eEurope is an umbrella covering a wide range of actions and programmes and one of the most important in relation to diversity is the eContent programme. This programme supports the increased availability, use and distribution of European digital content. It aims at improving access for all to high-quality digital content on the global networks, in a multiplicity of languages. A work programme for the years 2003 and 2004 was adopted by the Commission on 19 December 2002 with an expected budget of EUR 26.5 million in 2004.

The Commission has also proposed a new programme, eContentplus (2005-2008) which will support the development of multi-lingual content for innovative, on-line services across the EU. The new programme focuses on three areas: geographical data, educational material and cultural content, and aims at seeking to support the combination of information from different systems — irrespective of format, language or location.

As regards the question on ensuring the benefits of technology to all areas, the Commission has taken steps to allocate resources to areas potentially missed out. The eEurope 2005 Action Plan indicates the need for Europe to have widespread availability of broadband access at competitive prices. Although investment in broadband will mainly come from the private sector, the Action Plan proposes to support deployment in less favoured areas. To this end, the Commission published a Staff Working Paper giving 'Guidelines on the criteria and modalities of the use of structural funds in electronic communications' (1).

The purpose of these guidelines is to help Member States and regions prepare their electronic communications infrastructure projects (including broadband) for presentation for European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) support.


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WRITTEN QUESTION P-0771/04
by Caroline Lucas (Verts/ALE) to the Commission
(5 March 2004)

Subject: La Breña II dam — compensation measures

The Commission’s decision, in December 2003, to co-finance with EUR 80 million the La Breña dam, part of the Spanish National Hydrological Plan, included a set of compensation measures agreed with the Spanish authorities. These are presumably meant to reduce the negative impacts of the project.

Will the Commission provide a list of these compensation measures? Since the new dam will create a reservoir four times the current size in the middle of a Natura 2000 area, how does the Commission consider it possible to compensate for the destruction of more than 2000 ha of high quality habitat? How has the Commission calculated the value of this habitat, which provides the connection between the two last Iberian lynx populations in Spain?

How will the favourable conservation status of a priority species (the Iberian lynx), included in Annexes II and IV of the Habitats Directive, be guaranteed in this project?

Finally, how does the Commission intend to monitor the application of these compensation measures?

Answer given by Mrs Wallström on behalf of the Commission
(6 April 2004)

The Commission refers to the reply it gave to the Honourable Member’s oral question H-120/04 raised during question time at Parliament’s March I session (1), and provides the following complementory information.
The compensation measures presented by the Spanish authorities in relation to La Breña II reservoir project are substantial and should outweigh any marginal impacts which may occur. To compensate for the loss of the Iberian lynx habitat, it is proposed to expropriate an area of 2134 hectares (ha) and actively manage favouring the lynx. The Iberian lynx compensatory measures not only focus on habitat conservation and prey species re-introduction; but also target the problems of interconnectivity between two Iberian lynx subpopulations. For this reason, special measures to improve ecological corridors have been designed. Moreover, the compensation package not only focuses on the Iberian lynx, but on other key species present in the site in order to guarantee the overall coherence of the site.

The proposed compensation measures were drawn up by the promoter with the support of key scientific institutions such as the Biological Research Station (Estación Biológica Doñana) and the Department of Ecology, University of Córdoba. Those compensatory measures have been assessed by the Regional Ministry of Environment of the Government of Andalusia and the Spanish Ministry of Environment through the ‘Iberian Lynx Expert Group’. Both institutions have made a favourable assessment.

The reservoir is located in the south-east of the Natura 2000 site overlapping the site’s limits. This situation could be qualified as peripheral in relation to the Natura 2000 site. It will affect 625 ha, representing about 1.05% of 60 000 ha of the site.

The Commission will make available the list of compensation measures, as well as its opinion on this case and other available environmental information related to this project, in accordance with Articles 4(4) and 4(5) of Regulation (EC) No 1049/2001 of the Parliament and of the Council of 30 May 2001 regarding public access to Parliament, Council and Commission documents (1).

The Commission considers that given the probable effects of the construction of the La Breña II reservoir on the priority species Iberian lynx and the species in Annex I of the Birds Directive (2), and the likely results from the planned compensatory measures contained in the Compensatory Measures Project prepared by the competent authority, it can be concluded that in the long-term, the overall coherence of the Natura 2000 network will not be significantly affected.

The Commission expects to receive yearly monitoring reports on the implementation of the project from the Spanish Government.


WRITTEN QUESTION E-0780/04
by Maurizio Turco (NI) to the Commission
(11 March 2004)

Subject: Violation of religious freedom in the United Kingdom

In view of the following:

- Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms;
- Articles 10 and 22 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU;
- Article 6 of the EU Treaty;
- the International Religious Freedom Report for 2003 issued by the US Department of State;