

ORAL QUESTION WITH DEBATE O-0067/03
pursuant to Rule 42 of the Rules of Procedure
by María Avilés Perea, on behalf of the PPE-DE Group
to the Commission

Subject: EUROSTAT

The Commission President, Mr Prodi, discussed EUROSTAT with the Conference of Presidents and members of the Budgetary Control Committee on 25 September and offered to answer further questions concerning the affair as required.

1. Why were Commissioners so slow to react to the growing signs of a crisis within EUROSTAT? Specifically:
 - a) Why were the Commission's information-flow policies so inadequate that Commissioners were apparently unaware of damaging internal auditors' reports, referrals to OLAF, OLAF investigations and OLAF submissions to national judicial authorities?
 - b) Why were the repeated efforts of whistleblowers to bring the problems within EUROSTAT to the attention of Mr Prodi and other Commissioners ignored for so long? How does the Commission propose to resolve the outstanding whistleblower cases?
 - c) What action should a Commissioner be expected to take when suspicions arise concerning the activities of a Directorate-General if, for example, he/she saw a damaging internal audit report and/or received information from a whistleblower? Is 'passivity' an adequate or acceptable response to such problems? At what stage does 'passivity' become negligence?
 - d) Was the Commission's inaction in the face of the growing evidence concerning the crisis in EUROSTAT consistent with a policy of zero-tolerance of fraud and mismanagement?
2. Does the Commission believe that the Commissioners have to take political responsibility for the actions of their Directors-General? How does this policy relate to the Commissioners' Code of Conduct and fulfil the criteria of the 'Committee of Independent Experts'?
3. Why did the reforms undertaken by the current Commission fail to uncover problems for four years after the Commission took office, allowing many unacceptable practices to continue until this summer, despite considerable information being available?
4. Does the Commission believe that Annex 3 of the Framework Agreement was applied correctly in respect of the supply of information to the European Parliament? How can such procedures work in future?
5. What action now needs to be taken in order to rectify the systemic problems, for example in connection with the responsibility of Commissioners, the flow of information, the role of OLAF and revision of the Framework Agreement (Annex 3)? Does the Commission believe that the relationship with OLAF should be clarified by making it an independent body?

Tabled: 16.10.2003

Forwarded: 20.10.2003

Deadline for reply: 27.10.2003

