

Two front-rank political personalities have disappeared over the last few months: Mr Zakharenko (former Minister for Internal Affairs) disappeared in May 1999 and Mr Gonchar (Vice-Chairman of the 13th Supreme Soviet) in September 1999; we have no information concerning their whereabouts. The case of a third major personality, Mrs Vinnikova (former Chairwoman of the Belarusian Central Bank) has been solved. She joined her son in the United Kingdom at the end of 1999.

In the light of these developments the Council is not in a position to lift the 1997 restrictions. The EU makes its position clear to Belarus at every appropriate occasion and presses for more democratic reforms (senior officials' Troika mission to Minsk on 1 and 2 November, meeting between Under-Secretary of State Blomberg and Foreign Minister Latypov in Istanbul on 18 November and démarches by heads of mission whenever necessary). Moreover, the recently signed TACIS Civil Society Development Programme will contribute to improving the democratic reform process in Belarus.

The EU's overriding aim is the holding of free and fair, internationally observed and recognised elections in 2000. The Council has taken good note of President Lukashenko's commitment to such elections, and will hold him to his word.

To set the electoral process in motion, a dialogue between the Government and the opposition is indispensable. The EU fully supports the efforts of the OSCE as the only organisation able to kick-start this dialogue.

(2000/C 280 E/098)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2665/99

by Yasmine Boudjenah (GUE/NGL) to the Commission

(12 January 2000)

Subject: Restructuring of ABB Alstom Power

The management of the ABB Alstom Power group, which was formed in a merger on 30 June 1999, has announced a restructuring programme. In some countries where the undertaking operates job cuts have already been announced.

Have this group and/or its pre-merger constituent groups received any EU aid?

If so, could the Commission give details of the amount and the conditions under which it was granted? Was such aid conditional on job creation? Is the Commission prepared to ask for it to be repaid?

Answer given by Mr Barnier on behalf of the Commission

(10 February 2000)

The Commission is making the necessary inquiries in the various Member States. It will make the results of its investigation known as soon as possible.

(2000/C 280 E/099)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2667/99

by Olivier Dupuis (TDI) to the Council

(13 January 2000)

Subject: Prospects of Azerbaijan joining the Council of Europe and development of EU/Azerbaijan relations

Can the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy give full details on the state of progress of Azerbaijan's accession to the Council of Europe? More generally, can the High Representative indicate how the EU intends to develop relations with the country?