Regulation on passengers' rights and obligations in relation to the use of international train services. This Regulation will address several issues, such as compensation in the event of delays or failure to meet service obligations; the development and publication of service quality indicators; transparency of information on fares and travel conditions for passengers as well as the out-of-court dispute settlement mechanisms. The Commission also encourages railway undertakings to take measures to improve service levels and to adopt and implement a quality charter for international rail services.

The Commission is aware of the significant differences, which exist in the tariffs for short, cross-border train services, compared to the same distances carried out on a national network. These price differences can be explained by the application of international tariffs by national railway undertakings for sections between a border station and the border itself, where public service contracts do not apply. Good practices of integrated, cross border services though exist in the Union. The Conpass study from the research programme (8) is looking at cross-border public transport in order to further develop good practices.

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(2003/C 92 E/105)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-1864/02

by Niall Andrews (UEN) to the Council

(28 June 2002)

Subject: Spanish Presidency and sub-Saharan Africa

As the Spanish Presidency is drawing to a close will the Council state to what extent its wish to impart continuity and impetus to the European Union’s policy in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in seeking settlement formulas for the major armed conflicts (Great Lakes, Western Africa and Horn of Africa) and for the domestic problems faced by countries such as Angola and Zimbabwe, has been realised?

Reply

(19 December 2002)

Insofar as the question refers to the first half of 2002, the Council would inform the Honourable Member of the following:

1. Concerning the Great Lakes region, the EU has welcomed the progress made at the meetings in the Inter-Congolese Dialogue which closed in Sun City, South Africa on 19 April 2002 after having run for 52 days. While regretting that not all resolutions discussed could be adopted, the EU considered
that the 37 reports approved establish beyond doubt the high level of commitment invested in the search for national reconciliation and peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The EU has allocated EUR 3.2 million to support the mediation efforts and the organisation of the dialogue. During the whole period it was continuously informed about the proceedings through reports from the EU Special Representative, Mr Ajello.

2. The EU has been following closely the political, military and humanitarian developments in Western Africa. In particular, the EU is concerned about the negative effects of the continued violence in the Mano River Union (Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia) on the peace process in the region. The humanitarian situation remains fluid and varies in the three countries; while developments in Sierra Leone have improved there are no positive trends in Guinea and things are getting worse in Liberia. In a Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the EU on 12 March 2002, the EU expressed its support for the initiative of the King of Morocco which brought together the three Heads of State at the Mano River Union Summit in Rabat (27 February 2002). The EU is deeply concerned by the recent intensified fighting in Liberia which can only lead to further destabilisation and increase the suffering of the population. While supporting all local and regional mediation efforts, the EU will also maintain its pressure, via the Special Representative of the Presidency for the region, Mr Hans Dahlgren, for an end to all violence and for a continued political dialogue.

3. The European Union has been active in supporting peace initiatives in the Horn of Africa in the context of IGAD.

Concerning the Somalia peace process the EU particularly welcomed IGAD's recommendation urging the Transitional National Government (TNG) and all other parties to commit themselves to combating terrorism in all its forms and called upon all parties to participate in the IGAD-facilitated dialogue without preconditions. The EU emphasised its readiness to examine ways and means of supporting IGAD’s efforts with a view to resolving and completing the national reconciliation process.

In the IGAD framework the EU is also supporting initiatives to promote a comprehensive peace settlement in Sudan. Considering that the continuation of the conflict and violation of human rights constitute the main obstacles to social and economic development, the EU considers its contribution to the peace process to be a priority.

The EU welcomed the decision of the boundary Commission on the final legal settlement of the position of the Ethiopia/Eritrea border which is considered to be a central element of the comprehensive peace agreement signed between the two countries on 12 December 2000. Concerned about the serious deterioration of the internal situation in Eritrea since the end of last year, the EU reiterated the need to address these problems in the continued dialogue with the authorities.

4. The European Council in Barcelona expressed its satisfaction at the announcement of the cessation of the hostilities in Angola by the government on 13 March with a view to achieving a global cease-fire in the country. This statement was followed up by the GAC on 13 May, which welcomed the Commission's intention to contribute to the alleviation of the humanitarian situation in the country as well as to assist the different phases of the Peace Process. The Council also expressed its willingness to support the efforts of the Angolan people to bring lasting peace, stability and sustainable development to the country. In this context the Council is also preparing a review of its Common Position on Angola.

5. Seriously concerned about the developments leading up to the elections in Zimbabwe from 9 to 11 March this year, the Council first conducted negotiations with the country under Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement.

6. At its meeting on 18 February 2002, the Council recalled its conclusions of 28 January, under which it was agreed to implement targeted sanctions if the Government of Zimbabwe prevented the deployment of an election observation mission, or if it prevented the mission from operating effectively, or prevented the international media from having free access to cover the election, or there was a serious deterioration in the situation on the ground, in terms of a worsening of the human rights situation or attacks on the opposition, or if the election was assessed as not being free and fair. Consequently, given the continuing political violence, serious violations of human rights and
restrictions on the media in Zimbabwe, it decided on 18 February to take appropriate measures (1) and implement targeted sanctions, in particular on a number of people in Zimbabwe closely associated with the regime. When Zimbabwe subsequently prevented election observers from the EU from doing their job and when it was confirmed that the elections by all democratic standards were not free and fair, the European Council decided, on 15 and 16 March, to dispatch a high level troika to the countries of the SADC region to discuss the EU’s concerns regarding Zimbabwe. The troika led by State Secretary Nadal visited Mozambique, South Africa and Malawi from 19 to 22 May and reported to the Council on 17 June on its findings.

7. On 17 June, the Council again expressed its deep concern at the deterioration in the situation and undertook to monitor events as they unfolded and act accordingly. The Union undertook to respond generously to the appeal made by the United Nations to alleviate the food and humanitarian crisis that besets Zimbabwe and other countries in the Region; it also urged the Zimbabwean authorities to review the process of agricultural reform in accordance with the proposals of the UNDP.


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WRITTEN QUESTION E-1865/02
by Brian Crowley (UEN) to the Council
(28 June 2002)

Subject: Special Olympics 2003 and creating an inclusive sporting environment

As the Council is aware, in 2003 the Special Olympics will be held in Ireland. Will the Council indicate how it intends to contribute to the success of this event which will be the biggest sporting event to be held in 2003 and what measures will it support in the future to ensure an inclusive sporting environment for all?

Reply
(16-19 December 2002)

The Council considers that measures and events, such as the Special Olympics to be held in Ireland in 2003, can be of great assistance in promoting equal opportunities, combating discrimination and ensuring an inclusive society. However, it should be pointed out that initiatives relating purely to sport do not fall within the scope of the Treaty establishing the European Community.

In this context it could however be mentioned that some Council decisions are related to ensuring an inclusive society for all, and thus, indirectly, an inclusive sporting environment.

For example, the year 2003 has been designated as the ‘European Year of People with Disabilities’. The Council Decision to that effect was adopted in November 2001 (1). This Decision stresses the importance of promoting equal opportunities (in general) for disabled people in Europe.

At the moment the European Parliament and the Council are considering the Commission proposal concerning the establishment of the European Year of Education through Sport 2004 (2). One of the objectives of the proposal (Article 2(5)) is to encourage reflection and discussion on what needs to be done to promote the social integration of the disadvantaged groups through sport in education.