The Commissioner and the Korean Minister, recognising that the Union and Korea have similar scientific thematic priorities (biotechnology, nanotechnology, environment, space, information technologies and sustainable energy — Korea has just decided to participate in the International Thermonuclear Experiment Reactor (ITER) project), as well as similar scientific policy challenges, agreed to examine the conditions for a scientific and technological cooperation Agreement.

The assessment of the feasibility for such an Agreement (which would offer a general framework for cooperation and facilitate Korean participation in the Union Research programmes and vice versa) is ongoing.

(2004/C 51 E/238)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2181/03

by Olivier Dupuis (NI) to the Commission

(30 June 2003)

Subject: Thirty-fifth day of the hunger strike by the cyber-dissident Zouhair Yahyaoui

Zouhair Yahyaoui has been detained in prison since 4 June 2002, and has been on hunger strike for 35 days. He was formerly webmaster of the TuneZine website, which broadcasts information on the rule of law and public rights in Tunisia, and is currently serving a two-year prison sentence. At the end of a trial that was strongly criticised by numerous Tunisian and international organisations, he was found guilty of 'propagation of false news' on 20 June 2002 and lost an appeal against this conviction on 10 July 2002. His case was referred to the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention on 27 August 2002. Mr Yahyaoui has been on several hunger strikes in protest against a sentence which he views as punishing freedom of expression. He is currently 35 days into his latest hunger strike. Although there are now great concerns over his state of health, Mr Yahyaoui is still being held in an overcrowded cell in particularly degrading conditions. On 4 June 2002, Ms Sophie Piekarec, who is Mr Yahyaoui’s fiancée and a French national, was turned out of the country on her arrival at Carthage airport, before she was able to visit Mr Yahyaoui.

Is the Commission keeping abreast of Mr Yahyaoui’s situation? What action has it taken to induce the Tunisian authorities to take urgent steps to guarantee decent prison conditions and the appropriate medical care for Mr Yahyaoui and to immediately release him pending a new trial on the basis of internationally recognised rules?

What action has the Commission taken, or will it take, to induce the Tunisian authorities to respect the international principles pertaining to the rights of the individual and in particular the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 9 December 1998, Articles 6.b and 6.c of which state that ‘Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others: … As provided for in human rights and other applicable international instruments, freely to publish, impart or disseminate to others views, information and knowledge on all human rights and fundamental freedoms’ and ‘to study, discuss, form and hold opinions on the observance, both in law and in practice, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and, through these and other appropriate means, to draw public attention to those matters’?

Answer given by Mr Patten on behalf of the Commission

(24 July 2003)

The Commission is carefully monitoring the situation of Mr Zouhair Yahiaouithrough the Commission Delegation in Tunis and through contact with bodies that defend human rights.

Through these channels to the Tunisian authorities the Commission has repeatedly expressed its concern regarding Mr Yahiaouithose in a similar position. The next meeting of the EU-Tunisia Association Council, on 29 September 2003, will provide a further occasion to try to obtain better prison conditions for the detainees and to draw attention to the fact that Tunista is in breach of the right to freedom of expression.
We would take this opportunity also to inform you that, through the MEDA programme, the Commission is actively engaged in modernising the Tunisian judicial system and making it more independent.

More generally, to promote respect of human rights more effectively in the Mediterranean area, the Commission has adopted a communication concerning a new impetus to be given to human rights and democratisation projects which will be implemented by the European Union in partnership with Mediterranean countries. In this connection the Commission will be proposing to its partners that they draw up plans for specific action.

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WRITTEN QUESTION E-2182/03
by Maurizio Turco (NI), Marco Pannella (NI), Marco Cappato (NI), Benedetto Della Vedova (NI), Gianfranco Dell’Alba (NI) and Olivier Dupuis (NI) to the Commission

(30 June 2003)

Subject: Violation of freedom of expression in Vietnam

The Misna news agency reported on 18 June that the Vietnamese doctor Phan Hong Son had been sentenced to 13 years’ imprisonment, followed by an additional 3 years’ house arrest, for collecting information and documents issued by a foreign country to use them against the Socialist State of Vietnam. The doctor was arrested on 27 March 2002 after having translated, and sent to Vietnamese friends and officials, an article entitled ‘What is democracy?’ which he had found on the US State Department’s Internet site. Furthermore Dr Son had written, and published on the web, an open letter protesting against the fact that his house had been searched and his computer confiscated.

In view of the foregoing:

- What information does the Commission have concerning the case of Dr Phan Hong Son?
- What type of pressure does the Commission intend to bring to bear on the Hanoi Government to obtain the immediate release of Dr Phan Hong Song, who is guilty only of having translated into his own language, and circulated, a document about democracy?
- More generally, what type of initiative does the Commission intend to take to dissuade the Vietnamese Government from continuing to take action (such as abolishing the right to freedom of expression) in flagrant breach of the international agreements to which Vietnam subscribes and the spirit and letter of the cooperation agreement between Vietnam and the EU?

Answer given by Mr Patten on behalf of the Commission

(31 July 2003)

The Commission is well aware of the trial and verdict against Dr. Son. The Presidency and the Commission had formally requested access to the trial of 18 June 2003. Local representatives of the Commission Delegation in Hanoi and of some Member States along with representatives of other diplomatic missions were present at the court building but were denied access. An appropriate reaction is currently under consideration.

The case of Dr. Son reflects the difficulty which the Vietnamese authorities have in dealing with what is perceived as opposition to the State and the Communist Party in a society unaccustomed to public dissent. Vietnam needs more rapid progress in its reform programme, including on governance, so that the administration could learn to deal with a wider range of views and appreciate the value of accommodating dissent in the system of government. The Commission has defined the promotion of good governance, best administrative practices and a properly functioning judiciary system as priorities for co-operation with Vietnam under the Country Strategy 2002-2006. The Commission believes that its co-operation programme, especially through its specific support for institutional and administrative reforms as well as