

Food distribution to the most deprived persons in the Community

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The Council held a **public policy debate** on a proposal for a Regulation to optimise the current system of food distribution to the most deprived. The Council instructed the Special Committee on Agriculture to continue its discussions pending receipt of the European Parliament's opinion, which is expected in March 2009.

This first discussion centred on the question of the **legal basis**.

Several delegations thought that Article 37 TEC – which the Commission had chosen when drawing up its proposal – was appropriate since the proposal did indeed seek to "stabilise the agricultural markets" by using intervention stocks and to "ensure reasonable prices in supplies to consumers".

Conversely, a number of delegations, without questioning the high solidarity value of food distribution to the most deprived, considered that the programme as amended by the Commission proposal no longer came within agricultural policy but rather social policy, or even the national sphere of responsibility of the Member States.

These comments were made without prejudice to the positions that would be expressed at a later stage concerning the key points of the proposal, namely:

- intervention stocks to be the priority supply sources, but market purchasing to be allowed;
- wider range of foodstuffs: allowing Member States to choose foodstuffs most in line with the objectives of nutritional balance, in consultation with the competent organisations;
- three-year plan: as from 2010 food distribution plans would be drawn up for three-year periods so as to improve long-term planning and ensure better preparation by national administrations and civil-society partners;
- co-financing: the Member States would have to co-finance the distribution programme and the highest Community participation would be in the "cohesion" countries (new Member States, Greece and Portugal).

Participation in the programme is optional; 19 Member States took part in 2008.

In 2009 the programme will continue under the existing legal framework, with a budget of EUR 500 million.