

WRITTEN QUESTION E-5435/07
by Francisco Assis (PSE)
to the Commission

Subject: Environmental concerns in Chile

There have been numerous complaints from civil society organisations within both the EU and Chile concerning toxic waste from the cellulose factory operated by a private enterprise Celulosa Arauco y Constitución (CELCO), which allegedly polluted a UNESCO biosphere lagoon leading to the death of a large number of black-neck swans¹ as well as other organisms. It would seem that a new plant has started to operate in the valley of Itata, in the region of Bío-Bío, 400 km south of Santiago, making it the biggest plant of its kind in Chile, with a capacity to produce 858 000 tons of bleached pulp per year.

Can the Commission confirm that this new plant will receive authorisation to dump its waste into the Itata River, which provides water for more than 40 000 small farmers, until the firm builds a pipeline to carry the waste to the sea by the end of the year? Is the Commission aware that local residents have, time and again, held protests against the pulp mill and its plans to dump its effluent into the river and the sea and that a regional medical association issued a report sounding an alert regarding the alleged health risks posed by the plant?

The protection of the environment and the promotion of sustainable economic development are primary concerns of the European Union.

In this respect, is the Commission of the opinion that the CELCO cellulose factories comply with the highest environmental standards fully in line with the standards applied within the European Union? What can the Commission do to assist Chile in the use the best available environmentally friendly technology such as Totally Chlorine Free (TCF) bleaching process, and closed-loop production, which reuses water and chemicals and eliminates effluent discharges? Taking into account the present Association Agreement, is there anything else the Commission may propose to do so as to assist the Chilean authorities in the battle against environmental degradation?

¹ Prior to the disaster the Cruces River sanctuary was home to Latin America's greatest concentration (around 6,000) of black-necked swans (*Cygnus malencoriphus*).