



21.1.2010

NOTICE TO MEMBERS

Subject: Petition 1098/2007 by Juan Antonio Carrasco Ragel (Spanish), on behalf of Plataforma Por El Estudio Epidemiológico, on the conduct of an integrated epidemiologic study for the inhabitants of both Gibraltar County (Andalucia, Spain) and Gibraltar (United Kingdom)

1. Summary of petition

The petitioner asks the European Parliament to assist the inhabitants of Gibraltar County (Andalucia, Spain) in their efforts to convince relevant Spanish authorities about the need to coordinate with the Gibraltar authorities and conduct an integrated epidemiologic study for Gibraltar area. The petitioner explains that the residents of Gibraltar have serious reasons to be concerned with their health as the area would be heavily polluted due to the different industries located there. According to the petitioner, unlike the Spanish authorities, the government of Gibraltar would be willing to conduct such a study on its territory. The petitioner considers that, in order to be relevant, the study should include the whole Gibraltar and states that all those living in Gibraltar are entitled to be aware of the health risks they are exposed to.

2. Admissibility

Declared admissible on 14 March 2008. Information requested from Commission under Rule 202(6).

3. Commission reply, received on 21 January 2010.

The inhabitants of Gibraltar and Campo de Gibraltar believe that they have the right to health just like other areas of Andalusia and the right to know why they die earlier here than in other similar areas. The relevant European, Spanish, British and Andalusian legislation gives them this right, but the public body responsible for this refuses to do so. The Government of

Gibraltar is willing to conduct this epidemiological study on its own territory, but obviously it should be carried out in coordination with that of the Regional Government of Andalusia.

Therefore, the petitioners call for urgent action or any other measure considered appropriate so that the Regional Government of Andalusia carries out an epidemiological study, in coordination with the Government of Gibraltar, covering the inhabitants of Gibraltar and Campo de Gibraltar. This study must be independent and must determine whether or not the high rates of mortality of the inhabitants of this area are related to the emissions into the air and water from the industries established there.

The "*Atlas of mortality in small areas of Spain*"¹ confirmed that inhabitants of Gibraltar and Campo de Gibraltar have a high incidence of mortality, and that life expectancy is shorter than in other areas of Spain. The "*Municipal Atlas of cancer mortality in Spain*"² shows that the levels of cancer in the Campo de Gibraltar district are much higher than the average for Spain. The inhabitants of this area show rates of hospital admissions for tumours which are higher than the average for other parts of Andalusia³.

Since the 1960s, a number of industries have been set up in Campo de Gibraltar which emit hazardous substances into the air, water and natural environment, according to the 2001-2005 EPER records.

The Ministry for the Environment of the Regional Government of Andalusia entrusted the Centro Superior de Investigaciones Científicas de España with a number of studies for the Environmental Quality Plan with a view to conducting an environmental diagnosis of this district. This study concluded that "*Carrying out a general epidemiological study in Campo de Gibraltar and especially Puente Mayorga is recommended.*"

13 000 signatures were submitted to the presidency of the Regional Government of Andalusia requesting an independent epidemiological study for the Campo de Gibraltar inhabitants which would clearly determine whether the emission of products from the industries established there has anything to do with the high rates of mortality and tumours that exist in this region. The Regional Government of Andalusia, through its Ministry of Health, has refused to conduct this general study.

The European Environment and Health Action Plan 2004-2010⁴ emphasises that understanding and tackling environment related health problems requires sustained cooperation between many actors: the European Commission, Member States, national, regional and local authorities, environmental, health and research communities, industry, agriculture and stakeholders. All these actors have a shared responsibility for making progress in this complex area.

The Commission has already identified systemic exposure of the public in that area to excessive levels of air pollution as regulated under Directives 1999/30/EC⁵ and the new Directive 2008/50/EC on ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe⁶. This emphasises the importance of a proper understanding of the local pollution situation and the associated health risk in order to take appropriate action as required by the directive. In January 2009, Spain received a Letter of Formal Notice for persistently exceeding the daily and annual limit values of particulate matter

¹ Universidad Pompeu Fabra de Barcelona

² Spanish Ministry of Health

³ Study by Dr Dávila conducted at Punta de Europa de Algeciras Hospital

⁴ COM(2004) 416 final adopted by the Commission in June 2004

⁵ OJ L163, 29.6.1999

⁶ OJ L152, 11.6.2008; Directive 2008/50/EC will repeal Directive 1999/30/EC as of June 2010

PM₁₀ that entered into force in 2005. The Commission is currently taking further steps to enforce compliance with air quality legislation in the area.

Member States have the responsibility for research, education and training – being a key aspect of the environment and health interface - and for implementing monitoring and risk management measures. Member States also play a central role in ensuring that the results obtained at national level are fed into discussions at EU level (Consultative Forum on Environment & Health) and for disseminating EU information at the national and local level.

Conclusions

There is no legal obligation to carry out epidemiological studies. However, the Commission would like to point out that according to the European Environment and Health Action Plan 2004-2010¹ the understanding and tackling of environment related health problems requires a sustained cooperation between many actors: the European Commission, Member States, national, regional and local authorities, environmental, health and research communities, industry, agriculture and stakeholders and that all these actors have a shared responsibility for making progress in this complex area.

¹ COM(2004) 416 final adopted by the Commission in June 2004