in Germany. The total amount of all guaranteed loans for such businesses in the new Länder comes to more than EUR 125 million (20.4% of the EUR 615 million in loans for the whole of Germany).

The amount granted in guarantees for Germany comes to EUR 485 million, of which EUR 100.3 million, or 21%, has benefited the new Länder and Berlin. Of the EUR 485 million, EUR 245.5 million is covered by counter-guarantees from the European Investment Fund (EIF). As at 31 March 2002, EUR 236.4 million of this amount was for the Deutsche Ausgleichsbank (50% counter-guarantees from the EIF relating to a guarantee amount of EUR 472.9 million and a loan amount of EUR 591.1 million (1)) and EUR 9 million for the Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (75% counter-guarantees from the EIF relating to a guarantee amount of EUR 12 million and a loan amount of EUR 24 million (2)).

Details of the breakdown for the individual Länder can be found in the tables sent direct to the Honourable Member and the Secretariat of the European Parliament.

Under the ETF start-up facility, investments have been made in three venture capital funds that have provided resources for start-up capital and invest primarily in Germany. Of these three funds, one is fully invested. A Community participation in this fund was approved at the end of 1998. For the second fund, whose first funding round was completed in mid-2000, around half of the approved resources have so far been called. The participation in the third fund was approved in mid-May 2002: the funding round has not yet been completed. Meaningful data allowing a comparison in terms of percentages between the old and the new Länder are available for only one fund.

This fund has called EUR 8.8 million of Community resources (22.4% of the total capital of EUR 39 million) and invested in 27 portfolio companies, 25 of which are based in Germany and two in Switzerland.

Of the 25 companies, three (12%) have their head office in the Länder mentioned by the Honourable Member (two in Berlin, one in Saxony). These three companies have received funds from the venture capital fund worth EUR 1.3 million in total.

The Joint European Venture (JEV) programme supports the creation of transnational joint ventures between SMEs in the Member States of the EU and the European Economic Area. The Community contribution is designed to cover expenses linked to setting up the joint venture (facility to co-finance preparatory measures and investments).

The JEV also supports events to foster cooperation between SMEs with a view to setting up joint ventures and to inform SMEs about the JEV programme (facility for events promoting the programme).

Since the start of the JEV programme, EUR 188 750 has been made available for applicants from the new Länder and Berlin. These funds are paid out in instalments as the projects progress. Tables showing co-financing of preparatory measures and investments and events promoting the programme are being sent direct to the Honourable Member and the Secretariat of the European Parliament.

(1) The Deutsche Ausgleichsbank grants a release from liability for 80% of the loan. This partial release from liability is covered by a 50% guarantee from the European Investment Fund.
(2) The Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau grants a 50% release from liability, which is covered by a 75% guarantee from the European Investment Fund.

(2003/C 137 E/025)  
WRITTEN QUESTION E-1735/02  
by Jan Mulder (ELDR) to the Commission  
(17 June 2002)  

Subject: Impact and cost of the European Union’s information services in the Member States

According to Eurobarometer (survey 56.3 dated 24 May 2002), 80% of European Union citizens are still totally unaware of the European Union’s information services. No more than 3% of European Union citizens use the European Union’s information services in the Member States as a source of information about the European Union.

1. How much money is spent on running the various European Union information services, including the European Commission and European Parliament representations, in the Member States? Can the Commission give a breakdown per information unit and cost item?

2. Does the Commission feel that the cost involved in maintaining EU information services is commensurate with the use which EU citizens make of those services?

3. How does the Commission intend to bring the cost-benefit ratio relating to those services back into balance?

Answer given by Mr Prodi on behalf of the Commission

(27 September 2002)

The total cost of running the 23 Commission Representations in the year 2000 was EUR 22,216,764, broken down as follows:

- Budget line A-4200:
  - operational costs: EUR 13,587,018;

- Budget line A-1112:
  - staff employed locally: EUR 7,683,253;

- Budget lines A-4100, 4110, 7001, 7004, 1410, 4020, 4030, 7004, 7010, 7020, 7060:
  - additional personnel costs: EUR 946,493.

