priest is allowed to do. On 9 January 2001 Commissioner Diamantopoulou replied to my question No E-3622/00 [1] — which raised the subject of the equality of men and women in regard to conducting religious ceremonies — but did not deal with the substance of the matter.

The Commission report entitled 'Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in the European Union' [2] contains a wide range of proposals for strengthening equality within the EU, referring to 'balanced participation in decision-making', and the introduction of the gender dimension into employment strategy etc.

Is the refusal to ordain women as priests consistent with the notion of equality promoted by the Commission and the other EU institutions? What is the Commission's view of the fact that the Protestant Church has women priests? What initiatives could the Commission take to make that fact more widely known and to make the other Christian denominations and other faiths (Judaism, Islam etc) realise that women should have the opportunity to be ordained into the priesthood? What is the Commission's view of the ban on marriage and the acquisition of a family by clergy of all religions and faiths with the exception of the Orthodox Church, in which marriage and the creation of a family are regarded as an achievement and a clear sign of respect for human nature?

(1) OJ C 151 E, 22.5.2001, p. 196.
(2) COM(1999) 106 final, 5 March 1999.

Answer given by Mrs Diamantopoulou on behalf of the Commission

(4 September 2001)

As already stated in its answer to written question E-3622/00 by the Honourable Member [1], the Commission cannot become involved and comment on issues which are outside Community jurisdiction, such as the organisation, performance and conducting of religious ceremonies which are based on rules peculiar to each religion.

(1) OJ C 151 E, 22.5.2001.

(2002/C 40 E/172)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2003/01

by Robert Goebbels (PSE) to the Commission

(6 July 2001)

Subject: European statistics on per capita income

The European Union, in the shape of Eurostat, regularly produces statistics comparing factors such as per capita income in the different Member States of the European Union. A recent publication compared the differences in income between the Member States of the Union and the applicant countries. With the index for the European average set at 100, the comparison shows that the poorest country in an enlarged Europe would be Bulgaria (index 23), while the richest country would be Luxembourg (index 181). To achieve these results, Eurostat calculates the gross domestic product of each country in purchasing power parity and divides this figure by the number of inhabitants of the country. Is it not the case that this method leads to distorted results, particularly as regards Luxembourg where GDP is the product of the work of residents and non-residents, since the latter are not taken into account by Eurostat when it divides GDP by the number of inhabitants?

A factor which is insignificant in all the other Union countries is highly significant in the case of Luxembourg, where the total workforce of 275 000 (April 2001) includes some 95 000 non-resident frontier workers, in other words more than 37 % of the working population. Should Eurostat not review the methodology it uses for statistics of this kind, which ultimately are inaccurate?

Answer given by Mr Solbes Mira on behalf of the Commission

(18 September 2001)

The per capita gross domestic product (GDP) figures in euros and in purchasing power standards are disseminated quarterly by the statistical office of the European Communities (Eurostat) for the Member States, as well as for applicant and other countries.

Before providing a detailed answer to the Honourable Member's question, it would be useful to clarify some of the basic concepts concerning both GDP — which is the focus of the question — and gross national income, which is better known as gross national product.

GDP is the final result of the production activity of a country's producer units. It can be calculated from various viewpoints, the best known of which is the expenditure angle, defined as the sum of household consumption, general government consumption, gross fixed capital formation and the external trade balance.

The national income concept, on the other hand, relates to income rather than production and is obtained by deducting primary income paid to non-residents from GDP and raising GDP by the primary income received from the rest of the world.

In international comparisons, the main indicator used to measure wealth is, by convention, GDP which, by definition, is produced on the economic territory of a country either by residents or by non-residents. It is true that on the basis of this indicator, Luxembourg is the richest country in the world with an index as high as 190 (€15=100) for 2000.

