

WRITTEN QUESTION P-1265/00
by Hugues Martin (PPE-DE)
to the Commission

Subject: Clarification regarding the admissibility of special export aid under Community law

The storms which struck the western part of Europe in December 1999 have wreaked unprecedented havoc for forest industry. In spite of the debates in Parliament, the Union institutions have apparently failed to gauge the economic, social, and cultural impact of the devastation – not to mention the increased fire risks as summer draws nearer.

To deal with the emergency, the French Government has decided, among other things, to grant the sum of FF 50 per tonne for the transport of timber intended for export to Union Member States and non-member countries.

Community rules on competition, and in particular the Community preference obligation, rightly prohibit aid of the above type unless its purpose is to bring relief to an exceptional situation. Article 87(2)(b) of the EC Treaty accordingly stipulates that '[The following shall be compatible with the common market: ...] aid to make good the damage caused by natural disasters or exceptional occurrences'.

Will the Commission treat the present emergency as a special case of the same kind as, for example, the severe drought in Portugal in 1993 and 1994, and approve the aid that France has undertaken to provide?