Answer given by Mr Busquin on behalf of the Commission  
(20 September 2002)

The Commission agrees that new developments in Neuroscience do raise ethical questions. The Commission has already taken steps to address these issues by funding research projects on the ethical aspects of brain research and by organising symposia at international scientific conferences such as the symposium 'Ethics of psychiatric genetics' at the World Congress on Psychiatric Genetics, Brussels 8 to 12 October 2002.

The Commission specifically recognises the need for open dialogue on the ethical and social impact of new technologies in both the Science and Society Action Plan (1) and in its communication on Life sciences and biotechnology — A strategy for Europe (2).

The launching of a public debate regarding the advances in Neuroscience and its ethical and social implications is currently being discussed with the European Group on Life Sciences. This high level group of scientists was established in April 2000 by the Member of the Commission responsible for Research with the objective of contributing to the organisation and animation of a Life Science Discussion Platform. The Commission is willing to investigate the possibility of organising a public debate on this topic.

Providing advice on the ethical aspects of new developments in Neuroscience is clearly in the remits of the European Group on Ethics in Science and New Technologies. The Group is an independent, pluralist and multidisciplinary body with a wide range of expertise including science and medicine, informatics, law, philosophy and theology. Therefore, the Commission does not consider it necessary to create a new advisory body to give advice in the field of neuroscience.

(2) OJ C 55, 2.3.2002.

Answer given by Mr Liikanen on behalf of the Commission  
(4 September 2002)

The Commission has no knowledge of the facts mentioned by the Honourable Member.

In accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, actions aimed at promoting or safeguarding the image of a specific tourist destination are the sole responsibility of the national and/or regional authorities.
It is not therefore possible for the Commission to intervene or take initiatives along the lines advocated by the Honourable Member.

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WRITTEN QUESTION E-2423/02

by Olivier Dupuis (NI) to the Commission

(20 August 2002)

Subject: Disappearance of Venerable Thich Tri Luc (Mr Pham Van Tuong)

Thich Tri Luc, whose secular name is Pham Van Tuong, was born in 1954 and is an active member of the UBCV (Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam) movement for religious freedom, democracy and human rights. Thich Tri Luc was first arrested in 1992 and detained for 10 months without trial. He was again arrested on 5 November 1994 for participating in a UBCV mission to rescue flood victims. He was sentenced to two and a half years detention and five years’ house arrest at an unfair trial in Ho Chi Minh City, where he was charged with ‘abusing democratic freedoms to harm the interests of the State’. On 19 April 2002, Thich Tri Luc fled to Cambodia to escape religious persecution in Vietnam. He applied for refugee status at the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in Phnom Penh and was granted such status on 28 June 2002.

Since Thursday, 25 July, the UNHCR Office in Phnom Penh has been unable to secure information on his current whereabouts. Given reports that Vietnamese secret police routinely enter Cambodia to arrest, forcibly repatriate and even murder refugees from the ethnic Montagnard minority fleeing persecution in Vietnam, there is reason for concern about his safety.

Is the Commission aware of the disappearance of Thich Tri Luc (Mr Pham Van Tuong) and of the forcible repatriation of political refugees seeking asylum in Cambodia carried out by the Vietnamese authorities? More generally, how does the Commission intend to implement the human rights clause of the cooperation agreement between Vietnam and the EU and, in particular, to address the grave concern over the harassment and detention of religious leaders in Vietnam once again expressed by the United Nations’ Human Rights Committee in Geneva?

Answer given by Mr Patten on behalf of the Commission

(20 September 2002)

The Commission is aware of the disappearance of the Venerable Thich Tri Luc and is following up the matter continuously with the local representatives of both the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) and the UNCHR (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights). The Commission assesses the situation with the Union’s Member State Representatives in Phnom Penh on a regular basis. The recent visit of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mrs Mary Robinson, provided a further opportunity to take up the matter with the Cambodian authorities.

The Commission has a frank and open dialogue with the Cambodian authorities on human rights issues, including during the last European Community-Cambodia Joint Committee meeting in May 2002. Union demarches related to the respect of human rights have taken place in Phnom Penh on several occasions. The Delegation in Phnom Penh is also in regular contact with local human rights non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Concerning the implementation of human rights clause in the European Community-Vietnam Co-operation Agreement, questions related to the respect and promotion of human rights are addressed in the meetings of the European Community-Vietnam Joint Commission. The Member State embassies and the Commission Delegation in Hanoi also have frequent discussions with the Vietnamese authorities on human rights issues, including specific cases.