

WRITTEN QUESTION P-3116/08  
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to the Commission

Subject: Risks associated with nanotechnology; the European response

An ever-increasing range of uses of nanotechnology is one of the most significant technical developments of the last decade. The latest results of this branch of science are already appearing in everyday life, as it is used in toothpaste, clothing, cleaning substances and countless other products by companies aiming to improve product quality.

However, alongside improvements to quality, we should not lose sight of the possible dangers inherent in nanotechnology.

It is not clear to either the distributors or the consumers of nanomaterials, which have hitherto completely unknown properties, what potential environmental or health risks might be associated with their use.

It would be as well to anticipate any potential harmful effects before having to actually deal with them. An increasing number of forums feature experts and lay people alike discussing their concerns about the uses of nanotechnology. The European Union must provide scientifically well-founded, reassuring answers in order to allay such worries. An increasing proportion of the research and development funds set aside for nanotechnology must be used to find out about and avert the risks, and a policy of caution must be effectively pursued worldwide.

In the light of the above, I have the following questions:

Can the Commission provide detailed, reassuring information to the general public on the risks associated with the uses of nanotechnology?

Does the Commission intend to impose limits on the individual uses of nanotechnology – the effects of which are as yet unknown – until such time as scientifically well-founded evidence is available on their consequences for health and other effects?

Does the Commission plan to play a greater role in terms of funding in order to investigate the risks inherent in using nanotechnology, promote research in this area and minimise these risks?

What plans does the Commission have for cooperating as soon as possible with non-EU countries to conduct research in, and publish information on, the dangers of nanotechnology materials worldwide?