

**Question for written answer E-012210/2011
to the Commission
Rule 117
Michail Tremopoulos (Verts/ALE)**

Subject: Livestock contamination caused by the excessive use of plant protection products along the Axios estuary in a Natura 2000 area

Complaints have been received from a number of livestock farmers¹ regarding the fatal contamination of livestock for a period of around ten years as a result of illegal spraying outside cultivated areas in order to clear vegetation from rural roads and the embankments of irrigation and drainage channels. This has been taking place in the Halastra area and within the Axios estuary – Loudias – Aliakmon national park, forming part of the Natura 2000 network (GR1220002) and covered by the international Ramsar Convention. According to Circular No 93229 of 20 July 2010 concerning cross-compliance issued by the Payment and Inspection Agency for Community Guidance and Guarantee Aid (OPEKEPE), which is the responsibility of the Ministry of Rural Development and Food, arable farmers receiving direct aid are required to use mechanical methods rather than chemicals² in order to clear vegetation within irrigation and drainage areas. Despite repeated requests from livestock farmers and the Regional Ecology/Solidarity Alliance to the OPEKEPE for information regarding its findings, they have never received a satisfactory reply. According to the circular, the burning of stubble is discouraged (and prohibited inside Natura 2000 areas) in favour of grazing as an alternative means of eliminating arable residues. This situation has provoked escalating disputes between livestock and arable farmers, sometimes ending in court, with both sides calling for an immediate solution.

In view of this:

1. Has the Commission received information from the Greek authorities concerning their investigations into illegal spraying in this area and the extent to which stubble is being burned and, if so, what have been their findings?
2. What measures will it take to protect local livestock and biodiversity?

¹ Complaints by G. Geropoulos and V. Kyratzis to the Payment and Inspection Agency for Community Guidance and Guarantee Aid (No 66120 of 26 May 2011 and No 80282 of 19 July 2011).

² http://it.opekepe.gr/forms/files/%CE%95%CE%B3%CE%BA%CF%8D%CE%BA%CE%BB%CE%B9%CE%BF%CF%82_%CE%A0%CE%BF%CE%BB%CE%BB%CE%B1%CF%80%CE%BB%CE%AE%CF%82_93229_2010.pdf