This can be explained on various counts:

— Luxembourg is a special case since it is defined, on account of its size, as a single region. As with all regions which are very strong poles of economic activity, it attracts a great number of commuters who make a very significant contribution to its GDP (some other regions in the EU are in the same position and the 1998 figures for regional GDP in two of these — Hamburg and Inner London — were 12 and 67 points higher respectively than in Luxembourg);

— Luxembourg's GDP is 'boosted' by the significant volume of purchases, particularly of consumer goods, made on its territory by these commuters and other inhabitants of its neighbouring countries. These purchases are to be considered as exports and thus form part of GDP; they also benefit the State's coffers through the taxes levied on them;

— Given that the general level of prices in Luxembourg is only slightly higher than the Community average, per capita GDP expressed in purchasing power standards (PPS), where purchasing power parities are therefore used as conversion rates, is virtually the same as the GDP in euros, whereas in general when the euro index is high, the volume index is low (in Denmark for example, the index for per capita GDP in euros in 2000 stood at 146,4 but fell to 120,2 in PPS on account of the very high level of prices in this country).

With regard to the matter of whether Eurostat should revise its methodology for this type of statistics, the Commission is of the opinion that this is not possible, primarily for the following reason:

— Statistical data are compiled in accordance with international standards and conventions (the European System of Integrated Economic Accounts (ESA 95) in the EU, and the System of National Accounts (SNA) on the world stage) which cannot take the specific situations in each individual country into account.

— These standards are often drawn up after lengthy discussions among national experts resulting in Council regulations which are usually the fruit of hard-won compromises, especially in cases where they have financial implications for the Member States (e.g. their contribution to the Community budget).

— One point of contention at the moment, for example, is the treatment of financial intermediation services indirectly measured (FISIM), which certain Member States, headed by Luxembourg, would like to see broken down by user sector and final use of GDP (which would lead to a further substantial increase in Luxembourg's GDP), whilst others oppose this type of breakdown. It should also be pointed out in this context that Luxembourg has, for some time now, published two versions of its national accounts: a national version which takes FISIM into account and a Community version which showed GDP to be around 10-15 % lower, depending on the data, than in the national version.

— To return to the use of GDP as an indicator for international comparisons, if the concept of national income (which is closer to the actual notion of income) were used in its place, there would be no fundamental change in the situation for Luxembourg, as its national income would only be slightly lower than its GDP.

— The Commission is, however, attentive to the question asked by the Honourable Member, which raises a fundamental problem relating to statistics: these are based on standards and conventions which apply internationally to all countries and thus they cannot give total coverage to all aspects of economic and social life.

(2002/C 40 E/173) **WRITTEN QUESTION E-2008/01**

by Renato Brunetta (PPE-DE) to the Commission

(6 July 2001)

Subject: Modus operandi as regards the supply of natural gas to the European internal market

According to the figures in the European Investment Bank study entitled 'The Western European gas market, 1996', the European market's dependence on sources outside the Community will increase from 31 % in 1995 to 45 % in 2010.

If such quantities are to be supplied, a variety of long-term supply contracts will need to be administered, and pipelines built and managed as efficiently as possible to enable the gas supplied to be conveyed to the consumer markets. When devising solutions of this kind, the operation of the gas transmission networks has to be treated as a priority strategic issue.

In the light of the foregoing: What steps has the Commission taken or will it take to make the supply of natural gas from sources outside Union territory (which will become the main sources) as reliable and dependable as possible? In particular, what forms of organisation should suppliers and distributors in general adopt to enable them, at the operational level, to reduce the consequences that might ensue if serious incidents were to occur — as they could — at natural gas transmission facilities or producer countries were to cut off the supply?

Answer given by Mrs de Palacio on behalf of the Commission

(6 September 2001)

Community natural gas demand is expected to increase over the coming decades while domestic Community gas production in the medium to longer term is expected to decline. The Community's dependence on non-European sources of gas is therefore expected to increase over the next 20-30 years.

The increasing demand for imported gas confirms the need for strong political and physical links with external suppliers and a diversified supply portfolio. Key strategic issues related to the security of the Community's energy supply were identified in the Commission's Green Paper 'Towards a European strategy for the security of energy supply [1]' including possible geopolitical implications of the expected increase in import dependency from external gas suppliers such as Algeria and Russia.

While it should be noted, that the continuity of supplies from the former Soviet Union, and then Russia, being the main external gas supplier to the Community has been exemplary over the last 25 years, strengthened co-operation both technically and politically with external suppliers is in the mutual long-term strategic interest.