WRITTEN QUESTION E-0562/03
by Juan Ojeda Sanz (PPE-DE) to the Commission

(27 February 2003)

Subject: Arrest of journalists in Gibraltar

As the Commission is aware, on 20 January 2003 a group of journalists who were preparing to film the action being taken by the environmentalist group Greenpeace in protest against the oil tanker Vemamagna in Gibraltar were arrested.

Members of the Campo de Gibraltar Press Association have reported that the officers manning the Gibraltarian patrol boats behaved in a violent and arbitrary fashion and then proceeded to arrest some of the journalists present and to detain them in police cells for a nine-hour period, following which they were released without charge.

The above-mentioned Association deems such behaviour to constitute a direct attack on freedom of speech, on the right to report freely and on the right of the general public to be informed.

Could the Commission seek information from the Gibraltar authorities as to the reasons which prompted the officers of the Royal Gibraltar Police to arrest the journalists?

Answer given by Mr Vitorino on behalf of the Commission

(27 March 2003)

The Commission would refer the Honourable Member to its answer to written E-0201/03 by Mr Menéndez del Valle (1)


WRITTEN QUESTION E-0587/03
by Jan Mulder (ELDR) to the Commission

(28 February 2003)

Subject: Balkan sugar

Can the European Commission define the concept of 'massive increase of exports into the European Community above the level of normal production and export capacity' to which Article 12 of Regulation (EC) No 2007/2000 (1) refers to allow possible measures of suspension of the arrangements provided for in this Regulation?

Does the Commission consider the current level of importation of sugar (205 000 tonnes from January 2002 to November 2002) as 'usual' compared to 70 132 tonnes in 2001 and 613 tonnes in 2000?

Following a recent report by OLAF (European Anti-Fraud Office) on imports of sugar from FRY, the European Commission is expected to propose a clause of temporary suspension of the Balkans regulation (EC) No 2007/2000 of 18.9.2000 (Article 12) for this country. However, a temporary suspension can take effect for a period of three months only.

What steps is the Commission intending to take after this three month delay? Will the Commission make sure that, in this space of time, Serbia will find an efficient way of providing proof of origin for the sugar which will be exported to the European Union?
FRY and the EU are supposed to prepare an Association and Stabilisation agreement in the near future. Taking into account FRY’s current difficulties in establishing proof of origin, as well as their intention to join the EU, has the Commission considered the possibility of arranging limited export quotas on the basis of the commercial sugar trade for the last five years, with a possible increase in these quotas if Serbian production increases?


Answer given by Mr Fischler on behalf of the Commission

(2 April 2003)

Council Regulation (EC) No 2007/2000 of 18 September 2000 introducing exceptional trade measures for countries and territories participating in or linked to the European Union’s Stabilisation and Association process, amending Regulation (EC) No 2820/1998, and repealing Regulations (EC) No 1763/1999 and (EC) No 6/2000 was adopted to provide the Western Balkans with the greatest possible opportunities to export to the Community in order to support the economic development of the region. This development is a necessary condition for political stability and peace and is consequently one of the pillars of the Union’s Stabilization and Association Process.


Sugar imports from the Western Balkan have indeed increased significantly. The Commission is aware of this increase and is monitoring the imports very closely by means of a surveillance program, whereby customs administrations of Member States report on a weekly basis. Furthermore, the Commission abolished export refunds for sugar exports with destination to the Western Balkans in view to limit the incentive for the current trade pattern.

The Commission is considering all measures to address the issue of proper enforcement of rules of origin on imports of sugar from Serbia and Montenegro, including a temporary suspension of trade preferences. Under Council Regulation (EC) No 2007/2000, the Commission may take measures to suspend in whole or in part the preferential arrangements for a period of three months, subject to certain conditions. The period could be renewed, if no substantial improvement of the situation in the country happened.

The Commission works on a daily basis with Serbia and Montenegro to improve the functioning of customs operations. A Community-funded Customs Assistance Mission (CAFAO) is very active throughout the country in advising the authorities. The Commission clearly expects that Serbia and Montenegro will do their utmost to provide for a reliable system of certification and verification of origin.

The start of negotiations on a Stabilization and Association Agreement with Serbia and Montenegro is subject to a positive assessment (feasibility report) from the Commission on the readiness of the country to negotiate and implement such an Agreement.

The Commission considers that subjecting duty-free imports of sugar from Serbia and Montenegro to a quota would not efficiently address this issue of proper enforcement of rules of origin.

The Commission would envisage quotas only as a possible measure against the risk of serious market disturbances through excessive imports.