Would the Commission provide a detailed account of any discussions, acts of political and/or economic cooperation and, more generally, any relations that have existed − or exist at present − between the EU and Iran since September 1999?

Answer given by Mr Patten on behalf of the Commission

(17 July 2000)

The Commission fully shares the concern over the lack of respect for human rights in Iran expressed in the draft resolution B5-0079/1999 by the Parliament. In the comprehensive dialogue between the Union and Iran, questions regarding human rights are consistently raised by the Union.

On the specific situation of the 13 Iranian Jews and 8 Muslims detained on charges of espionage, a number of demarches have been made by the Union as well as by individual Member States in the course of last year. The Union has stressed the importance of a free and fair trial and was disappointed to see that the trial was not open to observers. Following the verdict on 1 July 2000, the Union stated its concern and its wish that the Court of Appeal would alleviate the punishments.

The comprehensive dialogue between the Union Troika and Iran, which started in 1998, continues with meetings at the level of deputy minister or state secretary every six months. A meeting was held in Helsinki in December 1999 and the latest was held in Tehran in June 2000. All issues of importance, including human rights and also this trial, are regularly raised.

The Commission has for some years funded assistance to Iran in the area of refugee assistance through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and through international non-governmental organisations. A care and maintenance project implemented by Médecins sans frontières (MSF)-France was launched early this year. Together with a humanitarian project (hospital) launched following an earthquake some years ago, these are the only cooperation activities with Iran currently being implemented.

While the political situation in Iran remains a matter of concern, the positive developments with the recent parliamentary election and Iran’s growing sensitivity to international pressure, open new possibilities to develop a constructive dialogue on human rights issues with the Iranian government. The Commission will continue to follow the situation closely in order to seize any opportunity to support this positive change.

WRITTEN QUESTION P-2098/00
by Elspeth Atwoooll (ELDR) to the Commission

(16 June 2000)

Subject: Amnesic Shellfish Poison

At a meeting on 15 December 1999, the European Commission Standing Veterinary Committee decided to create a working group to examine testing methods for the detection of Amnesic Shellfish Poison (ASP) in scallops.

Has the working group concluded its examination of the issue, and if so, will its findings place the Standing Veterinary Committee in a position to make swift recommendations for a modification of Directive 97/61 (1) on ASP testing in order to clarify the provisions of this Directive, in particular by laying down a precise definition of standard practice across all Member States for the testing of scallops?

Does the Commission accept that practice in this area currently differs from Member State to Member State, and that this constitutes a serious threat to the single market in scallops?

The standing veterinary committee decided at the meeting of 15 December 1999 to create a group of experts and to consult the Community and the national reference laboratories for marine biotoxins about the presence of amnesic shellfish poison (ASP) in shellfish, particularly in scallops, and the anatomical distribution of this toxin in the edible parts of the molluscs. The experts group met in Brussels on 17 February 2000 and prepared draft conclusions to be presented for discussions to the plenary meeting of the Community national reference laboratories.

The meeting of the laboratories held on 15-17 March 2000 welcomed the draft conclusions of the expert group, but considered that, in the light of the available data on inter-animal variability, a further assessment should be made by the working group taking account of the outcome of ongoing scientific studies on the matter. The group will meet again when this scientific data is available, which the Commission hopes will be this autumn.

The Commission is aware of the difference between Member States in the application of the analytical tests. Nevertheless the Commission is also aware of the incomplete science on the subject. This is why over the last two years, different experts have been working on the subject, co-ordinated by the Community reference laboratory for marine biotoxins.

Once the final conclusions are available, the Commission will consider whether a legislative proposal is necessary.

(2001/C 89 E/164) WRITTEN QUESTION E-2100/00
by Chris Davies (ELDR) to the Commission

Subject: Death of dolphins in EU waters

In view of reports that hundreds of dolphins in EU waters are being caught and drowned, and further to my Written Question E-0935/00 (1), will the Commission now draw up and publish a plan of action, in accordance with a strict timetable, to resolve the problem and prevent the death of dolphins, either by the application of improved scientific techniques or by a ban on the use of pelagic trawls, as already applied in some Member States?


Answer given by Mr Fischler on behalf of the Commission

(29 August 2000)

At the Fisheries Council of 16 June 2000, the Commission expressed its deepest concern on this and similar issues. To follow up, the Commission will very soon contact Member States requesting them to inform it of what actions they have taken or intend to take at national level to limit by-catches of cetaceans in commercial fisheries. Furthermore, the Commission indicated its intention to give priority to further research and to consider what might be done in the immediate future.