of persons under suspicion because of their place of birth. After repeated questioning, the Dallas authorities informed him that his case had been resolved. He went back to Italy for the Christmas holidays and on his return to Dallas Airport he was detained, handcuffed, chained to other detainees, locked in a cold cell without being allowed to contact anyone and placed on the first flight back to Europe the following morning, bound for Stuttgart. A similar fate befell a Swedish businessman held in the same cell. Marco Fornari, refused re-entry into the USA, has missed a semester of studies but has to continue to pay the rent on his apartment, which still contains his books and personal belongings.

This is an absurd, humiliating and flagrant violation of the most basic rights of European citizens.

What does the Commission intend to do to protect the rights of our citizens infringed by the USA?

Answer given by Mr Patten on behalf of the Commission

(30 March 2004)

EU statements following the events of 11 September 2001, notably in the United Nations (UN) Commission on Human Rights and the UN General Assembly Third Committee, have constantly highlighted that the fight against terrorism must be conditioned on maintaining respect for human rights, and not the other way around.

The Commission, therefore, thanks the Honourable Member for bringing the circumstances of the detention of this Italian citizen in the United States to its attention. While the Commission does not have any competence to intervene in this case, it is of course of fundamental importance that international commitments to ensure legal safeguards are honoured by all countries.

(2004/C 88 E/0520)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0536/04

by John Bowis (PPE-DE) to the Commission

(24 February 2004)

Subject: Colombia

1. What steps is the Commission taking to help the Colombian Government ensure that its national security policy is compatible with international human rights law and obligations?

2. Is the Commission aware that the then United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, expressed concern about the dismantling of the Human Rights Unit of the Colombian Attorney-General’s office, and will the Commission discuss with the Colombian Government how they will ensure the continued effective working of independent human rights investigations and, when appropriate, legal proceedings?

Answer given by Mr Patten on behalf of the Commission

(22 March 2004)

1. The Commission, in its contacts with the Colombian Government, expressed its deep concern regarding the still grave human rights and international humanitarian law situation in Colombia, and urged the Government to urgently address this situation.

Furthermore, the Commission uses all the cooperation instruments at its disposal to help the Colombian Government improve the situation in this respect. All the Commission’s priorities for the use of its cooperation instruments, as described in its Country Strategy Paper for Colombia (1), ultimately aim at improving the human rights and humanitarian situation.
They consist of:

- the support of on-going Colombian activities in the search for Peace;
- targeting of the roots and causes of the conflict;
- providing humanitarian assistance to the victims of the conflict.

In 2004, for instance, the Commission will design, with the Colombian Government, a programme worth EUR 10.5 million aiming at reducing impunity levels by improving the functioning of Colombia's justice system.

2. At the London Meeting on International Support for Colombia on 10 July 2003, the Commission, together with the other representatives of the international community, voiced its strong support for the work undertaken by the Office of the United Nations (UN) High Commissioner for Human Rights in Colombia, noted with satisfaction the Colombian Government's pledge to implement the recommendations made by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and urged the Colombian Government to implement these recommendations promptly.

The recommendations include:

(a) that the Attorney-General submit a bill to Congress establishing a career structure for officials and employees of his Office, with a view to strengthening the independence and impartiality of that institution;

(b) to ensure and to strengthen the independence of the Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law Unit in the Attorney-General's Office, to guarantee the protection of its staff and to provide it with the means necessary to carry out its investigations;

(c) to establish within the Attorney-General's Office's Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law Unit a group specializing in the investigation of possible links between members of the military and the police and paramilitary groups.

During the recent high-level contacts between the Commission and the Colombian Government (visit of the Member of the Commission in charge of External Relations to Colombia on 21/22 January 2004, visit of President Uribe to Brussels and Strasbourg on 9/10 February 2004), the Commission expressed its strong support for these recommendations.

The report by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on the implementation of its recommendations will be discussed at the forthcoming 60th session of the UN Human Rights Committee in Geneva. On this occasion, the EU will draft the Chairperson's Statement on Colombia.

In addition to its political support for the work and recommendations of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Colombia, the Commission also funded some of its activities through the 'European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights' (budget chapter 19 04):

- EUR 783 536 have been allocated to a project in favour of municipal ombudspersons for the period 2002-2004;
- EUR 600 000 have been allocated to a project aiming at strengthening the country's penitentiary institutions for the period 2003-2005.


(2004/C 88 E/0521) WRITTEN QUESTION E-0539/04
by Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL) to the Commission
(24 February 2004)

Subject: Implementation of the Structural Funds in Portugal

What are the specific third CSF programmes still going on in Portugal, which have an uptake rate lower than 30%? For which programmes are payments below 15% of the total co-participation?