The Commission considers that financial co-operation can help promote the necessary changes in Turkey, and to encourage Turkey to comply with the Copenhagen criteria. In this respect, special attention is paid to projects related to the fulfilment of the Copenhagen political criteria in the field of human rights. Turkey is a focus country under the 2002-2004 programme of the European initiative for Human Rights and Democracy.


WRITTEN QUESTION E-0528/02
by Christa Randzio-Plath (PSE) to the Commission
(25 February 2002)

Subject: Working conditions in the flower trade

In Europe, on 14 February, St Valentine’s Day, lovers give each other flowers. Most of those flowers come from countries outside Europe. Cut flowers are imported into Europe principally from Latin America and Africa. Europe is the largest market for cut flowers. Flower pickers and packers of both sexes work for derisory wages, on dubious contracts, frequently without any suitable apparel to protect them against pesticide poisoning and in constant danger of falling ill.

1. What measures is the European Commission taking in trade and cooperation agreements in order to help bring about better working conditions for men and women working in the flower trade?

2. To what extent does the Commission use the granting of development cooperation funds in order to eliminate the problems faced by workers in the flower trade?

Answer given by Mr Lamy on behalf of the Commission
(23 April 2002)

In its communication ‘Promoting Core Labour Standards and Improving Social Governance in the Context of Globalisation’ (1), the Commission presented a comprehensive strategy, suggesting action at European and international levels, by public and private actors alike, and in all relevant policies: social, external relations, development and trade. The Community strategy aims to create incentives and build capacity for countries to implement and respect core labour standards globally and in all sectors of the economy, including the flower trade in Latin America and Africa.

A concrete step has been the adoption by the Council of a revised generalised system of preferences (GSP) scheme. The social incentive scheme — which grants additional preferences to countries that respect the core labour standards — was improved and the basis for temporary withdrawal of the general preferences was extended to cover grave and serious infringement of all International Labour Organisation (ILO) core conventions, including those related to child labour.

As regards bilateral agreements, the Commission communication suggested inclusion of core labour standards as an integral element, thus following the approach taken in the EC-ACP Partnership Agreement with the African, Caribbean and Pacific States (the Cotonou Agreement).

Specifically, future agreements between the European Union and Mercosur and Chile will include a special section on cooperation in social, cultural and work-related matters, e.g.:

– respect for and promotion of the principles relating to fundamental labour rights, taking into account the rules of the ILO;
– the development and modernisation of labour relations, working conditions, social welfare and employment security;
the development and modernisation of working relations and processes, with emphasis on the stimulation of a social dialogue;

giving priority to education and training programmes aimed at vulnerable social groups, in respect of employment and work retraining;

the promotion of programmes in the field of work inspection, professional education and training, international migration of workers and frontier development.

It should be noted that core labour standards are part of the human rights clause which forms part of bilateral co-operation agreements. In its Communication on The European Union’s Role in Promoting Human Rights and Democratisation, the Commission proposed as part of the political dialogue discussing with partner countries how ratification of the fundamental human rights instruments and other rights-based international agreements (in particular ILO conventions) and their effective implementation could be pursued. The Commission believes that respect for social rights and core labour standards contribute to durable and equitable social and economic development.

In terms of funding, the Commission communication on core labour standards suggested increased funding from bilateral sources and ILO technical assistance programmes for the promotion of core labour standards. Funding has been allocated under the European initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (Chapter B7-7 of the EU budget) for projects tackling the issue of trafficking, child labour and slavery. Such support complements the assistance channelled through country-specific programmes, in which social development and labour standards are integral elements.


(2003/C 92 E/016) WRITTEN QUESTION E-0532/02
by Hanja Maij-Weggen (PPE-DE) to the Commission

(25 February 2002)

Subject: Cession of territory by Vietnam to China

Can the Commission confirm that the Government of Vietnam has ceded approximately 800 km² of territory to China as a result of secret negotiations between the Vietnamese and Chinese Communist Parties?

What is the background to this cession, and how many Vietnamese nationals are being compelled to move or to change their nationality?

Is this a legal cession, approved by parliaments, or has it been performed secretly, and thus illegally?

Answer given by Mr Patten on behalf of the Commission

(27 March 2002)

As announced by the parties concerned, the Governments of China and Vietnam signed the ‘Treaty between the People’s Republic of China and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam on Land Boundary’ in Hanoi on 30 December 1999.

The Treaty was ratified by the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress in China on 29 April 2000 and by the National Assembly of Vietnam during its 7th session on 9 June 2000. On 6 July 2000, the two countries exchanged instruments of ratification in Beijing on 6 July 2000, when the Treaty entered into force.