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ORAL QUESTION (0-50/83)

with debate pursuant to Rule 42 of the Rules of Procedure
by Mrs PHLIX, Mr VAN ROMPUY, Mr CHANTERIE, Mr MARCK and
Mr HERMAN

to the Commission of the European Communities

Subject: Community policy in the coal sector

According to the most recent EUROSTAT data, proven and, as yet, unexploited coal reserves in the Community amount to roughly 70,000 million tons, making Community Europe, with over 14.3% of world reserves, the fourth largest holder of coal deposits in the world.

Likewise according to the EUROSTAT data, coal production in the Community amounted to 240 million tons in 1982. Comparison of this figure with the figures for previous years reveals a steady fall in domestic production to the advantage of imports from third countries despite the fact that the Community has set out to achieve an output of 270 million tons a year through the promotion of investment.

On 10 June 1983 the Commission of the European Communities adopted a series of proposals for a balanced policy in the field of solid fuels including a proposal to reduce Community output by roughly 40 million tons a year, a figure corresponding to 15% of present output. In view of the continuing need to make coal production in the Community more competitive and more rational, we would ask the Commission:

1. What are the reasons for the failure of the Community's policy in the coal sector, the aim of which was to achieve an annual output figure of 270 million tons?
2. If mines regarded as uncompetitive are closed, will the surplus demand thus arising be covered by means of additional imports or by an increase in Community production?
3. Having regard firstly to the unstable political situation in some exporting countries and the attendant uncertainty of supplies and secondly to the need to build up a climate of confidence to encourage the consumption of solid fuels, which in turn calls for security of supplies, what view does the Commission take of growing Community dependence on supplies from third countries?
4. Does the Commission not consider that demand in those production sectors which are at present additionally penalized because of their reliance on coal would improve if it were to take urgent measures to tackle and solve the environmental problems posed by the use of coal?