All participants in the Sensus project are legal entities established in the Community, which could therefore participate in RTD activities under FP4 with a financial contribution by the Community, in conformity with the rules for participation.

Said rules for participation do not contain a list of legal entities which should be a priori excluded from participating in Community funded RTD activities. Governmental bodies, including intelligence organisations such as Amt für Auslandsfragen (AfA), are therefore entitled to participate in RTD projects provided their participation is justified by the technical objectives of such projects and complies with any further requirement under the rules for participation and the specific programme concerned.

A further Commission decision was necessary for the inclusion of European Police Office (Europol) because of its status as an international organisation (the Honourable Member is referred to the answer the Commission gave to his written question E-892/01 (1)).

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Aventinus I</th>
<th>Aventinus II</th>
<th>Sensus</th>
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<td>Programme</td>
<td>Fourth Framework Telematics Applications Programme (TAP)</td>
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<td>TAP Call</td>
<td>First Call, closing 15 March 1995</td>
<td>Fourth Call, closing 15 April 1997</td>
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</table>

As these projects focused on pre-competitive research, no commercial language technology products resulted to date, or were expected to result, from the Aventinus or Sensus projects.

(1) See p. 17.
Answer given by Mr Patten on behalf of the Commission

(22 June 2001)

As indicated by the Honourable Member, the disbursement ratio for the Mediterranean Development Assistance programme (MEDA) over the period 1995-1999 was of only 26%.

While underlining that the percentage of financial commitments over the same period was of 99.9%, the Commission sees three explanations behind this insufficient disbursement ratio:

- an inefficient decision making and programming process under MEDA I,
- general procedural difficulties within the external assistance mechanisms of the Commission
- and absorption problems of the Mediterranean partners.

As regards the first point, the Commission has now put in place a new legal framework: Council Regulation (EC) No 2698/2000 of 27 November 2000 amending Regulation (EC) No 1488/96 on financial and technical measures to accompany (MEDA) the reform of economic and social structures in the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership (1) incorporates a much more programmatic and strategic approach, with the adoption of annual financing plans, replacing the previous cumbersome procedures for single projects; as well as enhanced donor co-ordination on the spot and with the European Investment Bank (EIB).

As regards the second reason, the primary objective of the reform of the external assistance is precisely the improvement of the quality and consistency of programming.

As a result of the steps which are being taken to correct the operational problems that affected MEDA, it should be noted that the implementation results for the year 2000 show execution ratios of 95% and 38% for commitments and payments respectively.

The Commission is well aware of the need for an increase in the human resources devoted to MEDA implementation, both in Brussels and in the Commission's delegations. Provisions are being made in 2001 and 2002 for the Commission to hire the necessary staff resources under Part B of the budget, in liaison with the ongoing process of deconcentration. Moreover in 2001, EuropeAid Co-operation Office, MEDA Directorate, will receive ± 35 extra posts. And for 2002 a significant increase of posts is foreseen subject to agreement by the budgetary authority.

The Commission underlines that no comparison could be made with the exchange programme of officials with Member States which has different objectives from those of the co-operation programmes with third countries.

The Commission agrees with the Honourable Member that there is a need for simplification of procedures under MEDA. This is precisely what the revised MEDA Regulation will bring. Notably, through a programme based approach implemented through annual financing plans, instead of the previous myriad of projects individually submitted to the MED committee. In this sense, it can be said that the revised MEDA Regulation will bring a modus operandi fairly close to that of TACIS.

The human resources devoted to the management of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership have not decreased over the last two years. They have been redistributed within the different services of the Commission mostly concerned (Directorate general for External Relations (DG RELEX) and DG Europe Aid), while their number has remained constant so far. However, this overall number is about to increase, in line with the hiring process mentioned above.