The Commission is taking action to improve its performance in Albania. In addition to the establishment in 2001 of the EuropeAid Cooperation Office and efforts to streamline procedures, part on the major reform underway in the EC's external assistance programme worldwide, the Commission plans substantially to reinforce its delegation in Tirana, with the specific objective of improving implementation. Furthermore, the Commission has adopted (on 18 December 2001, after a detailed analysis of the situation in the country) a new, improved strategy paper for Albania (1), which will be the framework for the programming and implementation of future Community assistance.

Community assistance in Albania supports general economic development. But it does so by putting emphasis on creating the institutional framework for a market economy, by consolidating democracy and civil society, building the rule of law in particular through an independent judiciary, supporting public order and fight against organised crime, fraud and corruption, securing fiscal sustainability of the state, enhancing key areas of the public administration in order to achieve an adequate business environment, supporting long-term, sustainable development through improving education or environmental protection. In all these areas, the aim is to help Albania make progress towards the Union, an aspiration which enjoys very substantial support among the people of Albania and which is an important element of the Union's efforts to bring lasting peace and stability to the Balkans.


(2002/C 301 E/010) WRITTEN QUESTION E-3547/01

by Erik Meijer (GUE/NGL) to the Commission

(7 January 2002)

Subject: Rise in crime due to the increase in the proportion of the urban population of no known name, nationality, address or source of income

1. Does the Commission agree with the local authorities of major cities in the EU Member States that in recent years a growing proportion of long-term residents has come to consist of people who have no known name, nationality, address or source of income?

2. Can the Commission confirm that, in practice, the Schengen agreements on a restrictive immigration policy for people from outside the EU have not been found to result in any reduction in the number of unidentified residents of cities but have mainly had the effect that growing numbers of people are permanently resident there who feel themselves compelled to do everything they can to conceal their identity and therefore do not apply for asylum?

3. Is one of the reasons for this increase in the number of residents whom the authorities cannot identify that, while there is no legal source of income and no other provision for those who have no legal residence permit or who lose such a permit, this does not in practice result in their leaving but only in their doing their best to avoid being found?

4. To what extent does the lack of legal income for this growing population group give rise to illegal employment, trade in illegal goods, break-ins and robberies?

5. Can the Commission confirm that it is particularly residents of the candidate countries who, in anticipation of 2004, are moving to cities in the EU in larger numbers, and that disproportionate numbers of them come from ethnic minorities in their State of origin and find themselves in the position of second-class citizens in relation to the ethnic majority there, such as Turks from Bulgaria, Roma from Central Europe, Albanians from outside Albania and Hungarians from the regions ceded by Hungary in 1918?

6. Does the Commission see any way of making it possible to return to the previous situation, in which it was a matter of course for the appropriate authorities to know the identity and sources of income of residents, irrespective of whether they were of indigenous or immigrant origin, so that the normal rules with regard to welfare, taxation, safety and liability to punishment also apply to them?
Answer given by Mr Vitorino on behalf of the Commission

(7 March 2002)

It is impossible to estimate with any precision the numbers of illegal residents living in the major cities of the Union. Evidence from regularisation programmes over the last few years indicate, however, that many of them are known to the authorities (having overstayed their original visas) and have a job. Recent studies show that the number of people from the candidate countries working legally in the Union is relatively low compared to the whole Union workforce (approx. 300,000 plus dependants = 0.2% of the Union workforce). In addition there are an unknown number of undocumented Central and Eastern Europe countries (CEEC) nationals working in the Member States often on a temporary basis while violating residence regulations by changing the purpose of their stay or overstaying their three-month visa-free residence. Figures on the ethnic origin of these illegal workers are not available.

Although measures taken by Member States as well as within the Union framework up to now have undoubtedly had an effect, additional steps are seen as necessary to fight against illegal immigration and residence. The Commission has, therefore, forwarded a Communication to the Council and the Parliament on a common policy on illegal immigration (1), containing an action plan with appropriate measures. As requested by the Laeken European Council of 14 and 15 December 2001 the Council is about to adopt its own action plan, largely based on this Communication.

Furthermore, the Commission will be issuing soon another Communication on an integrated and comprehensive strategy on border control and management which will build upon the existing common acquis on external borders. It will sketch out how to increase further the capability to address effectively the challenges posed at the Union's external borders by both illegal immigration and the activities of criminal networks. In order to reduce the number of illegal residents, who cannot be identified and subsequently returned to their countries of origin, the Commission has also proposed assessing the feasibility of a European Visa Identification System in order to establish a timely instrument to ensure proper admission for short-term stays and return after expiration of the visa. The European Council has already asked the Council to take the necessary steps to set up such a system in its conclusion no 40 and 42 of the Laeken European Council of December 2001.

Another major issue, which needs to be addressed in the context of illegal residence, is the availability of undeclared work in the Union. The possibilities for working in the black labour market create a significant pull factor for irregular migrants. Appropriate sanctions must, therefore, be imposed on employers of illegal residents. These sanctions must focus in particular on the financial advantages they gain by employing illegal workers.

The Commission believes that the implementation of the policies which it has already put forward and in particular a more transparent policy on legal migration, as described in its Communication on a Community immigration policy (2), together with the co-ordination of policies designed to reduce push factors in countries of origin, an improved and strengthened system of controls at the Union external borders and greater efforts to enforce labour legislation in the Member States, will lead to a reduction of illegal immigration and residence.