

WRITTEN QUESTION E-6275/08
by Margaritis Schinas (PPE-DE)
to the Commission

Subject: Illegal trading

Illegal trading is one of the biggest problems faced by businesses, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, which remain unprotected against unfair competition while it exacerbates their already precarious financial situation. Entrepreneurs feel exposed and are protesting against the expanding and uncontrolled activities of illegal traders on the market, who sell their products without the required licences, without paying the VAT due, and evade the payment of rents and wages which legal enterprises authorised by the State are required to do. The result of this situation is that, in order to survive financially, firms either opt for redundancies or close down entirely.

Furthermore, the sale of products of dubious quality and origin at low prices often carries with it inherent risks to the health of consumers, as recent incidents on the European market have demonstrated. Bearing in mind the difficult times we are all living through as a result of the international financial crisis, which is affecting all social strata, will the Commission answer the following questions?

- To what extent does it concur with the above description of the present situation and what measures has it taken - and, if it has not, to what extent does it intend to do so - to protect small and medium-sized enterprises in the fight against illegal trading, which is so detrimental to business and the economy?
- What measures has the Commission taken to inform the public and increase their awareness of the risks inherent in the products of dubious quality and origin sold by such street hawkers?
- Can it provide whatever statistics are available on the activities of illegal traders in each Member State?