

Answer given by Mr Solbes Mira on behalf of the Commission

(4 April 2002)

The Commission is aware that some Member States have securitised future revenue streams through special purpose vehicles (SPV).

A Task Force of statistical experts from Member States is currently examining this matter in relation to existing rules and will make recommendation to the Committee for Monetary, Financial and Balance of Payments statistics (CMFB) on appropriate accounting treatment in line with existing Maastricht debt definitions.

A change in the method of calculation of public debt is not being contemplated at present.

Based on existing information, the Commission does not see that actions undertaken will endanger budgetary policy co-ordination or will lead to any deterioration of public finances.

The stability and growth pact has proved to be an effective tool for budgetary policy co-ordination enabling the necessary macro-economic stability, which fosters growth and employment in the medium term.

(2002/C 172 E/204)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0384/02**by Bernard Poinant (PSE) to the Commission**

(21 February 2002)

Subject: China's accession to the WTO and respect for human rights

During last October's part-session in Strasbourg, the European Parliament adopted Mr Gahrton's report on China's accession to the WTO (A5-0366/2001). Incorporating China into the World Trade Organisation cannot be viewed in any way other than favourably. As far as can be judged, the repercussions for the Chinese population could only be positive. The choice of holding the Olympic Games in Peking in 2008 is presumably based on the same logic.

However, there are signs of public concern. Admitting the Chinese communist regime into the international community must not mean forgetting its daily violations of human rights: death sentences, torture, arbitrary detention etc., are not uncommon.

If China joins the World Trade Organisation it must conform to the rules. One of those is the GATT's General Agreement on customs tariffs of 1947, Article 20 of which provides for exceptions to the agreement, notably concerning the import of products manufactured in prison.

In the case in point, many Chinese are sentenced to forced labour and are thereby compelled to manufacture products for export.

The European Union has a duty to monitor this situation. How does the Commission intend to deal with this matter?

Answer given by Mr Lamy on behalf of the Commission

(18 March 2002)

The Commission fully shares the concern of the Honourable Member with regard to practices of forced labour and prison labour.

Respect for human rights, including core labour standards, globally is a priority objective for the Commission. The Communication from the Commission 'Promoting core labour standards and improving

social governance in the context of globalisation⁽¹⁾ indeed presented a comprehensive strategy for the promotion of core labour standards in the context of globalisation. The strategy suggests action at international and European levels, in all external relations as well as in the International Labour Organisations to ensure the application of core labour standards.

With respect to trade policy, the Communication suggests an incentive approach by a strengthening of the Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP) social incentive scheme. The Council adopted the revised GSP scheme in December 2001 and has thus confirmed this approach.

As regards prison labour more specifically, the Honourable Member rightly pointed to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade Article XX, which allows for trade measures to be taken against prison labour. China's accession to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in fact provides greater transparency in trade practices related to prison labour. The Commission will monitor the situation in China in the light of WTO provisions and will take action as appropriate.

⁽¹⁾ COM(2001) 416 final.

(2002/C 172 E/205)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0404/02

**by Cristiana Muscardini (UEN), Roberta Angelilli (UEN), Sergio Berlato (UEN),
Roberto Bigliardo (UEN), Sebastiano Musumeci (UEN), Antonio Mussa (UEN),
Mauro Nobilia (UEN), Adriana Poli Bortone (UEN), Franz Turchi (UEN)
and Mariotto Segni (UEN) to the Commission**

(21 February 2002)

Subject: Italian citizens with Belgian pensions

Italian citizens who have worked in Belgium and have returned Italy with an invalidity and/or retirement pension awarded by the Belgian authorities have to face long delays and go through lengthy formalities before they receive their cheques.

The Belgian bank responsible for payments sends a bank transfer to the Italian central post office in Rome.

From Rome, the post office cheques are then sent to various localities throughout Italy, resulting in significant delays in payments and increasing the risk of pensioners being robbed when they have to collect their money from the post office.

Will the Commission:

- ensure that Italian pensioners are treated in the same way as pensioners from Portugal, France, the Netherlands, Germany, Luxembourg and even Morocco, by allowing them to receive their pension payments directly from the Belgian bank concerned;
- intervene without delay to ensure the equal treatment of all European pensioners, thus preventing discrimination against Italian citizens?

Answer given by Mrs Diamantopoulou on behalf of the Commission

(21 March 2002)

The Commission would like to remind the Honourable Members that, according to the provisions of Council Regulation (EEC) No 574/72⁽¹⁾, social security benefits are paid to beneficiaries either directly or through a liaison body. Annex 6 to this Regulation mentions the procedure for payment of allowances chosen by the institutions responsible for payment in each Member State. Belgium opted for direct payment of allowances.

However, this Regulation does not specify what form the direct payment should take, which means that it can be paid by money order.