Austria imposes certain reporting requirements on their banks and financial institutions in order to obtain statistical information for establishing the balance of payments: according to the regulations issued by the Austrian National Bank, banks have to distinguish between resident- and non-resident accounts. Certain transactions from and/or to a non-resident account as well as cross-border transactions in general have to be notified to the authorities.

However, in order to allow for cheaper retail payments within Austria, banks are authorised to arrange for a specific Euro account for non-residents ('Euro-Sonderkonten für Devisenausländer; Exporterlös-Sammelkonten'). Transfers from and to such accounts can be made under the same conditions as domestic transfers from and to resident accounts. The transfers to be credited to that account can however not exceed a sum of EUR 12 500 and have to be transferred at least once a month to a non-resident account or to an account abroad.

There is also a tax-issue to be considered in this context: residents in Austria are subject to Austrian income tax on the interest from their bank accounts. Non-residents, on the contrary, are normally not subject to Austrian income tax on such income, but in their country of residence.

Hence, operating a non-resident account calls for additional administrative procedures for the credit institutions under present Austrian legislation. If a bank therefore decides to levy additional charges in order to cover the cost of the necessary manual handling, this decision is a commercial decision and not an illegal discrimination. The business policy of charging for the operation of non-resident accounts does not constitute an infringement against existing Community-legislation.

Nonetheless, the Commission considers since a long time that the above-mentioned reporting requirements have to be simplified if not abolished altogether within the Internal Market as a matter of principle. The Parliament actively supports the Commission’s initiatives in this respect. A first token of success is the agreement among Member States to require reporting only for transfers of more than EUR 12 500 from 1 January 2002 onwards. This will certainly decrease the cost for the cross-border credit transfers as well as for transfers from and to non-resident accounts of lower value.

Moreover, the recently adopted Regulation on cross-border payments in euro (1) should further contribute to alleviate the existing problems in connection with non-resident accounts. This Regulation aims at a reduction of charges for cross-border payments of up to EUR 12 500, so that by 1 July 2002 (concerning electronic payment transactions) and respectively by 1 July 2003 (concerning cross-border credit transfers) charges have to be aligned to those for corresponding payments at national level.


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WRITTEN QUESTION E-0235/02
by Karin Junker (PSE) to the Commission

(6 February 2002)

Subject: Future of European Documentation Centres

The network of European Documentation Centres (EDC) has been in existence for 30 years. There are now more than 500 centres both within and outside the EU. The centres have concluded an agreement with the Commission on the provision of documentation and training. In its communication on a new framework for cooperation on activities concerning the information and communication policy (1), the Commission underlines the importance of the EDC by stating, inter alia, that ‘the EDC are key information points’.

Despite the importance which the Commission rightly attaches to these centres, the post of head of unit responsible in the Directorate-General for Press and Communication has been vacant since April 2001. Complaints are also being made that, more and more frequently, even those documents listed in the monthly register of the Publications Office as being available free of charge are treated as not available for distribution to EDCs.
Can the Commission explain why the post of head of unit has remained vacant for so long, and when a fresh appointment can be expected? Why is information otherwise available free of charge not made available to the EDCs? How will the Commission involve the EDCs in the European Union's future information policy in a way commensurate with their importance, and what will it do to allay the concern felt by many staff regarding the future of the centres?

(1) [COM(2001) 354 final].

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

(22 March 2002)

The post of head of unit was filled in January 2002 and the new head of unit is continuing to develop a strong working relationship between the European Documentation Centres (EDCs) and the Commission.

EDCs have preferential access to the Commission's data base and to all documents published by the Office for Official Publications of the European Communities (OPOCE), free of charge. The only exception is the Official Journal for which the usual charge is made. In recent years the OPOCE has made its publications available to the EDCs online rather than in paper form in order to enable quicker access to documents and to cut down on distribution costs.

The Commission continues to believe that 'the EDCs are key information points' and they will certainly be an important part of the Union's future information policy.

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(2002/C 301 E/030)  **WRITTEN QUESTION E-0237/02**  
by Anna Karamanou (PSE) to the Commission  
(6 February 2002)

**Subject:** Concern over the 110 prisoners in Guantanamo

The treatment of the 110 prisoners in the American Guantanamo base in Cuba who are thought to have had links with the al-Qa'ida network has aroused world-wide indignation. Various international bodies and non-governmental organisations have protested about both the inhuman transportation and detention conditions of those in the American base, and the legal regime under which they are being held.

What steps does the Commission intend to take to ensure that the conditions of transportation and detention of the prisoners in Cuba are investigated and that a competent tribunal pronounces on the legal status of the detainees and, in particular, whether they are entitled under the provisions of the Third Geneva Convention to prisoner of war status? How will it ensure that, in any case, their human rights are fully respected and they are treated humanely, in accordance with the Geneva Convention and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights?

(2002/C 301 E/031)  **WRITTEN QUESTION E-0392/02**  
by Charles Tannock (PPE-DE) to the Commission  
(20 February 2002)

**Subject:** The application of the Geneva Conventions regarding prisoners of war

Does the Commission believe that members of terrorist organisations such as Al-Qaeda fall within the category of 'prisoner of war' under the terms of the 1949 Geneva Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, bearing in mind the requirement under Part I Article 4 that prisoners of war must be 'Members of the armed forces of a Party to the conflict as well as members or militias or volunteer corps forming part of such armed forces' or 'Members of other militias and members of other volunteer corps,