Question for written answer E-007684/2011
to the Commission
Rule 117
Anja Weisgerber (PPE)

Subject: Shelving of work to amend the EU Drinking-Water Directive (Directive 98/93/EC)

The EU Drinking-Water Directive (Directive 98/83/EC) and amendment thereof prompted my colleagues Thomas Ulmer and Andreas Schwab to put a written question to the Commission, which was tabled on 14 May 2008 and answered by Mrs Vassiliou on behalf of the Commission on 25 June 2008. The Commission later placed the amendment of the directive on the agenda, but the matter has since been shelved.

In the light of the issues which have been raised by the EHEC outbreak, food safety and consumer protection are becoming a focus of renewed attention by consumers, industry, politicians, and the media. It is therefore difficult to understand why the Commission should have shelved the amendment of Directive 98/83/EC and is choosing not to do anything further for the time being.

Water from free-standing water dispensers (water-coolers) often contains – as studies have clearly demonstrated – worryingly high concentrations of bacteria, even including pathogens. This is one area which has not been properly regulated by the EU Drinking-Water Directive, since the requirement to comply with hygiene-related limit values applies only at the moment when tanks are filled, but not when water is dispensed to consumers.

Because it gradually becomes contaminated and is not filtered, drinking-water from water-coolers can pose a health hazard to people who are immunocompromised (e.g. children and the sick). Bearing in mind the growing number of water-coolers in Europe and their broad public acceptance, regulation needs to be brought to bear urgently.

1. Why does the Commission believe that the amendment should be shelved at the present time?

2. Given the state of play, does it think that it should consider reactivating the amendment process?

3. If not, could the regulatory gaps concerning water-coolers be dealt with separately and in that way closed?