

**Question for written answer P-005258/2014
to the Commission**

Rule 117

Marie-Christine Vergiat (GUE/NGL)

Subject: The SNCM

On 20 February 2012, the Commission presented its Strategy to support coastal and marine tourism in Europe in which it emphasised the strategy's 'great potential for jobs and growth' and regretted the 'fragmentation of the sector with a high proportion of SMEs'.

In 2012, the Société Nationale Maritime Corse-Méditerranée (SNCM) accounted for 26 % of the region's passenger transport market and 33 % of the freight transport market. Currently, however, the Commission is demanding EUR 440 million from the SNCM, a sum that is nearly 250 % of its turnover of EUR 190 million.

The Commission has taken this action following a complaint lodged by the company Corsica Ferries, which wants to see an annoying competitor eliminated. Corsica Ferries is a subsidiary of an Italo-Swiss holding company which just owns the trade name. The vessels are owned by a number of subsidiary companies situated in tax havens. Moreover, up to 1999 Corsica Ferries operated under a Panamanian flag of convenience in order to evade tax and social constraints. Furthermore, this company has already taken similar action in Sardinia where it succeeded in closing down the public operator. Ten days after the latter closed down, passenger fares rose by 140 % on average. Tourist numbers fell subsequently by 23 % in one year and the collapse in maritime traffic was only partially offset by a rise in air traffic, which is a less environmentally-friendly means of transport with a wealthier customer base.

1. Does the Commission not see a paradox here, in wanting to see strong companies emerge in the coastal and maritime tourism sector while demanding that already existing companies repay sums equivalent to 250 % of their total turnover?
2. Is the Commission aware that it is the guardian of the Treaties, which promote 'social justice and protection' (Article 3 TEU), affirm 'the essential objective of their efforts' to be 'the constant improvements of the living and working conditions of their peoples' (preamble to the TFEU) and make reference to the Community Charter of the Fundamental Social Rights of Workers, and that it has therefore a duty to combat social and fiscal dumping?