WRITTEN QUESTION E-3811/00
by Patricia McKenna (Verts/ALE) to the Council

(7 December 2000)

Subject: Prison reform in Russia

Russia holds an extraordinarily high proportion of its population — 1,1 million — in prisons and prison camps. The latest figures show that, out of every 100 000 Russians, some 750 are imprisoned. A special report by the official Russian human rights body estimates that 85 000 prisoners in Russian prisons have no beds, 91 000 suffer from TB, and 5000 have AIDS. From these figures, it is obvious that the Russian prison system is failing and is in serious need of reform and financial assistance.

At the EU-Russia Summit which took place in Paris at the end of October, the Joint Declaration by Mr J. Chirac, Mr R. Prodi and Mr V. Putin, President of the Russian Federation, stated that, ‘the primary objective of cooperation, which is entering into a new phase, will be to support the institutional, economic and social reforms, with a view to strengthening the rule of law and meeting the democratic requirements of a modern economy and society.’ With respect to this statement, can the Council explain what future plans it has to tackle Russia’s prison crisis?

Reply

(8 March 2001)

The Council is concerned by the situation in penal establishments in Russia. One of the EU’s priorities in its cooperation with Russia is support for institutional reforms. A joint project of the Commission and the Council of Europe relating to the reform of penal institutions in Russia is currently under way as part of the TACIS programme. The Council also regularly reminds Russia of the importance it attaches to respect for human rights, which is one of the foundations of the partnership between the EU and Russia.

WRITTEN QUESTION E-3812/00
by Patricia McKenna (Verts/ALE) to the Commission

(7 December 2000)

Subject: State of Russian prisons

Russia holds an extraordinarily high proportion of its population — 1,1 million — in prisons and prison camps. The latest figures show that, out of every 100 000 Russians, some 750 are imprisoned. A special report by the official Russian Human rights body estimates that 85 000 prisoners in Russian prisons have no beds, 91 000 suffer from TB, and 5000 have AIDS. A report by the NGO Human Rights Watch estimated that Russia’s prison population increased in 1999 and, according to official figures, it grew by 45 000 prisoners in the first five months of 1999. Pre-trial detention centres held about 300 000 people in 1999, 80 000 contracted serious diseases in detention, and about 2000 died awaiting trial.

At the EU-Russia Summit which took place in Paris at the end of October, the Joint Declaration Mr Chirac, Mr R. Prodi and Mr V. Putin, President of the Russian Federation stated that, ‘the primary objective of cooperation, which is entering into a new phase, will be to support the institutional, economic and social reforms, with a view to strengthening the rule of law and meeting the democratic requirements of a modern economy and society.’ With respect to this statement and to the alarming statistics, can the Commission explain what future plans it has to aid social reform in Russia and, in particular, to help it tackle its prison crisis?
Answer given by Mr Patten on behalf of the Commission

(19 January 2001)

In line with the common strategy of the Union on Russia, addressing the social consequences of transition is one of the priorities of the Tacis programme for Russia for the period 2000-2003. This mainly concerns strengthening the reform of the social sector, while covering the basic security needs of the population, particularly vulnerable groups. Efforts so far have not focused on prisons, but rather on reforming the health system as a whole, including development of primary health care (general practitioners) and promotion of health prevention. These technical assistance initiatives should be expanded in the future and could cover prisons as well, provided the Russian authorities press ahead with their new reform programme, which rightly treats social issues as a priority.

Humanitarian aid has been supplied by the Community’s Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) to ease the difficult living conditions of the most vulnerable in selected institutions (including prisons), as well as of TB patients in chosen pilot areas. However, in view of further funding constraints in 2001 and the continuing humanitarian crisis stemming from the Chechnya conflict, ECHO’s priority will be emergency operations in the Northern Caucasus.

In addition to this limited humanitarian aid and to systemic health reform projects, addressing the issue of Russian prisons, parallel actions could contribute to improve the judicial system itself. Tacis funds have already been allocated to promote the legal protection of individual rights. Support will be given to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) providing legal advice to citizens and will, thus, seek to reduce the unfavourable statistics that the Honourable Member quotes. For the future, a priority would be the improved training of Russian judges. The Commission is studying the possibility of a large Tacis project in support to the newly established Academy of Justice. Furthermore, twinning of Community and Russian courts will be possible under the new Tacis institution building partnership programme, currently under development.

(2001/C 174 E/159)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-3816/00

by John Bowis (PPE-DE) to the Commission

(7 December 2000)

Subject: Community rules on the transport of live animals

Will the Commission guarantee that, when bringing forward its action on enforcement of Community rules on the transport of live animals, it sets standards that are no less stringent than those recently imposed by the Government of Slovenia?

Answer given by Mr Byrne on behalf of the Commission

(16 February 2001)

The protection of animals during transport is an important concern for the Commission. The first Community legislation on the protection of animals during transport was adopted in 1977. Since then it has been replaced by Council Directive 91/628/EEC of 19 November 1991 on the protection of animals during transport and amending Directives 90/425/EEC and 91/496/EEC(1) as amended by Council Directive 95/29/EC of 29 June 1995(2) which introduced important changes such as the approval of transporters and the route plan as well as loading densities and travelling time limits.

On 16 October 2000 the Slovenian government started to carry out inspections and controls on the cross border transport of animals to verify compliance with the relevant Community legislation on transport conditions and travel times, as incorporated into national Slovenian law.