Answer given by Mr Vitorino on behalf of the Commission
(17 October 2002)

The Commission is fully aware of this case which received considerable publicity. The Commission has no authority to verify whether proceedings in any Member State violated the right to a fair trial, there is no legal basis for an action of this sort and no mechanism exists with which to do so. The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) lays down the standards required for a fair trial. These provisions are set out in Articles 5 (Right to liberty and security) and 6 (Right to a fair trial) and are developed in the case law of the European Court of Human Rights. Any complaints that proceedings violated the right to a fair trial have to be made to that court, after exhaustion of domestic remedies. The Commission understands that the plane-spotter tourists have lodged an appeal against their convictions and sentences in the Greek Court of Criminal Appeals. If the appeal is unsuccessful, an application can then be made to the European Court of Human Rights.

The Commission is not in a position to make a statement about plane-spotting since it has no competence to do so.

Answer given by Mr Patten on behalf of the Commission
(16 October 2002)

Decisions on opening new Delegations inevitably involve hard choices on priorities. The Commission has long been aware of the great political and economic importance to the Union of Saudi Arabia and indeed, the other Gulf Co-operation Council States. In 1998 as correctly pointed out by the Honourable Member, it made the opening of a Delegation in Riyadh one of the priorities in the development of its External Service. Unforeseen events, such as the Balkan crisis and the ever tighter financial climate, however, made it impossible to meet the 1998 targets: of the six Delegations, two Offices and a representation which had been planned. At that time only two Delegations were opened, both in the Balkans.
In its Communication to the Parliament and the Council on July 2001 on the development of the External Service, the Commission decided on a number of further changes to the network of Delegations. Given the tight financial conditions under which the External Service has been operating the changes had to be budget neutral. In consequence some external representations are in the process of being closed and some have been streamlined in order to permit a small number of new openings.

The Commission is happy to be able to inform the Honourable Member that Saudi Arabia, Taiwan, Singapore, and Ecuador are again included in the plans of the Commission and negotiations are under way in order to open Delegations in those countries by the end of 2002.

As for Iran and Switzerland, while the Commission is similarly aware of the weight of those states politically and economically, the present pressure on resources means that the Commission is unable to open Delegations in the immediate future. The Commission wishes to assure the Honourable Member, however, that Iran and Switzerland are under active consideration for an opening in the medium term.

(2004/C 11 E/013)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2671/02
by Stavros Xarchakos (PPE-DE) to the Commission
(24 September 2002)

Subject: Destruction of the cultural heritage and persecution on the islands of Imbros and Tenedos

According to Christians who were born and until relatively recently lived on the islands of Imbros and Tenedos (which now belong to Turkey), the thousands of Christian inhabitants of the two islands were forced to abandon their homes, while Christian churches were looted and converted into mosques. Until 1964, 9000 Christians lived on Imbros alone, whereas at the present time they number no more than 200 because of all the forms of persecution they have suffered, the influx of thousands of settlers from Anatolia and the establishment of ‘open prisons’ (!) on the island for prisoners serving long sentences. The Treaty of Lausanne (which was officially signed by Turkey and has regulated Greek-Turkish relations since 1923) provides for the right to greater self-administration for the two islands, which Turkey has never agreed to implement.

Will the Commission state its views on the implementation of the Treaty of Lausanne by Turkey? Is it aware of the pillaging and destruction of the cultural riches of Imbros and Tenedos? What is its position on the religious repression and the persecution of the Christians of Imbros and Tenedos? I would ask the Commission not to provide — yet another — general answer concerning the ‘need to encourage amicable relations between Greece and Turkey’ etc.

Answer given by Mr Verheugen on behalf of the Commission
(4 November 2002)

The monitoring of the implementation of the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne does not fall within the competence of the Commission. However, within the framework of its assessment of the candidate countries’ progress towards accession, the Commission monitors closely the situation of ethnic and religious minorities and communities in Turkey. As candidate country, Turkey should comply with the Copenhagen political criteria including the respect for human rights and protection of minorities.

In its Regular Report presented on 9 October 2002, the Commission has noted that non-Moslem religious communities living in Turkey, whether recognised by the Treaty of Lausanne (namely Greeks, Armenians and Jews) or not, have encountered problems, in particular with regard to their lack of legal personality and property rights. There have been cases of confiscation of property and in other cases properties are at risk.

In an effort to remedy some problems related to property rights, the reform package adopted by the Turkish Parliament in August 2002 allows, subject to a number of conditions, certain non-Moslem minorities to acquire, dispose of and register property.