

4. How does it view such an attempt to depopulate remote areas and banish the inhabitants to the towns which recalls the tragedy in Vietnam where attempts were made in the 60s and 70s, also through American intervention, to make disputed areas uninhabitable for human beings with defoliants (the notorious 'Agent Orange')?
5. Is it prepared to make every effort to help put an end to any repetition of such a tragedy and, as a first step to that end, to ensure that neither the European Union nor its Member States end up in a situation where they have to share responsibility for this tragedy?

Reply

(24 April 2001)

As the Honourable Member is aware, the Council has had the opportunity to inform the European Parliament on its position on the activities in Colombia at various occasions: the last time on 31 January 2001 during the debate between the Parliament with Commissioner Nielson and Swedish State Secretary Lars Danielsson on Plan Colombia.

The Council is following very closely the complex and multifaceted problems faced by Colombia and has expressed its determination to support the peace process in the most appropriate manner.

On the question of aerial spraying of illicit crops, the European Union has had the opportunity to express its position to Colombian authorities, and in particular to express doubts about the effectiveness of the measure. The European Union has encouraged Colombian initiatives related to independent international monitoring of aerial spraying on the basis of procedures established by Colombian authorities. The EU has also pointed out to Colombian authorities the danger of a negative impact of the aerial spraying on past and future EU cooperation projects. Finally, the EU has had the occasion to express its conviction that crop substitution is the most effective means to combat illicit crop production.

The European Union is working on an autonomous European package to support the peace process in Colombia, which will be directed to modernising Colombian administration, strengthening the rule of law, developing alternative crops and protecting the environment.

At present, an expert mission has travelled to Colombia in order to identify concrete cooperation projects. The European package will be presented on the occasion of the international meeting on the peace process in Colombia to take place in Brussels in April this year.

Finally, the European Union has also contributed with € 6,5 million to projects concerning displaced population and contributes to the fight against drug production through various means.

(2001/C 187 E/176)

WRITTEN QUESTION P-0035/01

by **María Izquierdo Rojo (PSE) to the Commission**

(16 January 2001)

Subject: Discrimination against male pensioners as regards child allowances

France's implementation of legislation governing child allowances is discriminatory and unfair to male pensioners, since the national civilian and military retirement pension scheme makes provision for the payment of child allowances only to women or to men under discriminatory conditions. In Germany, on the other hand, child allowances are paid without distinction and in equal amounts to either men or women.

Since this discrimination against men is an infringement of the EU Treaties and does not respect the principle of equality between men and women in the field of social security, nor the principle of equal pay, and since the Commission should ensure compliance with the principle of equality between the sexes and enable European men to benefit from the policies on equality, does it not consider that it should remedy this form of discrimination?

Answer given by Mrs Diamantopoulou on behalf of the Commission*(7 March 2001)*

Concerning the question raised by the Honourable Member, the Commission can inform her that it has already lodged a complaint with the French authorities, on 5 April 2000, for failure to implement Article 141 (ex Article 119) of the EC Treaty as interpreted by the Court of Justice, particularly in cases C-7/93 (*Bestuur van het Algemeen Burgerlijk Pensioenfonds v. G. A. Beune*)⁽¹⁾ and C-147/95 (*Dimossia Epicheirissi Ilektrismou (DEI) v. Efthimios Evrenopoulos*)⁽²⁾, and for failure to implement Council Directive 96/97/EC of 20 December 1996, amending Directive 86/378/EEC of 24 July 1986 on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women in occupational social security schemes⁽³⁾, reflecting the Court's decisions. It should be noted that France has already been censured by the Court of Justice in its ruling of 8 July 1999 on case C-354/98 (*Commission of the European Communities v. French Republic*)⁽⁴⁾ for failure to notify the transposal measures for Directive 96/97/EC.

Moreover, regarding the specific question of civilian and military pensions, two matters have already been referred to the Court of Justice for a preliminary ruling by the French national courts (C-366/99 *Criesmar* and C-206/00 *Moufflin*).

⁽¹⁾ ECR 1994 I-4471.

⁽²⁾ ECR 1997 I-2057.

⁽³⁾ OJ L 46, 17.2.1997.

⁽⁴⁾ ECR 1999 I-4927.

(2001/C 187 E/177)

WRITTEN QUESTION P-0036/01**by Joaquim Miranda (GUE/NGL) to the Commission***(16 January 2001)*

Subject: Application for Cohesion Fund assistance in connection with the North Alentejo Multimunicipal Water Supply and Sewage Treatment System

An authoritative representative of the Portuguese State-controlled water company, 'Águas de Portugal', confirmed at a recent meeting of Portalegre Municipal Council (of which I am a member) that an application for Structural/Cohesion Fund assistance in connection with the above-mentioned system had been submitted to the Commission.

However:

- (a) The system, which would encompass substantial resources of the 15 municipalities comprising Portalegre District, has been laid down by the Portuguese Ministry for the Environment and Regional Planning (under Decree-Law No 128/2000) without prior consultation of the municipalities themselves,
- (b) The municipalities are currently considering whether to join the system and set up a corporation to run it. It therefore obviously follows that on the date when the application was submitted, they had not taken a decision on those two points, let alone on the terms of an application for assistance, although the resources concerned (still) fell under their responsibility,
- (c) One of the municipalities involved, Portalegre, has already stated that it will not be joining the system, and there are others which may incline to the same view,
- (d) Meanwhile, the Assembly of the Republic has already begun to debate Bill No 275/VIII, which, if adopted, will cast doubt on the above decree-law and hence on the water supply system in the form laid down.