

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2974/02

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to the Commission

Subject: Granting of European aid to economic development in rural areas in the administrative district of Safor

The administrative district of Safor in the Region of Valencia submitted two projects to compete for aid under the Proder II programme. The first project (APE-Safor) was submitted by the 'Association for the Economic Promotion of Safor', which includes the Mancomunitat de la Safor and the Higher Polytechnic of Gandía, together with about a dozen private organisations in the business, social, ecological and cultural spheres. The second project (Vernissa-Serpis) was submitted by five town councils with mayors belonging to the People's Party (PP) in the area known as the 'Vall de Vernissa'. The latter project was submitted without the knowledge of three other mayors belonging to a different political party, but whose councils would, in principle, benefit from the aid requested. The first project, approved by all the political parties and debated in the relevant fora with total transparency, covered all the councils in the administrative district (including those involved in the Vernissa-Serpis project) in order to avoid fragmentation. The five mayors referred to above nevertheless decided to act separately and present their own project. In the end the Agriculture Department of the Generalitat Valenciana (the body responsible for distributing the aid) awarded the aid to the Vernissa-Serpis project and rejected the other project, which had the same aims and would have benefited the whole Safor area.

Those responsible for the APE-Safor project spent a month asking for the documentation on the Valencian Proder projects to be reviewed, but they were not given an appointment until an hour after the deadline for the submission of appeals against the award of the Proder funding. They then drew up a preliminary appeal for reallocation of funding requesting the annulment of the award of European funding under the Proder programme, since they considered that the Generalitat Valenciana had withheld information by not allowing APE-Safor access to the basic criteria and detailed explanations justifying its rejection of their project (the award decision merely indicated which projects had been selected and which had not, on the basis of a detailed report which was not made public). The appeal pointed out that all the documentation concerning the award of aid by a public authority must be totally public and transparent and that any restriction on it constitutes unfair obscurantism and in this case meant that the association APE-Safor was helpless. Furthermore, the appeal considered that the origin of the order was contrary to the EU criteria for the application of rural developments projects, as regards the composition of local action groups and the chairmanship of such groups. It emerged, inter alia, that the assessment committee responsible for allocating the money consists of people appointed exclusively by institutions run by the PP. The appeal was rejected by the Agriculture Department on 22 July 2002, which has prompted the questioners to take up the complaint with the European institutions.

Is the Commission aware of the facts outlined above? Does it intend to take any steps to investigate and remedy this alleged instance of mismanagement and political use of European funding by certain public authorities?