Through various demarches and in particular through the Union high level troika to South Africa of 21 May 2002, the Union has discussed the full implications for Southern Africa of the present instability and of a further deterioration of the Zimbabwean economy in terms of disinvestment, refugee flows, and other consequences. The Union has reiterated its willingness to support the inter-party dialogue promoted by South Africa and Nigeria, to support the population and an orderly land reform process, as illustrated in the final conclusions of the June 2002 General Affairs Council.


(2003/C 192 E/037)

WRITTEN QUESTION P-2010/02

by Patsy Sörensen (Verts/ALE) to the Commission

(2 July 2002)

Subject: Expulsion of Romanian minors

Is the Commission aware that Belgium in particular is deporting Romanian children to their country of origin because they have committed offences under pressure from criminal organisations?

Is the Commission aware that one of the reasons is that these often very young children cannot be charged or held under Belgian law?

Is it correct that in the country of origin there is no provision for the children so that they frequently end up in criminal circles or living on the streets?

What steps and/or measures is the Commission considering to counter these practices and how, given the current projects for street children, could it help to ensure that these children are taken care of in an appropriate manner on their return?

Answer given by Mr Verheugen on behalf of the Commission

(30 July 2002)

The Commission is aware of the issue raised by the Honourable Member and of the fact that Belgium is executing a number of juvenile court judgements on the return of unaccompanied Romanian minors to their country of origin.

There is no specific Community legislation on the treatment of unaccompanied third-country minors in Member States covering matters such as the conditions for their reception, stay and return. Instead Member States are invited to take account of guidelines on this subject which have been established by a Council Resolution (1).

In the case referred to by the Honourable Member, the Belgian authorities have explained that these decisions were made with a view to taking the children away from the criminal organisations that controlled them and to facilitate their re-integration in their home environment. Alternatives, such as placing the minors in specialised centres in Belgium, would have not been in the best interest of the child for practical reasons (unfamiliar environment, language problems, …).

According to the above-mentioned Council Resolution, irrespective of their legal status unaccompanied minors who are nationals of third countries and find themselves in a Member State are entitled to protection and basic care in accordance with the provisions of national law. However, where a minor is not allowed by national law to stay in a Member State, the State concerned may only return the minor to his/her country of origin if on arrival therein adequate reception and care are available. These can be provided by parents or other adults who take care of the child, or by governmental or non-governmental bodies. In such cases the competent authorities of the Member States should co-operate with the authorities of the minor's country of origin, with international organisations such as Unicef and, where
appropriate, with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), in order to ensure that care will be provided upon return of the child. In any case, a minor may not be returned to a third country where this return would be contrary to the Convention relating to the status of refugees, the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental freedoms or the Convention against Torture and other cruel, Inhuman or Degrading treatment or Punishment or the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In the particular case of Romanian minors in Belgium, the Commission is informed that such co-operation has indeed taken place.

In Bucharest and other large cities in Romania there are reception centres for minors, where street children and other children in need of protection can be hosted under the responsibility of the local Child Protection Department, sometimes in co-operation with NGOs. In these centres, the legal and social situation of the children is analysed with a view to re-integrating them into their families or, if this is not possible, to developing a care plan. Bilateral agreements between Romania and Member States have been concluded or are being negotiated on this issue.

The Commission continues to support the Romanian Government in its efforts to improve childcare policies. At present a EUR 25 million PHARE programme is being implemented in Romania, providing funding for the closure of large old-style institutions, for developing alternative local child protection services and for a public awareness campaign on prevention of abandonment and re-integration of children into natural or foster families. As part of this programme, reception centres are eligible for financing. This programme will be followed by a similar programme which will start soon and for which EUR 10 million have been committed.


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(2003/C 192 E/038)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2018/02

by Erik Meijer (GUE/NGL) to the Commission

(9 July 2002)

Subject: Continued obstruction of shipping on the Danube as a result of the 1999 war in Serbia

1. Can the Commission confirm that of the three bridges destroyed in the 1999 war which spanned the Danube between the centre of the Serbian town Novi Sad and Petrovaradin on the south bank, only the middle bridge, the Varadinski Most joining Bulevar Mihajla Pupina and Beogradska Ulica, has been replaced by a new bridge, while the wide bridge in the west near Bulevar Oslobodjenja has been replaced by a heavily used pontoon bridge (Most na Barzama near Ulica Maksima Gorkog) and the combined road and rail bridge in the east has been replaced by a temporary rail bridge situated to the west of the ruins?

2. What are the effects of the presence of a pontoon bridge and a temporary bridge in Novi Sad on inland waterway transit traffic between the Netherlands, Germany and Austria (EU Member States) and the applicant countries Slovakia and Hungary, on the one hand, and Romania and Bulgaria to the south and east, on the other?

3. As a result of war damage, are there places other than Novi Sad — for example between Smederevo and Kovin to the east of Belgrade — where the width of passage or the headroom, and hence the permitted volume of shipping, is still smaller, as a result of damage, temporary bridges or shipwrecks, than the dimensions imposed by the locks in the dam in the Iron Gates (Djerdap) between Kladovo in Serbia and Dobret-Turnu Severin in Romania?

4. What are the prospects of restoring the capacity of the Danube for shipping and that of the connections between its banks to their full pre-1999 levels?

5. How will the activities referred to in question 4 be financed? What responsibility has the EU taken for them and what responsibility will it still take, in view inter alia of the importance of the Danube as the main route for transporting freight within the EU in its likely future volume?