1. The peace process in Colombia is currently going through a period of uncertainty. The President of Colombia felt obliged to put an end, on 20 February 2002, to the process, which began in 1998, of dialogue and negotiation for the conclusion of agreements with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia — People's Army (FARC-EP) and to the Disengagement Zone. The Council has always supported President Andrés Pastrana and his efforts over the years to achieve peace in Colombia. Unfortunately, the FARC-EP have refused to come on board.

2. It is now for the Colombian authorities to define tangible means of enabling the Colombian Government to open up new channels for finding a solution to the conflict. Recommendations by regional organisations to which Colombia belongs and the experience of neighbouring countries undoubtedly have a contribution to make in the definition of those means.

3. The Council has expressed its solidarity with the Colombian people and with President Pastrana and his Government, as well as the hope that Colombian democracy, on the basis of full respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law, can completely fulfil the aspirations for peace and prosperity of the Colombian people.

4. The Council has on several occasions expressed the view that there is no suitable alternative to a negotiated solution to the internal conflict and has reaffirmed its support for any initiative to establish a genuine dialogue with a view to ending the conflict which is tearing Colombia apart. The Council has also reiterated its willingness to support, together with the international community, any negotiation process which could lead to a peace based on human rights and fundamental freedoms.

5. The European Union will endeavour to fulfil the autonomous commitments entered into under the European programme of support for the Colombia peace process, insofar as security problems do not hamper it. The programme is aimed at promoting and ensuring respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and humanitarian law, improving the living conditions of local populations, encouraging the cultivation of alternative crops and the protection of biodiversity and supporting the introduction of reforms to the structures which fuel conflict.

6. Lastly, in its discussions with the Andean Community and the United States, the Council has on several occasions exchanged information on all aspects of the situation in Colombia and has outlined the European Union's position on this subject.

(2002/C277E/081)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0699/02

by Sergio Berlato (UEN), Cristiana Muscardini (UEN), Roberta Angelilli (UEN), Roberto Bigliardo (UEN), Mauro Nobilia (UEN), Antonio Mussa (UEN), Sebastiano Musumeci (UEN), Adriana Poli Bortone (UEN) and Franz Turchi (UEN) to the Commission

(13 March 2002)

Subject: Mountain regions

Europe's mountain regions provide general benefits from the environmental, economic, social and cultural points of view and also represent an exceptional heritage which must be enhanced and protected.

Because of their specific situation, their position on frontiers and between regions, and the problems of implementing coherent policies because of their fragmentary nature, mountain regions need a common policy.

Will the Commission define a coherent European policy on mountains and, possibly with the help of experts, examine under what conditions the guidelines laid down in the European charter of mountain regions could be translated into European law?
Answer given by Mr Barnier on behalf of the Commission

(17 May 2002)

The Commission has been following closely the progress of the draft European charter on mountain regions. However, it notes that it has still not been officially adopted by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe.

Several Community policies, in particular regional policy and the common agricultural policy, acknowledge the special features of mountain areas.

In the case of regional policy, 95% of the mountain areas in the Union are eligible for Community assistance in 2000-2006, either under Objective 1 (the Cantabrian range and the Sierra Nevada in Spain, the Highlands of Scotland, the mountain areas of central and northern Sweden, the Greek mountains, the southern Apennines in Italy and the Corsican mountains) or under Objective 2 (part of the Massif central in France, the Alps and Pyrenees and part of the northern Apennines). These programmes provide for specific measures to develop the potential of mountain areas, reduce their disadvantages and put them on the path of sustainable development.

In addition, Community Initiatives such as Interreg III and Leader+ take account of the ‘mountain’ aspect. The existence of an Alpine area has been incorporated into strand B ‘Transnational cooperation’ of Interreg III. The ‘Alpine area’ programme covers the whole of the Alps and the Alpine Convention, i.e. France, Italy, Switzerland (with its own federal funds), Austria, Germany, Slovenia and Liechtenstein. It seeks to promote the transnational cooperation begun during the previous programming period and complements the usual programmes for cross-border cooperation which promote more local measures. In addition, Leader+ provides mountainous rural areas with opportunities by helping improve relations between towns and rural areas, providing new services to those living there, developing natural and cultural assets and so on.

The Commission would also point out to the Honourable Members that the Second Report on Economic and Social Cohesion, adopted on 30 January 2001, recognised mountain areas as having permanent geographical or natural handicaps so that they qualified as one of the six territorial priorities for the future cohesion policy.

Finally it would note that it will shortly launch a study on the mountain areas of the Union and the applicant countries which will be line with the principles of the draft Charter, e.g. a definition of the concept of mountains using scientific and objective criteria concerned mainly with altitude and slope, a territorial definition of mountain areas, an objective diagnosis of the situation including an assessment and evaluation of the problems encountered in mountain areas and a description of the specific needs of mountain areas, and an analysis of the measures and policies developed by the Member States and the European Union to meet the challenges posed by these areas and better develop their potential. The results of this study will contribute to the discussion on the future of regional policy after 2006.

At European level, on 17 and 18 October the Commission will organise a seminar specially devoted to mountain regions which will be attended by all those involved at local level and decision-makers at regional, national and European level, including of course the candidate countries. At this information seminar the Community policies for mountain areas will be presented to those engaged in local development so that the instruments now available can be better used.

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0702/02

by Charles Tannock (PPE-DE) and Robert Goodwill (PPE-DE) to the Commission

(13 March 2002)

Subject: The implications for money-laundering and tax evasion of the new € 500 note

In its answer to Written Question E-3213/01 (1), the Commission listed a number of EU Member States which, until recently, used banknotes worth between € 200 and € 600, although it remains the case that only Germany and Holland used banknotes of comparable value to the new € 500 note.