WRITTEN QUESTION E-2757/02  
by Glyn Ford (PSE) to the Commission  
(1 October 2002)

Subject: North-East Asia Development Bank

Further to the answer to my Oral Question H-0366/02(1) regarding the importance of significant investment in North-East Asia, and in the absence of support for a North-East Asia Development Bank, can the Commission indicate how it is going to ensure that the much needed emphasis on North-East Asia is actually implemented through the existing International Financial Institutions (IFIs) such as the Asia Development Bank (ADB) and the World Bank (WB)?

(1) Written answer dated 11 June 2002.

Answer given by Mr Patten on behalf of the Commission

(6 November 2002)

The fact that the Member States and not the Commission are members of the international financial institutions identified in the written question makes it essentially impossible for the Community to influence their lending decisions. The resources made available by the Union Budget remain the sole financial instrument available to the Commission to influence North-East Asia’s development, in the framework set by the relevant Council Regulations. However, this situation does not prevent International financial institutions and the Commission from developing synergies and coordination between their respective cooperation strategies and activities, if and when they are active in that area.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB), for example, does design and pursue regional development strategies (South Asia, Mekong Basin), while noting that such a regional approach may become more complex to design and implement when substantial heterogeneity between individual country situations exists.

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2760/02  
by Frank Vanhecke (NI) to the Commission  
(1 October 2002)

Subject: The Union's asylum policy

On Friday, 13 September 2002, the Union’s Ministers for Home Affairs, meeting in Copenhagen, agreed to draw up in the near future a uniform Community programme for the voluntary or compulsory repatriation of illegal refugees or asylum-seekers who had exhausted all the relevant legal procedures. According to a report in the French newspaper ‘Le Figaro’ on Saturday, 14 September 2002, both amount to the introduction of ‘European charters’. The creation of a Community fund to pay for such charters was also proposed. According to the European Commissioner with special responsibility for justice and home affairs, Antonio Vitorino, the aim was to create added value in the organisation of Community repatriation programmes.

Can the Commission give a minimum and maximum estimate of the number of illegal immigrants currently on the territory of the Union, broken down by Member State?

How many illegal immigrants were repatriated from the Union during the last four years?

Does the Commission have available a list of what are known as ‘safe countries’ from which no applications for political asylum may be made?

What is the Commission’s opinion of the setting up of a Community fund to finance the repatriation of illegal refugees, and against which budget line could it be entered?
In the Commission’s view, what policy may be pursued vis-à-vis third countries in order to facilitate cooperation in matters of repatriation?

Is the Commission considering other Community schemes to combat illegal immigration into countries of the European Union?

**Answer given by Mr Vitorino on behalf of the Commission**

(25 November 2002)

There is a substantial number of illegal residents consisting of people that either illegally enter the territory of a Member State, or become illegal after ‘over-staying’ the authorised duration of their legal stay, or after being rejected as an asylum-seeker. By the very nature of the phenomenon, there are no precise figures or statistics and, thus, the number of illegal migrants in the Union can only be estimated. An estimate of the scale of illegal immigration can only be derived from existing hard data which has a link to the phenomenon such as refused entries and removals, apprehensions of illegal migrants at the border or in the country, (rejected) applications for asylum or other forms of international protection, applications for national regularisation procedures. These indicators only justify the rough assessment that the total level of yearly illegal immigration must be measured in six digit numbers. Any more concrete estimation does not appear reliable bearing the unavailability of hard data in mind. However, the level of illegal immigration is undoubtedly significant and cannot be neglected due to its social, economic and political implications (cf. also Communication on a common policy on illegal migration (1)).

The available figures show that allegedly 331,334 persons have been removed in total from the Union in the year 2001. For 2000 the reported number is 367,552 persons. For 1999 the reported number amounts to 324,206 persons. These figures are, however, incomplete due to the fact that some Member States do not or not regularly provide the necessary data. In the framework of assisted voluntary return programmes conducted by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) 87,628 persons emigrated in the year 2000 out of the Union voluntarily, for 1999 the number is 78,273 persons (cf. the Commission’s Green Paper on a Common Return Policy on Illegal Residents of 10 April 2002 (2)).

A number of Member States applies safe country concepts to reject applications for asylum in an accelerated manner. Some of these Member States use lists to designate safe countries, others don’t. There is therefore no agreed list available at Union level. The Commission has not proposed a Union list of safe countries in its amended proposal for a Council Directive on minimum standards on procedures in Member States for granting and withdrawing refugee status (3). Instead, it has proposed that where Member States choose to apply safe country principles, they should do so according to common standards. It is the Commission’s view that, as a first step, it should establish common standards on the material requirements for designation of a country as a safe country, and the requirements for applying a safe country principle to an individual applicant. However, in the Communication on a common asylum procedure (4), the Commission posited that in the longer term, a common approach should be further defined, either through the adoption of common lists or the abandonment of the principles all together.

The Commission’s policy regarding the return on illegal residents is presented in detail in the Communication on a common policy on illegal residents (5). It includes first considerations on a financial assistance for return and the necessity to closely co-operate with countries of origin and transit on the issues of return and readmission.

In general, the measures against illegal immigration are set out in the Council’s comprehensive plan to combat illegal immigration and trafficking of human beings in the Union of 28 February 2002, which is widely based on the aforementioned Commission’s Communication on a common policy on illegal migration.