focusing on the role of SMEs were accordingly organised, including a conference on ‘Financing SMEs: the European approach’ at Louvain-la-Neuve on 24 and 25 October 2001.

2. At the Energy/Industry Council meeting on 4 and 5 December 2001 the Council dealt with the specific problems of SMEs in various sets of conclusions:

- Council conclusions on the implementation of the Lisbon objectives in the area of enterprise policy, in which the Council invited Member States to:
  - review the experience of those Member States that have had exemplary growth and productivity performance since the mid-1990s, to see what lessons can be learned regarding ICT use and diffusion and what actions have contributed to making easier and faster the uptake of ICT by European enterprises, notably by SMEs,

- and invited Member States and the Commission to:
  - continue their work in the area of benchmarking enterprise policy, in particular in relation to SMEs, and in producing the relevant Scoreboards.

- Council conclusions on SME access to finance, in which the Council invited the Commission to:
  - encourage professionalism of the various players in the field of equity finance by identifying good practices in the field of public and private training;
  - facilitate contacts between banks, other financial providers and SMEs in order to draft a European code of conduct between banks and SMEs and thus strengthen their understanding of each other, and determine best practices for reducing the complexity of the administrative procedures involved in financing or government guarantees;
  - measure on a regular basis SMEs’ access to finance;
  - explore ways of reducing the informational asymmetries between capital supply and demand, looking in particular at risk assessment methodologies that are accessible, transparent and suited to SMEs’ requirements;
  - explore ways to increase liquidity of capital markets;

- Council conclusions concerning State aid, in which Member States were invited, among other things, to:
  - reorient aid towards horizontal objectives, including cohesion and, where appropriate, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

3. At the same meeting, the Council also noted information given by the Austrian delegation on the potential effects on SMEs’ access to finance of the new Basle Capital Accord due to be adopted shortly.

4. The Spanish Presidency has already planned to put an item on the European Charter for SMEs on the agenda of the Industry/Energy Council on 6 and 7 June 2002 as part of the follow-up to the conclusions expected from the Barcelona European Council on 15 and 16 March 2002.

(2002/C 147 E/182)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-3424/01
by Glyn Ford (PSE) to the Commission
(21 December 2001)

Subject: Funding from the Commission

In May 1998, the European Commission carried out an inquiry into the Migration News Sheet.
Can the Commission provide information on the steps which it has taken after having presented its mission report to the Migration Policy Group, the publisher of this publication, and after that organisation had submitted its comments thereon to the Commission (almost three years ago)?

On 7 March 2001, (in accordance with the terms of the contract concerning a subsidy for 2000), the Migration Policy Group submitted to the Commission a financial report, an activity report and a request for the transfer of the remainder of the agreed subsidy (VS/2000/0275) for the publication of the Migration News Sheet in the year 2000. What reasons does the Commission have for not responding to that request?

**Answer given by Mrs Diamantopoulou on behalf of the Commission**

*(14 February 2002)*

In principle, the audit carried out by the Commission covered the subsidies granted to the Migration Policy Group (MPG) in 1996 and 1997. In view of the irregularities discovered, the department responsible for the audit decided to extend it to cover the 1994 and 1995 files.

In its conclusions, and in order to be able to determine the amount of unduly paid funding, the auditor asked the recipient to prepare new financial statements based on actual costs (not including reserves), to provide more detailed explanations concerning the invoices from the Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME), whose 1995 and 1996 accounts were not clearly separated from those of the MPG, and to submit supporting documents relating to travel expenses.

As the new statements and supporting documents received were not totally satisfactory, additional information was requested. Discussions between the Commission and MPG representative took place in 1999 and continued in 2000.

Payment of the subsidy for the 2000 Migration News Sheet was suspended pending the repayment which had to be requested on the basis of the audit. The resulting debit notes and payment are currently being processed.

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(2002/C147 E/183)

**WRITTEN QUESTION E-3427/01**

*by Astrid Lulling (PPE-DE) to the Commission*

*(21 December 2001)*

**Subject:** Meetings of the College of Commissioners

Under Article 219 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, ‘a meeting of the Commission shall be valid only if the number of Members laid down in its Rules of Procedure is present.’ Article 5 of the Commission’s internal rules states: ‘The Commission shall, as a general rule, meet at least once a week. It shall hold additional meetings whenever necessary.’ The article also says ‘Members of the Commission shall be required to attend all meetings’.

Can the Commission say how many times the College of Commissioners has met since the investiture of the present Commission and how many meetings individual Commissioners have attended?

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

*(30 January 2002)*

In all but exceptional cases, and outside the holiday periods (i), the Commission meets once a week (in Brussels on a Wednesday, or during the plenary meeting of Parliament in Strasbourg on a Tuesday).