

WRITTEN QUESTION P-3007/07  
by Péter Olajos (PPE-DE)  
to the Commission

Subject: Are the Austrian tanneries which pollute the Rába gaining an unlawful competitive advantage?

Businesses operating on the EU's internal market must comply with uniform requirements: otherwise, competition will be distorted. Any which does not comply with the in many cases strict rules on labour protection, environmental protection, etc. gains an advantage over those which comply with EU requirements, because this reduces its costs.

The Boxmark tannery in Feldbach - in common with two other tanneries - has been polluting the river Rába for six years. It discharges the waste water from the plant's processes into the river without treating it, causing the river to foam. The plant's management has refused to use a filter system on the grounds that it would be too expensive. The tannery is therefore operating without any purification system.

The tannery's pollution of the water has not only caused serious economic damage in the area of the river because of the decline in tourism: it also flies in the face of the principle that the polluter should pay.

Does the Commission agree that the damage to the environment and the failure to comply with regulations also confers an unlawful competitive advantage on Boxmark?

What will the Commission do to prevent damage to the interests of European tanneries which use honest production methods, comply with environmental regulations and take account of concerns in that field?

How will the Commission ensure fair competition in the EU for businesses which respect environmental legislation?