

The Member States and their regions must then administer the programmes and implement them by selecting projects, which they monitor and evaluate. For its part, the Commission participates in the follow-up of programmes and contributes to the work of the monitoring committees, it determines the commitment appropriations, makes payments to reimburse expenditure actually incurred and certified and verifies the control systems in place.

Given the legal framework in force therefore, the Member States themselves may not decide on their own regional allocation of the structural funds.

(¹) OJ L 161, 26.6.1999.

(2004/C 51 E/155)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-1789/03

by Claude Moraes (PSE) to the Commission

(28 May 2003)

Subject: 'Fuel poverty'

'Fuel poverty' is the inability of citizens to afford adequate heating and light because of energy pricing policies and low incomes.

Does the Commission have a view, or has it undertaken any research on the issue of 'fuel poverty' in EU countries?

Is the Commission aware that multinational companies like Electricité de France have different pricing policies, and different policies on disconnection following non-payment of electricity bills in the cities of London and Paris, for example?

Answer given by Mrs de Palacio on behalf of the Commission

(2 July 2003)

For the Commission the question of fuel poverty enters into the bigger debate of public service aspects under energy policy. The Commission in its proposals amending the Electricity and Gas Directives (¹) has substantially strengthened the public service aspects of the existing Directives to ensure that vulnerable customers will be sufficiently protected in a market that will be completely open to competition. Thus, the Electricity Directive obliges Member States to ensure that all consumers have the right to be supplied with electricity. In both the Electricity and Gas Directives a provision is contained obliging Member States to protect final customers and to ensure in particular that there are adequate safeguards to protect vulnerable customers, including measures to help them avoid disconnection. It is up to Member States to implement this provision in a way that suits their particular situation best.

As already mentioned, the policies concerning the non-payment of electricity bills are relevant of the national authorities. Each Member State implements its own rules to protect the vulnerable consumers in case of disconnection following non-payment of electricity bills. Multinational companies have to comply with each national legislation; these legislations are each different, which requires for a multinational company different policies on pricing and disconnection following non-payment of bills.

(¹) OJ C 240 E, 28.8.2001.