

E-2679/04EN

Answer given by Mr Borg
on behalf of the Commission
(21 December 2004)

The Commission continues to be sensitive to the consequences of the expiry of fishing rights for EC vessels in waters under Moroccan jurisdiction. The Community has earmarked very substantial financial assistance, amounting to no less than € 197 million, for the restructuring of the fleets and the fisheries sectors that are affected by the non-renewal of the EC-Morocco fisheries agreement. Moreover, a significant number of Community vessels have received financial support from the Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance (FIFG) so that they could be transferred into EU-Moroccan joint ventures, while others were able to change fishing grounds and are now covered by Fisheries Agreements with other third countries. Today both in the Community and in Morocco the situation is no longer comparable with the state of affairs at the end of 2001, not only in view of the development of their respective fisheries sectors but also in view of the state of exploitation and the urgent conservation needs of the fishery resources in Moroccan waters.

The Commission is aware that, despite all these efforts by the Community, by national and regional authorities and by the sector itself, a certain segment of the industry continues to endure some negative consequences resulting from the expiry of the fisheries agreement. This matter is all the more sensitive as these consequences affect, in particular, small-scale fisheries and the semi-industrial fleet. The Commission continues to monitor and assess these problems in the context of its cooperation with the Kingdom of Morocco.

The Commission and the Moroccan government maintain excellent relations and the EU-Morocco Association Agreement has proved to be a suitable framework. Under this Agreement we have developed a monitoring system covering all issues pertaining to fishing and the marketing of fish products. A specific joint Sub-committee has been created to ensure proper coordination and, if necessary, tackle any possible question concerning cooperation in the fisheries sector.

One of the urgent issues of common interest in this area are the talks that both sides have agreed to hold, in accordance with Articles 16 and 18 of the EU-Morocco Association Agreement, with a view to examining the progressive liberalisation of trade in fisheries products. The Commission and Morocco are planning to take this issue further under the Action Plan that will provide guidance for the enhancement of cooperation between both sides under the European Neighbourhood Policy. The Commission and the Moroccan authorities would like to reach agreement on the organisation and the date of opening of negotiations on the liberalization of fishery products at the next meeting of the Sub-committee on Agriculture and Fishing, which will probably take place at the beginning of next year.