

ORAL QUESTION O-0083/01

pursuant to Rule 42 of the Rules of Procedure

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to the Commission

Subject: Environmental and social repercussions of the closure of the mine at Aznalcóllar (Spain) owned by the Boliden company

In 1998 the rupture of a pit used to contain waste from a mine owned by the Swedish firm Boliden at Aznalcóllar, Andalusia, caused significant environmental damage owing to the release of highly toxic sludge which eventually affected the Doñana Natural Park, a site protected under Spanish law as being ecologically valuable and a site designated by the Spanish authorities as a special protection zone for birds pursuant to Article 4 of Directive 79/409/EEC¹ on the conservation of wild birds. That firm had received significant amounts of Community funding at various times to allow it to operate.

Other mining activities pursued by the same firm appear to have caused similar problems in other parts of the world, particularly and most recently in Sweden. The Boliden company has decided to end its mining activities at Aznalcóllar, a decision which has had a serious negative impact on local employment, both direct and indirect. The firm had apparently undertaken to bear some of the expenditure needed to restore the affected area.

What steps has the Commission taken or will it take to ensure that subsidies granted to the company from Community funds, either directly or indirectly, are repaid, and that its commitments as regards repairing the environmental damage are met?

To what extent will the decision to end Boliden's activities affect the environmental restoration work which is currently underway, and how will the Commission guarantee that the undertakings given by the firm as regards repairing the environmental damage are complied with?

How will the Commission ensure that the Boliden company shoulders the liabilities arising from the accident, and how will it ensure that similar situations, involving this or other mining companies, do not recur in the future?

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Deadline for reply: 19.10.2001

¹ OJ L 103, 25.4.1979, p. 1.