**Question for written answer E-003290/2012**
**to the Commission**
Rule 117
**Frédérique Ries (ALDE)**

Subject: Authorisation for stevia to be made available as a food additive on the EU market

In November 2011, the Commission published in the Official Journal of the European Union Commission Regulation (EU) No 1131/2011 authorising the use of steviol glycosides, derived from the South American stevia plant, as sweeteners.

By authorising their placement on the market, with effect from the beginning of 2012, the Commission implicitly recognised that these natural sweeteners, considered to be up to 300 times as sweet as ordinary sugar, were harmless, a view that was in line with the positive opinion issued by the European Food Safety Authority in April 2010.

Although late in coming, this recognition holds out the prospect of product diversification, in particular of 'light' drinks, but also of a wide range of other products, including yoghurts, cereals, fizzy drinks, confectionery, chocolate and table top sweeteners. It could also meet increasing demand from European consumers, many of whom are switching to 'naturally healthy' products.

Could the Commission provide an initial assessment regarding the way in which stevia has been marketed on the EU market over the period since Commission Regulation (EU) No 1131/2011 came into effect?

Can it confirm that Commission Regulation (EU) No 1131/2011 is not restrictive and that it does not limit the use of stevia to table top sweeteners (in the form of artificial sweetener tablets) and sweetened flavoured drinks at the expense of other possible uses, for example in cakes and other bakery items?

Although allowing a natural sweetener that has been safely marketed in Japan and South America for nearly 50 years to be sold on the EU market is a welcome step, does the Commission also recognise the importance of preventing this substance and any patents awarded for steviosides from being monopolised by the 'giants' of the food industry?