

WRITTEN QUESTION P-4707/06  
by Inés Ayala Sender (PSE)  
to the Commission

Subject: New closure of the Franco-Spanish border to traffic using the Bielsa tunnel (central Pyrenees)

At a meeting held in Paris on 6 September between the President of the Government of the Autonomous Community of Aragon, Marcelino Iglesias, and the French Minister of Transport, Dominique Perben, Mr Perben said, among other things, that the French Government had completely overhauled the winter road clearance arrangements with the aim of remedying and averting the problems in communications between France and Spain across the central Pyrenees that tend to result from the bad road conditions on the French side of the border. His words were received with satisfaction, and some reservations, by the Aragonese authorities.

It does seem hard to believe that France, a leader in the field of transport, infrastructure, and innovation, should invariably find it so difficult to take swift, effective action, without blocking traffic, to resolve the usual problems on its territory, whether subsidence, landslides, heavy snowfalls, or the like.

The General Council of the département of Hautes-Pyrénées has just announced that the Bielsa tunnel will – again – be completely closed to vehicles for a month and a half, from the end of April until mid-June 2007. This will once more entail severe adverse effects on communications, tourism, the carriage of goods, and, in short, the fragile economy of the two regions on both sides of the Pyrenees, as well as jeopardising the principle of free movement in the EU and compliance with competition laws.

What steps will the Commission take to prevent the continual repetition of such situations? What kind of representations will it make to the French authorities to ensure that the repair work does not cut off all communication between France and Spain through the Bielsa tunnel for nearly two months, thus depriving Aragon of one of its few access routes to the rest of Europe? Does the Commission not believe that, in view of situations such as this and the fact that some Member States are manifestly unable, and have repeatedly failed to show the requisite political will, to maintain communications and comply with the fundamental rights applying in the Union, European projects providing easier routes through the Pyrenees and facilitating free movement across the border, one example being TEN project No 16, are become more urgent and necessary every day?