

Reg.
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Aid for Italian workers affected by the reorganization
of the sulphur industry

The EEC Commission has approved and submitted to the Council three proposals for social measures to help Italian workers affected by steps to place the sulphur industry on a sound footing.

The proposals cover the social aspect of a vast programme to reorganize the industry. The programme, which will be the subject of a special agreement between the Community and the Italian Government, within the context of the proposals put forward by the Liaison and Action Committee for the sulphur industry in Italy, is intended to allow the progressive opening of the Italian sulphur market, in which protective measures are still being applied under the safeguard clause contained in Article 226 of the Treaty.

The Commission's first proposal concerns the payment by the Community, through the European Social Fund, of half the expenditure incurred by Italy on the following:

- (i) Grants to sulphur workers who leave the industry on their own initiative;
- (ii) Interim allowances for workers who have been dismissed and have not yet reached 50 years of age. The amount will be fixed on the basis of the pay the worker was receiving before dismissal. This allowance will make it possible for workers to look, either locally or elsewhere, for new posts suited to their skills;
- (iii) Monthly allowances to workers between 50 and 55 years of age to tide over the period until either they find a new job or retire at the minimum pensionable age of 55. In view, however, of the age of these workers, and of the special conditions in the mining districts, it will not be easy for them to find another job in the area and as a general rule it will be very difficult to retrain them.

The Commission's second proposal deals with certain exemptions from the rules governing assistance from the European Social Fund. These exemptions have been specifically designed to assist the Italian workers in the sulphur industry; the conditions for assistance from the Fund have been relaxed and the benefits will be greater.

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The final proposal concerns the award of scholarships to children of miners who are at least 45 years of age and who have no other means of support than the interim or monthly allowance. As a rule such scholarships will be granted for a period of three years from minimum school-leaving age. The scholarships will enable the children of miners to undergo suitable vocational training.

These measures will affect some 4 200 workers, for the most part Sicilian miners, and will cost a total of over Lit. 7 000 million or some 11 200 000 units of account ⁽¹⁾, half of which will be contributed by the Community.

This is the first time that the Community has made a direct contribution to the cost of a reorganization programme for an industry undergoing a structural crisis. Furthermore, as the problem of the Italian sulphur industry is one that concerns the South of Italy and especially the region of Sicily, this is also the first practical step taken by the Community to implement a policy of regional development and, in particular, to promote the progress of an underdeveloped region.

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(1) 1 u.a. = \$1.