

How exactly does the Council intend to tackle these urgent issues?

Does it intend to speed matters up and introduce ad hoc measures to share out responsibility for the burden currently borne by Italy?

**Joint answer
to Written Questions P-3755/97, E-3927/97 and P-0109/98**

(19 March 1998)

As a response to the recent arrival of an increasing number of ethnic Kurds of Iraqi and Turkish nationality, as well as a small but growing number of migrants of other nationalities using the same transit routes, the Council adopted on 26 January 1998 a comprehensive EU Action Plan regarding different aspects of the recent influx of migrants from Iraq and the neighbouring region.

Although this influx of migrants is a significant problem for the Member States of the European Union, requiring enhanced cooperation in combating illegal immigration and in tackling the involvement of organised crime, the Council does not overlook the political and humanitarian aspects of the problem, to which the Honourable Members referred in their questions.

Appropriate action is undertaken at EU level, for the purpose of improving the analysis of the political, economic and humanitarian situation in the region. In this connection, a close dialogue is taken forward with UNHCR, in the framework of the Action Plan, to obtain further information about the humanitarian situation and to explore the role which UNHCR can play in the region in helping to deal with asylum-seekers, including in the possible development of regional solutions. The Action Plan also includes monitoring the needs of the Iraqi people, with a view to humanitarian assistance both at EU and bilateral levels, as well as continuing the dialogue with the countries in the region to emphasise the need for improved access to Northern Iraq by UN agencies and NGOs.

In addition, the Council is aware of the fact that substantial numbers of these migrants are properly recognised as refugees under the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees or granted some other form of status in Member States for humanitarian reasons. In this respect, it has to be pointed out that recognition in individual cases of refugee status within the meaning of the Geneva Convention, like the provision of other forms of protection on humanitarian grounds, are decisions that lie with Member States. This being the case, the Council fully recognises the importance of ensuring that humanitarian considerations continue to be given proper weight and that Member States' obligations to provide protection in accordance with international law continue to be honoured. This recognition is an essential component of the Action Plan, and is without prejudice to the need to ensure that the procedures for seeking and granting asylum and other forms of protection are not open to abuse by those who have no need of such protection.

The Council is currently working towards rapid and effective implementation of the Action Plan.

The Council does not at the moment envisage the adoption of ad hoc measures to share out responsibility for the burden borne by individual Member States with respect to this influx of migrants. It has to be pointed out, however, that the Council has adopted two instruments concerning burden-sharing with regard to the admission and residence of displaced persons on a temporary basis (Council Resolution of 25 September 1995, OJ C 262 of 7.10.1995, p. 1, and Council Decision of 4 March 1996, OJ L 63 of 13.3.1996, p. 10). In addition, the question of burden-sharing among Member States is included in the Commission Proposal for a Joint Action concerning Temporary protection of displaced persons (OJ C 106 of 4.4.1997, p. 13), which is currently under review by the competent working group of the Council.

(98/C 187/81)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-3761/97

by Patricia McKenna (V) to the Council

(24 November 1997)

Subject: Arrest of human rights activist in South Korea

Suh Jun-Sik, one of the organizers of the recent Sarangbang Human Rights Film Festival, was arrested by South Korean police on 4 November 1997.