

WRITTEN QUESTION E-1281/05
by Frederika Brepoels (PPE-DE)
to the Commission

Subject: State aid to the SNCF

The Commission recently approved the payment of € 1.5 bn in State aid to the freight division of the French railway group SNCF. This measure was taken as part of the restructuring plan to make the enterprise viable in an open market.

The Commission has investigated the conditions and assessed their compliance with Community guidelines for rescue and restructuring aid to enterprises in difficulties. The decision is remarkable, as this is the first time that explicit State aid has been granted to the freight division of a national railway company, and this could create a precedent within the EU.

Can the Commission confirm that it granted the above approval? If so, subject to what conditions is the Commission permitting State aid to the SNCF's freight division? How much State aid is being provided? Will this not distort competition with other freight carriers?

Is State aid of this type also possible for other railway companies within the EU? Have other railway companies applied for it? What stage has been reached in processing the applications?

Does this decision imply that the Commission has decided to adopt a more tolerant attitude towards the continuation of subsidies for public transport of passengers or freight in future?