As regards the implementation of the Aarhus Convention at Community level, these obligations are already fulfilled to a great extent by Regulation (EC) No 1049/2001/EC of the Parliament and of the Council of 30 May 2001 regarding public access to Parliament, Council and Commission documents (3)). Furthermore, Commission, Council and Parliament have already made considerable progress in putting documents they have in their possession (and which are not covered by one of the exceptions foreseen in the Regulation), in electronic databases and through registers that are publicly accessible through telecommunications networks. Thus, a lot of environmental information has already been made publicly accessible.

The developments in the ‘information society’ constantly offer new possibilities for electronic dissemination and accessibility of data. The Commission is aware of the fact that such new possibilities are not always or cannot always be directly and optimally used, because of the fact that the use of such new possibilities often requires considerable investments in equipment and personnel. This, however, does not necessarily imply that public access to the information through electronic networks is limited or hindered. The Commission has, however, confidence that the legislative instruments that are being developed at the moment — the above mentioned instruments, but also other initiatives such as the recent Commission proposal for a Directive on the re-use and commercial exploitation of public sector documents (4) — will push public authorities to effectively use such new possibilities to the widest extent possible. The modified Directive on public access to environmental information, on which Council and Parliament reached an agreement in conciliation on the 6 November 2002, will be formally adopted by the end of 2002. The Commission envisages furthermore to submit a proposal for applying the principles of the Aarhus Convention to the Community Institutions and will examine the questions raised by the Honourable Member in this context.

(1) Denmark, France and Italy have ratified the Convention.

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2678/02
by Erik Meijer (GUE/NGL), Pedro Marset Campos (GUE/NGL) and Herman Schmid (GUE/NGL) to the Council
(24 September 2002)

Subject: Continuation of peaceful solutions to the long-lasting conflict in the Philippines by avoiding outlawing non-terrorist organisations

1. Does the Council recall the resolution of the European Parliament of 14 January 1999 on the human rights situation in the Philippines (1), reaffirming the resolution of 13 December 1990 in which the European Parliament encouraged and supported peace negotiations between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP), and requested the Commission and the Council to provide and facilitate support and assistance to the parties in carrying out their formal peace negotiations and in undertaking development, relief and rehabilitation programmes and projects to lay the ground for a just and lasting peace?

2. Did the Council take note of the statement of 3 September 2002 by the Negotiation Panel of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines entitled ‘Why the CPP and NPA are not terrorist organisations’?

3. What action do you intend to take in order to avoid a situation in which the NDFP and the organisations belonging to it (the Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People's Army), or persons who have responsibilities inside the NDFP, CPP or NPA, are included on any list of terrorist organisations issued by the United Nations Organisation Sanctions Committee or the European Union, an action which could prevent a speedy and peaceful solution to this long-lasting conflict?

Reply
(18 February 2003)


2. The Council has not discussed the statement of 3 September 2002 by the Negotiation Panel of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines entitled ‘Why the CPP and NPA are not terrorist organisations’.

3. Following an in-depth examination of the information available in accordance with the criteria laid down in Article 1(4) of Common Position 2002/931/CFSP, the Council has decided to include the New Peoples’ Army and its leader Jose Maria Sison in its latest update (1) of the list of persons or organisations to which the measures set out in Common Position 2001/931/CFSP apply.


WRITTEN QUESTION E-2683/02
by Freddy Blak (GUE/NGL) to the Council
(26 September 2002)

Subject: Charges on European roads

Germany has recently reached an agreement on introducing a motorway tax as from 31 July 2003. Austria has also decided to introduce a similar charge as from 1 January 2003. At the same time many other EU Member States are considering similar initiatives.

While this obviously presents opportunities for promoting a modal shift, e.g. towards the railways, the above-mentioned decisions will hit some Member States’ haulage firms harder than others.

Can the Council, therefore, explain how these schemes are compatible with the rules of the internal market, and how they can be justified in view of their competition-distorting nature?

In addition, what initiatives are being considered with a view to the introduction of a uniform European system of road charges, fuel taxes and eco-points?

Reply
(18 February 2003)

The Council underlines that matters of national taxation fall within the competence of the Member States. Such taxation should at all times respect the fundamental principle of non-discrimination, it is for the Commission to check the compatibility of such measures with the general rules of the internal market.

As to the substance of the question regarding a uniform European system of road charges, the Council informs the Honourable Parliamentarian that the Commission:

– plans to present by the end of this year its Communication on a charging system for the use of infrastructure for all modes of transport;
– in its White Paper ‘European Transport Policy for 2010: time to decide’, announces a proposal for a Directive designed to guarantee the interoperability of toll systems on the trans-European road network;