

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2653/02
by Frank Vanhecke (NI)
to the Commission

Subject: Use of languages on labels on commercial products

In a reasoned opinion based on a judgment given by the Court of Justice of the European Union on 12 September, the Commission has drawn the French State's attention to the fact that the law prohibiting the exclusive use of English or of any language other than French on product labels violates a directive dating from 1978. In other words, in the Commission's view, France must tolerate the sale within its borders of products which are not marked with any information in French. The only condition is that a picture on the label should provide consumers with the necessary information. In this way, there is a danger that one particular language – English – will become overwhelmingly predominant with the Union, but there will also be a serious problem in countries and regions, such as Flanders, where highly complex and precarious legislation on the use of languages already exists which has been designed to maintain the political balance among the various language communities in the country.

1. Does not the Commission consider that this represents a violation of the principle of equality between the various languages?
2. Does not the Commission consider that this represents a clear violation of the principle of subsidiarity, provided for in the Maastricht Treaty? Surely, when it comes to consumer protection, national governments are in the best position to judge whether their own citizens, many of whom will be monolingual, will receive sufficient information?
3. What measure is the Commission considering in order to guarantee the equality of all official languages within the Union in future?