Because of the large number of tenders it is extremely difficult for the Commission to monitor all procurement procedures launched by United States authorities for the reconstruction of Iraq with respect to their consistency with GPA rules. The large amount of daily tenders and insufficient information available to non-bidders prevent the Commission from conducting any comprehensive analysis of that sort. The initial information available through a tender notice is very limited, and more detailed information (the tender documentation) is only available upon request by a bidder. To a large extent, the Commission has to rely on the information provided, by Member States or by individual companies in order to carry out an exhaustive examination of individual cases. However, despite some vague references in the press about complaints filed by Community suppliers, no formal complaint has been submitted to the Commission. As soon as a complaint is received, it will give the necessary priority to respond timely and accurately. In any case, the Commission will continue to monitor closely this matter.

It should also be noted that the Commission has not received from the United States administration any request of co-funding in exchange for the involvement of European firms.

(2004/C 88 E/0045) WRITTEN QUESTION E-1695/03

by Mario Mantovani (PPE-DE) and Antonio Tajani (PPE-DE)

to the Commission

(21 May 2003)

Subject: Humanitarian emergency in Iraq: the plight of children, disabled people and the elderly in hospitals

Following Commissioner Nielson's visit to Baghdad can the Commission supply exact figures about the dramatic situation of children, the disabled and the elderly in Iraqi hospitals, the main innocent victims of the overthrown regime?

In particular does it have detailed information as to whether patients whose cases constitute an emergency may be transferred to EU countries for immediate appropriate treatment? Which countries would be involved?

Over and above the emergency humanitarian aid swiftly made available by the European Union is the Commission aware, following the discussions being held between the various Member States, of any decisions concerning a possible emergency evacuation plan? If so, how would it be carried out? Otherwise, what are the possible solutions?

Answer given by Mr Nielson on behalf of the Commission

(3 July 2003)

The still chaotic situation in Iraq makes it very difficult to obtain precise figures on the situation of children, disabled and elderly people in Iraqi hospitals.

However, according to a recent Unicef report, the main threats to Iraqi children are posed by unexploded ordnance (UXO), as sadly demonstrated with one of the latest incidents in Basra where six children were reported killed while playing with ammunitions, and by the poor quality of water.

The quality of water supply is decreasing due to cross-contamination with sewage water from damaged pipe systems and the lack of cooking fuels to boil water. This combination of factors has serious implications on the health and nutrition status of children. In Basra, incidence rates of diarrhoea have doubled compared to the same time last year. In Baghdad, a Unicef survey showed that malnutrition rates have increased as 7.7 per cent of surveyed children under the age five are suffering from acute malnutrition, compared with last year's figure of four per cent.
The Commission, through the Humanitarian Aid Office has until now approved emergency humanitarian aid for a total amount of EUR 32.5 million in order to relieve the suffering of the Iraqi population, and particularly children.

The aid approved comprises emergency relief items such as food for hospitals, hygiene products, support for humanitarian flights but the main focus is on support for the restoration of health services, sanitation and water supply, severely affected by bomb damage and widespread looting (details in annex).

The latest approved emergency humanitarian package of EUR 10 million, focuses on disposal of unexploded ordnance (de-mining) and mine awareness with the specific objective of reducing the immediate threat that landmines and UXO represent for the general population and to humanitarian personnel and also to secure and strengthen the delivery and follow up of humanitarian assistance to vulnerable populations in Iraq.

Following the European Council in Athens on 17 April 2003 where the President of the Commission and the Union’s Heads of State reached a consensus on the willingness of the Member States to airlift badly wounded children to Europe, the Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) has been in contact with the interested Member States in order to analyse the possibilities of implementing such a measure.

One of the components of the Emergency Humanitarian Decision of 22 April 2003 was ‘support to emergency medical and surgical care. This may imply, if adequate medical treatment is not yet available in Iraq, the transfer of wounded or sick people, especially children to neighbouring countries or Europe as the case may be’.

A meeting was convened by ECHO on 30 April 2003 with the Member States that in the Humanitarian Aid Committee of 24 April 2003 had expressed interest in discussing further the airlifting operation. In this meeting, ECHO explained that Council Regulation (EC) No 1257/96 of 20 June 1996 concerning humanitarian aid (1) hindered ECHO from financing operations outside the area affected by the crisis. ECHO also could not replace the Member States in obtaining the necessary authorisations, as it is each Member State concerned that is supposed to take the responsibility for the completion of the above mentioned requirements.

Therefore, ECHO’s role could be two-fold:

- close co-ordination of this entire operation by ECHO headquarters and its office in Baghdad which would be available to facilitate the operation on the ground.

- Financial support to the part of the operation implemented in Iraq (preparatory treatment in the country, medicines and other medical supplies needed, transport of the patients to the plane, travel grants to children and their parents to prepare their trip to Europe ...).

Since then, the Commission was later informed that 10 children had been transferred to Austria on 15 May 2003 and it is also aware that some German and French non-governmental organisations are exploring the possibility of organising the medical evacuation of wounded or severely ill children.

ECHO is presently discussing with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) the modalities of ECHO support in country, i.e. before the children and their accompanying parent leave the country. This will probably involve medicines, hospital costs to prepare the children for departure, ambulance costs to the airport, travel grants for the child and the accompanying parent for suitable clothing and other preparations for the departure.

(1) OJ L 163, 2.7.1996.