

WRITTEN QUESTION E-3360/09
by Bill Newton Dunn (ALDE)
to the Commission

Subject: Bulgarian duty-free shops

In February 2008, the Commission published a proposed Council Directive on general arrangements for excise duty. This proposal sought to eliminate excise duty exemptions for duty-free shops located on the EU's external borders. In making the case to the European Parliament for closing these shops, the Commission repeatedly cited the case of Bulgaria – where the government ordered that duty-free shops be closed following allegations of illicit trading made by the Commission in its Interim Report on Progress in Bulgaria under the Co-operation and Verification Mechanism of 14 February 2008.

The European Parliament's subsequent legislative resolution of 18 November 2008 (P6_TA-PROV(2008)0541) supported amendments to the proposed Directive to preserve duty-free border shopping. Serious questions have since been raised regarding the basis of allegations made by the Commission against duty-free shops in Bulgaria. Bulgarian duty-free shop operators have also filed a complaint with the European Ombudsman regarding these allegations and the conduct of the Commission.

What information can the Commission provide in support of its allegations of illicit trading against Bulgarian duty-free shop operators?