

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2422/01

by Michiel van Hulten (PSE) and Ieke van den Burg (PSE)
to the Commission

Subject: Implementation of the ESF in the Netherlands from 1994 to 1996

On 20 July 2001 Director-General Quintin wrote to the Netherlands government informing it of the commencement of the procedure provided for in Article 24 of Council Regulation (EEC) 4253/88¹ of 19 December 1988 in respect of the implementation, in the Netherlands, of projects financed by the European Social Fund over the period 1994 to 1996.

1. Article 10(2) of Regulation (EEC) 438/2001² of 2 March 2001 stipulates that samples must cover 'at least 5% of the total eligible expenditure and be based on a representative sample of the operations approved'. The report of the accounting department of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment of 7 June 2001, which gave rise to the Commission's letter, covers 45 projects which together represent only 1.21% of total ESF support granted to the Netherlands over the period 1994 to 1996. Can the Commission indicate why it is apparently satisfied with a sample which, at least in terms of numbers, fails to meet the criteria laid down by Community law?

2. In paragraph 4.1 of its report, the accounting department says that it is not possible to make a statistically reliable estimate of the total amount of ESF subsidies, for the period 1994 to 1996, that was regular or irregular/uncertain on the basis of the investigation, as the latter is too limited in scope in relation to the large number of errors and the many different kinds of errors involved. In her letter, however, DG Quintin states that the Commission notes that the reported facts relate to an arbitrary sample. The irregularities and uncertainties found are therefore of a systematic nature. Does the Commission really believe that the systematic nature of irregularities and uncertainties can be established purely on the basis of the arbitrary nature of a sample, without taking account of the size of the sample involved?

¹ OJ L 374, 31.12.1988, p. 1.

² OJ L 63, 3.3.2001, p. 21.