The provision of information to the general public became a priority for the Representations of the Commission in 2001 with the adoption of a Communication on ‘A new framework for cooperation on activities concerning the information and communication policy of the European Union’ (1). The other priorities are to provide intelligence and guidance on the political situation in Member States and to interact with and monitor the national, regional and local media. In addition, the Representation offices prepare visits of Members of the Commission, they promote and stimulate debate about European issues and they undertake information campaigns on key issues agreed by the Commission and the Parliament such as the Euro and enlargement.

In a second Communication entitled ‘An information and communication strategy for the European Union’ (2) it is foreseen that the Representations will in future work in close partnership with the Parliament and with Member States, thus enabling them to reach and stimulate the interest of a greater percentage of the population.

The Commission is pleased that the Honourable Member takes an interest in the Eurobarométre survey and would also like to draw attention to the following aspects of the same survey:

- in respect of sources of information about the Union, the Commission Representations and the Parliament’s External Offices come directly behind the media, the Internet and discussions within the family and they come before national information facilities and trade unions or organisations such as consumer organisations. It is also worth noting that 25% of all citizens never show an interest in information about the Union. That is precisely why the Commission adopted its Communication on a new strategy on 2 July 2002 in order to stimulate interest, counter apathy and foster dialogue with citizens about European issues.

- with regard to the number of people who have heard about the Union’s information services, the response from the different Member States varies greatly. Clearly, this is due to a number of factors including educational, cultural and political differences. However, the Commission recognises that more efforts need to be made in all Member States and that information must be provided as close to the citizens as possible.

Indeed, the new Communication states that the most effective means of informing and engaging people is to adapt the information to local realities and perception as to the specific interests and concerns of the various groups targeted. The Representations will clearly play an invaluable role in this part of the new strategy.
In view of the disparate tasks of the Commission's Representations and their evolving role the cost-benefit ratio of the provision of information about the Union is difficult to assess accurately. It is clear, however, that improvements can and must be made. With the adoption of the new Communication on 'an information and communication strategy for the Union', and the gradual implementation of the proposals it contains, the Commission is confident that working in partnership with the Parliament and Member States the provision of information to citizens will be more effective.


WRITTEN QUESTION P-1736/02
by Claude Moraes (PSE) to the Commission

(10 June 2002)

Subject: Western Sahara and the Saharawi right to self-determination

Does the Commission support the Saharawi right to self-determination?

Does the Commission support the call for a referendum that will enable the Saharawi to have the right to form their own government?

Does the Commission agree that the sale of arms to Morocco is enabling that country to use them to keep the Saharawi out of their own country?

Answer given by Mr Patten on behalf of the Commission

(3 July 2002)

The Commission has always fully supported the views and actions of the United Nations concerning the Western Saharan Territory. This includes the recognition of the Territory as a non-self-governing one, as stated by the United Nations General Assembly, as well as the efforts of the United Nations Secretary General, Mr Kofi Annan, and his Personal Envoy, Mr James Baker III, in order to bring the parties in conflict to reach a mutually acceptable solution.

The United Nations Secretary General and the Security Council are still aiming this year to identify a viable option for a resolution of this conflict. In his report of 19 February 2002, Kofi Annan gives four options for consideration by the Security Council. The Security Council has decided to extend the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara until 31 July 2002 in order to consider further the above mentioned report of the Secretary General. At this sensitive stage in their work, the Commission and the Union want to make sure that no step is taken that would make their action more difficult. The Commission follows attentively the developments concerning this matter and stands ready to examine any requests for Community support in the context of a final settlement which respects international legality.

Humanitarian action taken through the European Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO), consisting of food and medical aid, amounts to EUR 81 million between 1993 and 2001; and another EUR 14 million has been proposed for 2002. In addition, the Commission is actively asking for the adoption of confidence-building measures, such as the release of war prisoners, the facilitation of contacts and visits between members of separated families. Those measures will help create better conditions for a fruitful dialogue between the parties in conflict.

At the recent Ministerial Troika meeting in Algiers on 5 June 2002 the Union seized the opportunity to transmit the European concerns and demands on humanitarian aspects of the Western Sahara conflict. The Union confirmed its support to the United Nations efforts to find a mutually acceptable solution. It urged both parties to solve the problem of the fate of unaccounted people and to release all those held since the start of the conflict. The Union also asked for the full respect of civil guarantees and human rights in the Western Sahara territories; and it also asked both parties in conflict to favour the contacts and visits between members of the families separated by the conflict.