

WRITTEN QUESTION P-2533/01
by Theodorus Bouwman (Verts/ALE)
to the Commission

Subject: Interpretation of the European Social Fund rules in the Member States of the EU and the Commission investigations into the implementation of ESF projects in the Member States

A report on the investigation into European Social Fund subsidies for the 1994-1999 programming period by H. E. Koning was recently published in the Netherlands (27 August 2001). This investigation was carried out on behalf of the Netherlands Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment.

1. Does the Commission share the report's findings that in the vast majority of cases the irregularities found related to understandable and unintentional misunderstandings of the Commission rules, which are sometimes complex and not always obvious by Dutch standards, rather than to real differences of opinion with the Commission on the interpretation of ESF rules?
2. Over the period from 1991 to the present have there been other misunderstandings and differences of opinion on the interpretation of ESF rules between the Commission and EU Member States other than the Netherlands? If so, can the Commission indicate: (a) which Member States were involved, (b) in which Member States this led to measures being taken and/or financial claims being made by the Commission, and (c) what was the nature and scale of the measures and/or claims and how were the relevant cases settled?
3. Over the period from 1991 to the present, has the Commission had investigations carried out in Member States other than the Netherlands into the spending of ESF funds as a result of alleged irregularities, suspicion or evidence of fraud involving ESF funds, or for other reasons? If so, can the Commission provide full details indicating, in each case: (a) in which Member States investigations were carried out, (b) what was the reason for this, (c) whether the Anti-Fraud-Office OLAF was involved in the investigation, (d) what the outcome of the investigation was, (e) what conclusions and or financial claims resulted from the investigation, (f) whether, and if so how, the relevant cases were settled?