

WRITTEN QUESTION E-4141/07  
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to the Commission

Subject: State aid

It emerges from press reports (La Repubblica of 27.7.2007) that the Autonomous Region of Valle D'Aosta has signed up to an advertising contract in order to have the Region's logo printed on the back of labels on bottles of a number of minor brands belonging to the Heineken group and that the cost of the operation amounts to EUR 16.32 million. Another press source (Ansa of 15.3.2007), reveals that the Autonomous Region of Valle D'Aosta has drawn up an agreement (different and separate from the aforementioned one) with Heineken itself envisaging an investment of EUR 10 million by the Region, 4 million of this in the form of loans, plus a share by the Region in the capital of a company in the Heineken group, to be used to extend the Pollein plant, where Dreher beer (a brand owned by Heineken) is produced. The negotiations with Heineken and the investments were officially justified by the need to safeguard the firm's presence in the Valle D'Aosta, so as to protect the jobs of the 70 workers currently employed in the Pollein plant.

This affair highlights the intolerable disparity in treatment between various areas of the country depending on whether or not they enjoy 'special autonomous status'. Thus the disparity in legislative conditions and differences in spending capacity do not introduce mechanisms of competitive federalism, but rather elements of distortion and serious disequilibrium.

In effect, the Valle d'Aosta Region has committed a total of more than EUR 26 million in order to keep in the Region a plant that now employs 70 workers.

In view of all this, can the Commission say:

- whether the investment for the benefit of Heineken does not constitute improper State aid contrary to European Union legislation and hence may constitute an infringement on the part of Italy;
- whether such an unscrupulous use of the resources and (possibly) powers deriving from regional autonomy does not constitute a position of undue advantage for the Valle d'Aosta Region to the detriment of other parts of the country and hence introduces elements of unfair competition;
- if this affair constitutes an infringement of Community law, what steps it intends to take?