing employment conditions and social rights and submit an industrial plan at European level which is consistent with developing research and safeguards employment in the Rome area and within the Marconi group, which is receiving €5 million from the European Union Structural Funds?