

WRITTEN QUESTION P-3853/02
by Francesco Fiori (PPE-DE)
to the Commission

Subject: Exports of Grana Padano cheese to Switzerland

A decree passed by the Swiss Confederation ('RS 632.110.411: Decree on Switzerland/EC cheese imports') states that Grana Padano cheese is exempted from customs duties and quotas provided its water content does not exceed 33.2%.

In November 2002, entry was refused to certain consignments of Grana Padano (aged at least 16 months and with a water content of either 34.1% or 34.8%).

It appears from past and present records of the Italian authorities and research institutes that no Grana Padano samples aged 16 months or more have exhibited a water content in excess of 33.2% - unless there has been a deliberate decision when preparing the sample for analysis to remove a large part of both the crust and the soft cheese under it. The latter elements are, as is well known, edible components of Grana Padano, and it follows that any analysis must take them into account.

A contrastive analysis cannot be made on the basis of a single sample, and the existing sampling procedure for all frontier checks in the EU requires the contrastive taking of samples together with the party concerned, or his delegate, and the subdivision of the sample into six equal lots, of which one or two are left with the exporter company, one is sent for analysis, and the remainder are kept so that further checks can be made in case of complaint.

Can the Commission confirm:

- whether the Swiss customs authorities are requiring only a single sample (a wedge-shaped slice cut from the centre, with crust on both sides and weighing approximately 1.5 kg) for the laboratory checks to determine whether the water content of the Grana Padano concerned complies with the international standard FIL-IDF 4a:1982;
- whether this procedure is in fact the reflection of a deliberate policy of gradual but constant import reduction, with particular regard to Grana Padano;
- whether the procedure could therefore be considered a form of 'indirect protectionism' running counter to the basic rules of free trade between nations?