

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0909/04
by Margrietus van den Berg (PSE)
to the Commission

Subject: To Serve and Protect - Netherlands Railways

The Dutch newspaper Het Parool reported on 11 March 2004 that, as of 1 April 2004, the security firm To Serve and Protect is to lose its contract to a competing firm. Using unorthodox methods, To Serve and Protect has achieved outstanding results in making Amsterdam's railway stations safe, to the complete satisfaction of all parties.

Netherlands Railways (NS), which has employed it hitherto, says that To Serve and Protect is no longer eligible because it does not comply with European public procurement criteria. The firm's excessively small size is a particular problem according to the NS. The latter's spokesman says that a business must have a turnover of at least € 4.5 m per annum and employ at least 400 staff.

1. If a firm is doing a good job and is competitive but too small, surely this last point cannot be grounds for debarring it from bidding for a contract? What does the Commission think about this?
2. What is the true state of affairs?
3. Can the Commission appreciate that such reports give newspaper-readers a negative impression of Europe and makes them angry at Europe?