

ORAL QUESTION H-0781/03  
for Question Time at the part-session in December 2003  
pursuant to Rule 43 of the Rules of Procedure  
by Ioannis Patakis  
to the Commission

Subject: Unlawful extortion by the ATE in respect of Greek tobacco producers

The Agricultural Bank of Greece (ATE) asks all tobacco-producing members of the tobacco producer groups (OPAK) to sign a direct debit with the ATE – a practice which is totally illegal, coercive, improper and carried out with the complicity of the Greek Government. The bank requires this before it will give letters of guarantee to OPAK, which will then deposit them with the Payment and Inspection Agency for Community Subsidies (OPEKEPE) in order to collect advance payment of the tobacco subsidy. One of the effects of the direct debit is to authorise the bank to go into the producers' accounts and deduct sums which in the bank's opinion are owed to it and to third parties. The ATE enforces this extortion by citing an agreement which it has signed with OPEKEPE, although it is inconceivable that the agreement lays down such a procedure.

What action will the Commission take to put a stop to the illegal extortion by ATE and to ensure that tobacco producers receive the subsidies to which they are entitled in good time?

Tabled: 04.12.2003  
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