Answer given by Mr Prodi on behalf of the Commission

(25 March 2002)

The comment by the Member of the Commission responsible for Trade was expressed as his personal political assessment of 50 years of the story of European integration. The President’s spokesman was referring to one of the basic principles of the Union, i.e. the equal treatment of Member States. The two positions are expressed in two different contexts and for two different purposes and, therefore, they do not need to be reconciled.

(2002/C 301 E/038)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0311/02
by Jonas Sjöstedt (GUE/NGL) to the Commission

(11 February 2002)

Subject: Scrutiny of Sävsjö municipality’s sale of the town sanatorium

According to reports in the media (Dagens Nyheter of 27 January 2002), the Commission is to look into Sävsjö municipality’s sale in 1999 of the town’s former sanatorium, the surrounding park and what used to be a doctor’s residence.

The sale price and local authority grants together with many other advantages a private purchaser secured to convert the sanatorium into a hotel and conference centre upset other local businesspeople. The latter considered they had been beaten with the help of taxpayers’ money, and legal proceedings are still ongoing in this connection. The Administrative Court of Appeal, however, found in the municipality’s favour, but the objectors are now said to have approached the Commission.

It is not certain what political decisions a municipality can take to promote business locally without affecting free competition in the internal market in the process.

Does the Commission intend to deliver an opinion on this matter? How many times a year does it make inquiries of the various Member States’ governments concerning similar decisions that have been taken by local and regional political bodies, on the grounds that they could adversely affect free competition in the internal market?

Answer given by Mr Monti on behalf of the Commission

(5 April 2002)

The Commission welcomes the decentralisation process which takes place in several Member States and whereby local authorities are entrusted with the task to conduct economic policy and promote business.

However, local as well as central authorities are subject to the EC Treaty competition rules. In particular, ‘aid granted by regional and local bodies of the Member States, whatever their status and description, must be scrutinized to determine whether it complies with Article 87 §1 of the Treaty’ (1).

Thus, the Commission should be informed, in sufficient time to enable it to submit its comments, of any plans to grant or alter aid put forward by the local authorities. The proposed measures should not be put into effect until this procedure has resulted in a final decision.

It has to be reminded in that respect that the prohibition of State aids laid down in Article 87 §1 of the EC Treaty concerns only selective advantages to entities having an economic activity and which distort or threaten to distort competition and trade between Member States.

According to the Commission Regulation (EC) No 69/2001 of 12 January 2001 on the application of Articles 87 and 88 of the EC Treaty to de minimis aid (2), aid measures are deemed not to meet all the criteria of Article 87 §1 of the EC Treaty, if they don’t exceed EUR 100 000 over a period of three years.
The Commission does not dispose currently of any statistical data concerning inquiries on similar decisions that have been taken by local and regional political bodies.


(2002/C 301 E/039) WRITTEN QUESTION P-0313/02 by John Bowis (PPE-DE) to the Commission

(4 February 2002)

Subject: ACP resolution on the rights of disabled people and older people in the ACP States

What action has the Commission taken on the resolution on the rights of disabled people and older people (ACP-EU/3313/01/fin.) which was adopted unanimously at the third session of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly in October 2001? Has the Commission now appointed a specialist officer in that area?

Answer given by Mr Nielson on behalf of the Commission

(26 February 2002)

The general objective of the Development Co-operation Policy of the Community is to encourage sustainable development leading to a reduction of poverty in developing countries.

The Commission sees social policies and improved access to, and quality of, basic social infrastructures and services (health and education in particular) as one of the best means to take account of specific demands of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups.

The Commission considers that the rights of disabled people and older people should be taken in consideration in this context. However, it does not specifically target these groups as beneficiaries from development co-operation activities. The Commission has nevertheless financed specific programmes for the benefit of handicapped people, especially in post-conflict situations and countries.

The Commission does not intend to appoint a specialist officer in this area.

(2002/C 301 E/040) WRITTEN QUESTION E-0399/02 by Feleknas Uca (GUE/NGL) to the Commission

(20 February 2002)

Subject: Proceedings to ban HADEP — wave of arrests in Turkey

The proceedings to ban HADEP, instituted in 1999 by the Turkish public prosecutor, have started. HADEP is charged with wanting to destroy the unity of the country. The court delayed the proceedings for one month to allow the HADEP President, Murat Bozlak, time to prepare a defence statement. The proceedings to ban HADEP will resume on 1 March.

Resumption of the legal proceedings has sparked off a new wave of repression against Kurds. Members and staff of HADEP have been arrested. The Kurdish Institute in Istanbul was placed under official seal without a court order. 500 students at the University of Van were arrested at the beginning of January 2002 when they wanted to hand the Rector of the University a petition in connection with a country-wide campaign for voluntary Kurdish courses at universities. As a result, other students who had signed the petition were detained throughout the country. According to some leading politicians, the students were accused of terrorism and charged.