

WRITTEN QUESTION P-2262/05
by Lilli Gruber (PSE)
to the Commission

Subject: Alternative fuels - natural gas for road transport - decision time

In the Green Paper 'Towards a European strategy for the security of energy supply' and in the White Paper 'European transport policy for 2010: time to decide' the Commission sets the objective of replacing 20% of current petroleum fuels with alternative fuels by 2020 for environmental and geopolitical reasons. The Alternative Fuels Contact Group set up for this purpose said in its final report published in December 2003 that 'natural gas is the only alternative fuel with potential for significant market share well above 5% by 2020'.

Despite this, no particular attention is paid to natural gas in Union policies. While agreeing that the use of hydrogen is a Union priority, it is difficult to understand the disparity between the resources allocated to hydrogen (which, according to the Contact Group report, has a potential of less than 5% by 2020) and natural gas, for which the technology is already developed and which is particularly interesting in the short to medium-term (not least to meet the objectives of the UN Kyoto Protocol) and can provide a link to hydrogen. Meeting the targets set would require relatively modest investment but above all a clear regulatory framework.

Some countries also have legislation which significantly restricts the competitiveness of natural gas. In Italy, for instance, it is prohibited at self-service stations, safe distances are much greater than in other countries and there is no legislation on domestic supply, which means that the motorist who opts for a less polluting fuel is downgraded to a second class citizen who cannot fill up in the evening or at weekends.

Does the Commission share the conclusions arrived at by the Alternative Fuels Contact Group in its report of December 2003?

What action has the Commission so far taken to meet its own objective of achieving a market share of above 10% for natural gas by 2020 and, above all, what action will it take in the immediate future?

Does the Commission intend to submit one or more directives relating to natural gas for road transportation in the near future?

Does the Commission not consider that the legislation in some countries, and Italy in particular, severely penalises natural gas vis-à-vis petroleum products, or may even be in breach of the competition rules?

What does the Commission intend to do to harmonise the market (service stations, filling systems, etc)?