

(2002/C 205 E/069)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0061/02**by Camilo Nogueira Román (Verts/ALE) to the Council**

(25 January 2002)

Subject: Internal constitutional political entities and the Laeken Declaration

The Spanish Head of Government and the Foreign Minister, when taking over the presidency of the Council, repeatedly denied the right of the autonomous regions of the Spanish State to be present at Council meetings when issues under their political competence are being discussed.

Spanish government leaders consider that because, according to the Spanish Constitution, sovereignty in international relations belongs to the State, it is impossible for a minister of an autonomous region to represent the State in the Council, even if accompanying a central government minister.

Since the Laeken Declaration recognises that internal constitutional entities and their political competences (in States where they exist) must be considered in the reform and constitutionalisation of the Treaties — it being moreover evident that in countries such as Germany, Belgium, Austria or the United Kingdom internal constitutional entities (Länder, constitutional regions, federal states, regions, etc.) are, where relevant, present at Council meetings — what difference can there be between the constitutions of these countries and the Spanish Constitution to justify the discrimination against the Spanish autonomous regions advocated by the Spanish Head of Government?

Why does the Spanish Head of Government take this attitude at the very time when Spain is taking over the presidency of the Council and work is beginning on the Convention which is to implement the Laeken Declaration?

Reply

(13 May 2002)

Article 203 of the Treaty establishing the European Community states that the Council shall consist of a representative of each Member State at ministerial level, authorised to commit the government of that Member State. Subject to this provision it is for each Member State to decide how it is represented.

The Council does not therefore have a view on this issue, nor would it be appropriate for it to do so. Equally, it would not be appropriate for the Presidency to comment on matters which fall within the competence of the Spanish government.

(2002/C 205 E/070)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0063/02**by Camilo Nogueira Román (Verts/ALE) to the Council**

(25 January 2002)

Subject: The Spanish presidency and the working languages of the EU

The entry of new countries into the EU, the official languages of which will be recognised on an equal footing with the current ones in the Union of fifteen countries, may accentuate the trend whereby, although the languages of all the Member States are recognised, some of them acquire the status of preferred working languages, as is currently the case for French and English.

Certain countries want their language to have the same recognition as English or French, the argument being based on the number of people speaking that language in the EU. However, in the EU there are languages, such as Spanish or Portuguese — Galician, one of the languages of the Spain, belongs to the same family — spoken by hundreds of millions of people on four continents, and therefore of a universal nature, which must be taken into account in settling this debate.

It would be absurd if the EU, which must play a fundamental political and economic role in the world, should underestimate the value of these two languages as preferred working languages, when, out of all the languages which are or are going to be the official languages of the EU, they are among the three most spoken languages in the world. What will the Spanish presidency's position on this issue be?

Reply

(13 May 2002)

Article 290 TEC states that the rules governing the languages of the institutions of the Community shall be determined by the Council, acting unanimously. The position of the Council on this issue is set out in its Regulation No 1 (EU) of 1958, as subsequently amended on the accession of new Member States, which states that there are currently eleven official working languages of the Community.

(2002/C 205 E/071)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0064/02

by **Camilo Nogueira Román (Verts/ALE) to the Council**

(25 January 2002)

Subject: The Spanish presidency's position on relations with Mercosur, and Argentina in particular

The Spanish presidency's priorities presented by the Spanish Foreign Minister, Josep Piqué, include relations with Latin America, but give lower priority to relations with Mercosur than to relations with Chile, although the organisation should be given preference since it consists of countries as important as Brazil and Argentina – the second of which has extremely serious problems and needs genuine help from the EU – as well as Uruguay and Paraguay. What are the reasons for this?

Reply

(21 May 2002)

1. The Council wishes to stress to the Honourable Member that the EU's relations with Mercosur are of equal importance to its relations with Chile. An EU-Mercosur Summit (in parallel with the European Union-Latin America-Caribbean Summit) is to take place in Madrid on 18 May 2002. As the programme of the Spanish Presidency indicates, 'These meetings could provide a good opportunity to conclude the negotiations on the Association Agreement with Chile and to give a decisive boost to those taking place with Mercosur so as finally to secure a commitment from the European Union which will ensure that preferential relations with this area are maintained and developed.' This statement is a fair reflection of the present state of current negotiations with Chile on the one hand and Mercosur on the other.

2. The Council would also remind the Honourable Member that conclusions on Mercosur were adopted at the General Affairs Council on 28 January 2002. In those conclusions the Council emphasises that, given the context of the current crisis in Argentina, it welcomes the determination displayed by the Mercosur Foreign Affairs Ministers in their Joint Declaration adopted in Buenos Aires on 11 January 2002 to strengthen the integration process between their countries. In addition, the Council believes that a strengthened Mercosur will be the key to the development of the region and it reaffirms the importance it attaches to the future Association Agreement between the EU and Mercosur. It welcomes the progress achieved so far in the negotiations and reiterates the EU's commitment to continue to make progress in those negotiations.

3. As regards the crisis in Argentina specifically, the Ecofin Council examined the situation in that country at length on 22 January 2002 and conclusions stressing the economic and financial aspects of the crisis were adopted and made public. The situation in Argentina was examined again at the Foreign Affairs Ministers' lunch on 28 January.