

WRITTEN QUESTION E-1349/02

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to the Commission

Subject: Structural Fund discrimination affecting the province of Teruel

The EP report A3-0115/93 (drawn up by the Committee on Regional Policy, Regional Planning and Relations with Regional and Local Authorities) of 30 March 1993 on areas with exceptionally low population densities (rapporteur: Mr Moretti) points out that demographic imbalance has a distorting effect on the facts in statistical data, thereby invalidating the information units used to map out areas receiving Structural Fund assistance. It expresses the view that the indicators used to determine areas eligible for Structural Fund assistance, in particular per capita GDP, fail to reflect the complexity of the problem of underdevelopment within the European Union and to determine the priorities of Community regional policy. The report recommends the acquisition of data on units below NUTS III level in order to define problems more precisely.

Subsequently the Commission drew up a proposal for an amended regulation (COM(2001) 0083¹), which lays down objective, clear, impartial and lasting criteria. Even so, the current categories NUTS 1, 2 and 3 do not correspond to these objectives and the criteria laid down in the current proposal are frequently ignored, so that the ultimate aim of providing truly comparable regional statistics is jeopardised. The proposal for a regulation still allows the possibility of introducing levels lower than the current NUTS categories (4 and 5), but they are unlikely to be useful for the purposes of recognising depressed regions.

In Spain the province of Teruel, which belongs to the Autonomous Region of Aragon, has two particular characteristics – it belongs to the most imbalanced region in Spain and has one of the highest rates of depopulation. The continuing reduction in the population and its gradual ageing mean that although the figures relating to wealth remain the same, the per capita GDP quotient is increasing. These factors mean that the indicator does not reflect the province's actual level of development, a problem pointed out in paragraph 1 of the EP's report.

Is the Commission aware of the existence of this distortion ?

In the circumstances, will the Commission propose any reform on the subject aimed at drawing up new criteria for choosing between developed and less developed areas with a view to 2006? Is there any possibility that Teruel might be given special consideration (such as that given to island and outermost regions), because of its low population density, in the run-up to 2006?

¹ OJ C 180 E, 26.6.2001, p. 108