WRITTEN QUESTION E-0414/07
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to the Commission

Subject: Reform of the common organisation of the market in fruit and vegetables

After more than two years' work on the reform of the common organisation of the market in fruit and vegetables, a proposal for a Council regulation was presented on 24 January 2007. The reform of this sector, like those for the wine and banana markets, is in keeping with the general thrust of the 2003 CAP reform. Its main goals are to enhance the sector's competitiveness, lessen the impact of crises, stabilise incomes and boost consumption. The Commission intends to achieve those goals by offering further incentives for the formation of producer organisations, replacing the current support for the processing of some fruits and vegetables by a direct-payments system, imposing costly cross-compliance requirements and abolishing export refunds. Fruit and vegetables are an extremely important sector, and should be treated as such. In the new Member States, the sector is highly fragmented and poorly organised. This makes it the weak partner in relations with the retail and processing sectors, which can dictate their own conditions. It is also extremely vulnerable to crises. The reform proposal rightly places the emphasis on support for producer organisations, providing for additional funding and a set of crisis management tools (green harvesting/non-harvesting, harvest insurance). However, it makes no mention of extra support for organisations granted preliminary recognition, on which the market organisation in the new Member States is based. In line with the 2003 reform, provision is made for decoupling aid from production and transferring processing support to the national envelopes. Unfortunately, these envelopes do not include funds for payments to soft-fruit producers. The national envelope for Poland will increase by no more than € 6.7 million, which is equivalent to the aid currently provided for tomatoes for processing. The proposal's failure to provide for support for soft fruits will contribute to the discontinuation of soft fruit production in the EU, which is of key importance to many thousands of small holdings. The proposal fails to take any account of the new situation that has arisen following the 2004 enlargement. The budget for the fruit and vegetables market continues to favour the EU-15 countries, with support for oranges, mandarins and figs, but none for soft fruits.

How does the Commission expect to enhance the stability of the soft fruits market and improve income levels when its reform proposal makes no provision for financial support or appropriate instruments for the sector? How does it intend to address the sector's problems when the proposal does not appear to put forward any appropriate solutions?