

WRITTEN QUESTION E-5803/07

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to the Commission

Subject: Unfair competition from the Japanese multinational Ashai Kasei Corporation

Europe is home to of the world's most remarkable industrial traditions, in the form of the production of 'Bemberg' cupro fibre. This derives from a key nineteenth-century invention by the German Peter Bemberg, concerning the creation of an artificial fibre, transparent like cotton and glowing like silk, corresponding to the highest quality standards in the textile sector. Throughout the twentieth century, Bemberg, with branches across Europe, played an emblematic role in terms of its production, the treatment of its workers, etc, as witness the tributes of numerous European artists and poets.

A Japanese multinational, Ashai Kasei Corporation, which obtained a patent in the 1930s for the production of artificial fibres in Japan, has now made itself, de facto and by dubious methods, into the world's biggest cupro fibre producer. This led swiftly to the closure of the Bemberg plants in Wuppertal and Dresden. The only surviving Bemberg plant is the Italian one at Gozzana, which is now universally recognised to be in crisis.

It emerges from the complaint lodged with the legal authorities that the special commissioner for the Bemberg crisis appointed by the Italian government has discovered, notifying the Commission and OLAF of the facts, that over the last twenty years Ashai Kasei has been undermining Bemberg's Gozzano plant, apparently abusing its dominant position and influencing the affairs of the crisis-ridden company via Swiss trusts, and that it is now trying to prevent the plant from surviving, by means of unacceptable monopolistic practices that are contrary to the interests of consumers, of creditors, and, even worse, of thousands of workers and of the industry in Europe. All in all, its aim appears to be to destroy its rival's brand image and to monopolise the industry worldwide, to the severe detriment of the market in textile products, whose representatives have already denounced what is going on.

The Commission has taken no action on this case, despite being called on to act by textile producers across Europe. On the contrary, it has reduced duties on the Japanese producer from 17.5% to 3%, and is allowing a monopolistic enterprise operating anti-competition practices to fix prices by itself and destroy its one remaining competitor on the world market.

In view of the above, does the Commission not believe that it and OLAF should, as a matter of urgency, adopt decisive measures to restore competition in this area? Does the Commission not also believe that, to this end, measures are needed to support this last bastion of cupro fibre production in Europe while avoiding any breach of the legislation on state aids?