

Mr Ukshin Hoti, a university lecturer and leading Kosovar figure who was nominated for the EP's Sakharov Prize in 1998, was sentenced to five years' imprisonment in 1994. Although his prison sentence came to an end last May, he is still missing. According to two concurrent testimonies, he was released from Lipljan prison on 16 May 1999. However, his family have not received any official notification from the Belgrade authorities. He may subsequently have been abducted and taken to Serbia.

Does the Council have more detailed information on the above cases?

What action has the Council taken, in particular at the United Nations and OSCE levels, with a view to the speedy release of some 2000 Kosovar prisoners still held in Serbian prisons, and to obtaining all the necessary information on the persons who have disappeared?

Reply

(13 March 2000)

The Council fully shares the Honourable Parliamentarian's concern over the fate of the Kosovar prisoners still held in Serbia and notably in the cases of Mrs Flora Brovina, Mr Albin Kurti and Mr Ukshin Hoti. On the occasion of the 19 July 1999 General Affairs Council, Ministers called on the FRY to guarantee the ICRC full access to these prisoners. The Council also called for the immediate release of prisoners held without charges and to treat prisoners in accordance with applicable international standards.

After the 19 July GAC, the ICRC has been allowed access to Serbian jails by the Belgrade authorities. It has so far identified 2000 Kosovo Albanian prisoners and might be in possession of updated information on the whereabouts and the conditions of the prisoners mentioned by the Honourable Parliamentarian.

The Honourable Parliamentarian can be assured that the Council will continue to consider progress in democratic freedoms and respect for the rights of minorities including the fate of the Kosovar prisoners as the key element for an eventual lifting of sanctions targeting the Belgrade regime.

(2000/C 280 E/173)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2869/99

by **Frédérique Ries (ELDR) to the Commission**

(18 January 2000)

Subject: Cost of sending letters from and within Belgium

A few months ago, a person wishing to send a standard-format letter from Belgium to France paid 17 francs, the same as for a letter within Belgium.

Now, however, the cost of sending a standard-format letter from Belgium to France has increased to 19 francs for a second-class letter and to 21 francs for a first-class letter. The cost of sending a letter within Belgium is still 17 francs.

Does not the Commission feel that a competition issue is involved here, since it is more expensive to send a letter within the Union than within a Member State?

Answer by Mr Bolkestein on behalf of the Commission

(25 February 2000)

Since 1 January 1999 the Belgian post office has in fact had different rates for domestic mail and for mail going to other Member States.

The postal services directive⁽¹⁾ requires prices to be geared to costs. This principle can thus prompt a postal authority to alter its rates in line with costs, especially when these differ between purely domestic handling and cross-border mail. When approached, the Belgian post office offered this reason to justify the rate alterations, especially in the light of its recent investments to improve the quality of cross-border mail services.

This transparency is intended to avoid subsidies, but it also reflects a definite feature of the single market. In ten or so Member States postal rates differ depending on whether the mail is to be delivered domestically or elsewhere in the Community.

The differing rates for domestic and intra-Community mail may be based on different types of service. If these are justified, they would not infringe Community rules on competition. Compliance with the cost accounting principles laid down in the postal services directive will allow such justifications to be examined, if need be.

(¹) Directive 97/67/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 December 1997 on common rules for the development of the internal market of Community postal services and the improvement of quality of service, OJ L 15, 21.1.1998, p. 12.

(2000/C 280 E/174)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0004/00

by Bart Staes (Verts/ALE) to the Commission

(19 January 2000)

Subject: Cobalt and nickel used in dentistry

Scientific research shows that more and more people are sensitive to heavy metals such as cobalt and nickel. Cars, industry and modern farming are some of the causes of the increasing number of heavy metals in food. Recent research in France has shown a link between heavy metals (nickel, copper, cobalt and aluminium, along with sulphate) in drinking water and Alzheimer's disease. Since the human body needs only a small amount of these metals, the remainder is stored and this results in allergies.

Cobalt and nickel are frequently used in dentistry. Hypersensitive patients suffer as a result. From the public health point of view, it would be better to use 'healthier' alternatives such as covering dentures with a complete non-corroding, wear-resistant coating. All too many dentists and laboratories argue that a coating is not necessary because there is no obligation. Nevertheless, directive 92/59/EEC (¹) bans the use of products which are 'dangerous to the health and safety of consumers'.

1. Has the Commission had any scientific research carried out into the increasing sensitivity to cobalt and nickel, in particular when they are used in dentistry? If so, what are the findings of this research? If not, is the Commission prepared to have such research carried out in view of the adverse effects on public health?

2. Is the Commission prepared to make use of cobalt and nickel in dentistry dependent on the obligatory covering of dentures with a complete non-corroding, wear-resistant coating, in view of the adverse effects on public health and the European ban on products which are 'dangerous to the health and safety of consumers' (directive 92/59/EEC)? If not, what is the Commission's justification for the continued use of cobalt and nickel in dentistry without covering dentures with a complete non-corroding, wear-resistant coating?

(¹) OJ L 228, 11.8.1992, p. 24.

Answer given by Mr Liikanen on behalf of the Commission

(16 March 2000)

1. The Commission ordered in December 1994 a study on dental amalgam and alternatives, products covered by the medical devices Directive 93/42/EEC (¹), and which was performed by an ad hoc working group. Members included experts representing Member States' ministries of health, scientists from different European universities, industry representatives, medical professionals, dentists' professional associations and two experts from the United States department of Health and Human Services.