3. Can the Commission confirm that in 1991 researchers Tendler (parasitologist) and Simpson (molecular biologist) discovered a new drug, R-SM 14, which should be suitable in vaccine form for large-scale use, and that research has also been carried out by the World Health Organisation but that so far no pharmaceutical firm has been willing to produce a vaccine because the purchasing power in the countries where there are epidemics of bilharzia is low and therefore no profit can be made?

4. Does the Commission agree that, following previous successful campaigns against smallpox and polio using vaccination, many human lives at risk or already damaged could be saved if public health took precedence over commercial considerations?

5. What contribution does the Commission think it can make to encouraging a substantial European input for a mass vaccination programme aimed at combating and ending the unnecessary epidemics of bilharzia in the Third World?

Source: Swedish television documentary broadcast on TV 1 in the Netherlands (23 February 2001), 'Netwerk' current affairs programme.

Answer given by Mr Nielson on behalf of the Commission

(14 June 2001)

The Commission agrees that bilharzia (schistosomiasis) is important in terms of socio-economic and public health in tropical and subtropical areas. Despite the progress in control, the disease still remains endemic in 76 developing countries where over 20 million people are currently estimated to be infected; 200 000 dying every year.

Given the difficulties in sustaining large-scale specific programmes in Africa, the core of the current strategy against bilharzia disease consists of a simple and effective control package (by means of drug treatment) which can be implemented through existing health and educational services and provision of safe water. The Community, therefore, supports bilharzia control in the context of its existing assistance for health sectors in developing countries.

After extensive research efforts, where funding from Community research programmes was crucially important to set-up appropriate North-South collaboration and with industry, important progress in vaccine development has been reported. Extensive trials are hampered now by the profitability requirements for private industry to undertake such large-scale investments. In this regard, the Commission believes that private industry should be further encouraged to invest in vaccines and medicines in this area.

The recent Communication and Programme for Action on HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis in the context of poverty reduction [1], highlights the importance for further investments and public private partnerships for public health priorities in developing countries and those could also influence decisions towards development of new drugs and vaccines for bilharzia. Finally, it is worth noting that Praziquantel, the main available drug, is produced extensively locally, an area also targeted strongly supported by Community policy.

[1] COM(2001) 96 final.

(2001/C 350 E/077) **WRITTEN QUESTION P-1106/01**

by John Cushnahan (PPE-DE) to the Commission

(28 March 2001)

Subject: EU-Israel Association Agreement

In its May 1998 Communication to the Council and the European Parliament, the Commission stated: 'Preferential access to Community markets for exports originating in Israeli settlements in the West Bank

and Gaza Strip and those from East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights contravene agreed rules of origin since these territories do not form part of the State of Israel under public international law. There are indications that these exports are taking place. The European Community will take steps to verify the accuracy of this information … Should it be confirmed, such violations of rules should be brought to an end.'

In September 1998 Israeli officials confirmed to the Commission that as a matter of official policy Israeli Customs was routinely certifying products wholly produced or substantially processed in Israeli settlements as originating in the State of Israel. After several cases of fraudulent imports of settlement products under preferences were uncovered by Member States' customs services, the Commission informed us that 'the interpretation of the territorial scope of application of the agreement adopted by Israel does not coincide with the interpretation accepted by the European Union'. However, the Commission also assured us that 'the verification procedure for the origin of products makes it possible to determine whether a product may benefit from the right to preferential treatment even where there is a failure to co-operate in the determination of origin on the part of the third country concerned.' After the Commission moved to coordinate a posteriori verifications by the Member States' customs services for a number of imports of settlement-produced goods, Israeli officials announced publicly that Israel would respond to the Member States' verification inquiries by reaffirming the originating status of the products concerned. Can Israel 'fail to co-operate in the determination of origin' without violating an essential provision of its agreement with the EU? Does such a failure to co-operate encumber and diminish the capacity of the Member States' customs services to detect and prevent customs fraud? Does the Commission tolerate an inferior standard of customs fraud deterrence and prevention on the Member States' parts where Israeli exports of settlement products are concerned?

Answer given by Mr Patten on behalf of the Commission

(15 May 2001)

As the Honourable Member may know, the Union-Israel Association Agreement establishes a procedure for the verification of the proof of origin, whereby the customs authorities of the importing country return the certificate of origin to the customs authorities of the exporting country, if they have a reasonable doubt as to the authenticity of such documents, the originating status of the products concerned or the fulfilment of the other requirements of Protocol 4 of the Agreement. The verification is carried out by the customs authorities of the exporting country. This process is presently taking place.

About 2000 certificates of origin have been sent back to Israel's customs authorities by Member State customs authorities. The Union-Israel Association Agreement foresees that Israel's customs authorities have up to 10 months to send an answer to Member States custom authorities. In case Israel customs authorities fail to answer or if the reply does not contain sufficient information to determine the authenticity of the document in question or the real origin of the products, the requesting customs authorities shall refuse entitlement to the preferences.

On the occasion of the first Association Council on 13 June 2000, the Union Presidency, in the official speech, expressed its particular attachment to the respect of the territorial coverage of the Association Agreement with Israel. The Commission, in full co-ordination with Member States, will ensure the respect of the Association Agreement.

(2001/C 350 E/078) **WRITTEN QUESTION E-1115/01**

by Esko Seppänen (GUE/NGL) to the Commission

(6 April 2001)

Subject: Food aid programme for Russia

In the winter of 1998-1999 the EU decided — evidently in order to use up its stocks — to grant food aid to Russia. It was agreed with the Russian government that 20 % of the income from the sale of this food would be directed to a special social fund. Has the Commission had any details of the use of the resources from this fund?