

Concerns have also been expressed about the ongoing criminal investigations regarding some Board members of the major Polish daily 'Rzeczpospolita', pointing to alleged intentions of the Polish government to regain control of this newspaper, and therefore raising the question of a politicisation of the media.

Regarding the latter allegations, the Commission is following the situation closely but would recall that the Union has no competence under the Treaties establishing the European Union to intervene in domestic criminal matters.

(<sup>1</sup>) COM(2001) 700 final.

(2003/C 110 E/018)

**WRITTEN QUESTION P-1502/02**

**by Gianfranco Dell'Alba (NI) to the Commission**

(22 May 2002)

*Subject:* Human rights violations in Vietnam

The overall human rights situation in Vietnam remains of great concern. The Government is carrying out a widespread and systematic campaign to persecute different groups such as political dissidents, religious leaders and indigenous people, namely the hill tribes of southern Vietnam, also known as the Montagnard.

According to sources in the region, in the province of Gia Lai several people were harassed, raped, beaten and arbitrarily arrested for having participated in the February 2001 non-violent demonstrations for the respect of human rights for the Montagnard as well as in the celebration of the 2001 Christmas festivities.

They are 25 men of the Degar tribe and one 18-year-old woman named H'Ngon at Sakari, in Cambodia. They are from the Cu Se District in the Gia Lai province: Hmen, Pen, Ninh, (Plei Hlu Hamlet); Bu, Tim (Plei Le An Hamlet); Tim, Dit, (Plei Le Ngol Hamlet); Hmanh (Plei Com Bom Hamlet); Kut, Hlol (Plei Nao Hamlet); Weh (Plei Bia Tih Hamlet) Hai, Jum, Dun, Tinh (Plei Djong Hamlet); Dun (Plei Bia Tih Hamlet) and Ksor Ni from Bon Broai, Ayun Pa district, Gia Lai province. All of the above listed people have been detained in their own district, except for Mr Ksor Ni who is held incommunicado.

Members of the Degar who report incidents against Vietnamese are habitually thrown into prison. The Vietnamese know they are easy and available victims because the Government will always apply double standards.

Whereas Vietnam is a party to the ICCPR, and considering the presence of the EU in the region and its major contribution to the UN in the region in connection with refugees, development, environment and drugs issues:

- Does the Commission intend to call on Vietnam to open, in observance with its adherence to international treaties, the various provinces of the central highlands to international and independent observers?
- Is the Commission planning to send a delegation to visit the region in question?

**Answer given by Mr Patten on behalf of the Commission**

(25 June 2002)

The Commission's Delegation in Hanoi, together with the Diplomatic Missions of the Member States, follows closely the human rights situation in Vietnam and participates in all diplomatic démarches of the Union to the Government of Vietnam. The first article in the Union-Vietnam Co-operation Agreement, which was signed with the Government of Vietnam in 1995, states that respect for human rights and democratic principles is the basis for our co-operation, and human rights issues are discussed with the Government of Vietnam at the meetings of the Union-Vietnam Joint Commission.

In February 2001 the Central Highland Provinces of Gia Lai and Dac Lac, experienced serious disturbances. Thousands of members of ethnic minorities, locally known as 'montagnards', were reported to have taken part in demonstrations, some of which led to violence, with groups of protesters blocking a national highway and attacking a post office and telephone switchboard and other public buildings. Police and military forces, including helicopters, were sent to the region to restore order. These events were reported by the official Vietnam News Agency. However, foreign correspondents were not permitted to visit the two provinces.

Following these events, some two hundred local citizens took refuge in Cambodia. Some of these people returned to Vietnam quite quickly. A small number were accepted for resettlement in the United States. Others remained and were joined by new arrivals. Meanwhile, some 15 persons involved in the February 2001 disturbances were tried and sentenced in Vietnam. By the end of last year, it was reported that there could be as many as 1 000 'montagnards' in Cambodia. However, agreement was reached in January 2002 between the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Governments of Cambodia and Vietnam on arrangements for a supervised repatriation of those who wished to return to Vietnam.

This action was launched satisfactorily, but encountered many difficulties. The Commission and the Member States lent their support to renewed discussions between the UNHCR and the two Governments in order to ensure the implementation of the agreed repatriation programme. However, following further incidents of difficulties, the UNHCR has effectively renounced the tripartite agreement. Following a subsequent offer from the United States Government, the Cambodian government has authorised the resettlement in the United States of the 'montagnards' remaining in Cambodia who wished to do so. This resettlement programme is being carried out in co-operation with the UNHCR.

The Commission, together with the diplomatic missions of the Union, has followed these developments closely, as well as the continuing situation in the Central Provinces, so far as conditions of access allow. It has not yet been possible to obtain independent confirmation of the individual cases referred to in the question, although the Commission is aware of interviews conducted in Cambodia with members of the 'Dega' Protestant group by a non-governmental organisation (NGO). The Commission's Delegation in Hanoi has therefore been requested to make enquiries and to take appropriate follow up action in conjunction with the Member State missions.

At the meeting between the Commissioner in charge of External Relations and the Vietnamese Foreign Minister NGUYENDY NIEN on 6 June, the Commission urged him to allow greater access to the area for diplomats and NGOs. Representatives of the Union Presidency and two of the other Member States have recently visited the Central Highlands, and reported back on the visit.

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(2003/C 110 E/019)

**WRITTEN QUESTION E-1531/02**

**by Robert Goebbels (PSE) to the Commission**

(3 June 2002)

*Subject:* The Commission's management of its 'advisers'

The internal assessment exercise entitled 'Designing tomorrow's Commission' (Decode), completed in July 1998, aimed to provide an up-to-date analysis of all activities carried out by the Commission, as well as the resources and working methods used, to enable it to plan its future and begin the process of reforming its organisation and operation. The Decode exercise also examined the role of advisers who are not part of the permanent establishment plan. It revealed, inter alia, that the function of these advisers was ill-defined, that they were used in an inappropriate way and that their role needed to be rethought.

It should be noted that a report drawn up at the request of the Commission by a specific Task Force on 'advisers' states in its 'analytical' section that the Commission is guilty of dysfunction in this area. Nevertheless, it makes proposals which, in contradiction to this analysis, mainly penalise the advisers, who are not responsible for this regrettable state of affairs. The report offers no solution, although it would be quite possible to devise one, which would solve the problem without incriminating these officials.