

The structural reforms pursued under the European Employment Strategy (EES) since 1997 have already resulted in better long term performances of European labour markets, as shown by the following facts documented in the Joint Employment Report for 2001:

- despite the fact that economic growth has been weaker than in the 1980s, there has been a marked acceleration in job creation;
- the Union has experienced a faster and deeper reduction in unemployment rates;
- the Union is also better equipped in terms of skills than in the past. A higher level of education facilitates adaptation to changes in economic activity;
- last but not least, following the stability oriented policies implemented over recent years, this occurred without increased inflationary pressure and the budgetary situation in the Member States is now much stronger than before the European employment strategy was launched.

If these efforts are sustained the Union should be able to absorb the slowdown more rapidly and therefore the current cyclical downturn should not affect the pace of reform.

The Commission considers that the continuation of the ongoing structural reform will further reduce persisting rigidities in the European labour markets.

Priority elements of such reform are:

- disincentives deterring people from taking up and remaining in a job;
- barriers to greater occupational and geographical mobility;
- the limited capacity to anticipate and manage change, which should be improved in particular by social dialogue in the face of corporate restructuring.

⁽¹⁾ COM(2002) 89 final.

⁽²⁾ COM(2002) 14 final.

(2002/C 229 E/081)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0328/02

by Feleknas Uca (GUE/NGL) to the Council

(12 February 2002)

Subject: Middle East conflict

The situation in the Middle East is worrying and worsening by the day. The Israeli army has penetrated into Palestinian-controlled territory. According to newspaper reports and press releases, continuing tensions between Palestine and Israel have led to the deaths of thousands of people since 2000, most of them Palestinians. As recently as last Sunday two people were killed and more than 100 wounded in a suicide attack in Jerusalem. The number of people killed and wounded in the Middle East conflict is alarming. In my opinion, a peaceful solution between the parties in the conflict is still a long way off.

How does the Council view the current situation in the Middle East?

What measures will it take to resolve the conflict?

What steps will it take in the first half of 2002 in order to contribute to a peaceful solution to the conflict?

Reply

(26 June 2002)

The Council is seriously concerned at the extreme gravity of the situation in the Middle East and has called for an end to the current spiral of violence and the suffering of the Israeli and Palestinian people. The European Council of Laeken set out the measures required by both parties in order to permit a resumption of political dialogue. On the occasion of its meeting in Barcelona, on 15/16 March 2002, the European Council made a declaration in which it stated that the Middle East is in the grip of an extremely grave crisis, and it called on both sides to take immediate and effective action to stop the bloodshed. The European Council warmly welcomed the adoption of UNSC Resolution 1397, which reflects the strong commitment of the international community in this regard and considered that it should be urgently implemented in order to allow two States, Israel and Palestine to live in peace and security and play their full part in the region.

This declaration gives the framework within which the European Council considers EU should play its role together with the Parties within the framework of a two-fold objective: the creation of a democratic, viable and independent State of Palestine, bringing an end to the occupation of 1967 and the right of Israel to live within safe and secure boundaries, guaranteed by the commitment of the international community and in particular the Arab countries.

The EU has called on the Palestinian Authority and President Arafat to do everything to put an end to terrorism and the armed Intifada, dismantle all the terrorist networks and arrest and prosecute the perpetrators of terrorist acts. It has called on the Israeli Government to withdraw its military forces and stop the extra-judicial executions, lift the closures and all the restrictions imposed on the Palestinian people and its leadership, and freeze the settlements.

The Council is fully committed to a continuing strong engagement by the EU in efforts to resolve the conflict and find a just and lasting peace. To this end, continuous contact has been maintained at the highest level with both the Palestinians and the Israelis. The President of the Council, Foreign Minister Piqué, visited the region at the beginning of this year. High Representative Solana was there already twice this year while Special Representative Moratinos has been pursuing his efforts on the ground. Visits by Ministers from Member States ensure that the EU continues its 'relay' diplomacy.

Within the international community, the EU plays a key role in ensuring close contact and coordination among the key players, at high level and on the ground. The EU considers resolute and concerted action by the EU, the United States, the United Nations, the Russian Federation and the Arab countries most concerned to be essential for progress.

Internally, the EU continues to actively explore ideas which might contribute to progress on the security, political and economic fronts. The EU also maintains its financial support for the Palestinian territories in order to alleviate the difficult socio-economic situation of the Palestinians, with a view to supporting the Middle East Peace Process.

Due to the recent evolution of the situation, EU Ministers of Foreign Affairs have met in Luxembourg on 3 April 2002.

(2002/C 229 E/082)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0333/02

by **Nuala Ahern (Verts/ALE)** to the Council

(12 February 2002)

Subject: Resources for enforcing Laeken decisions on nuclear energy

What extra financial and personnel resources will be committed — and over what period of time — to putting into practice the decisions on nuclear energy at paragraph 59 of the European Council at the Laeken summit in December 2001 in respect of (1) analysis of the safety and security reports to be delivered to the Commission by Member States' own atomic energy experts; and (2) the presentation of reports by accession states on the safety status of their respective nuclear programmes?