

On 6 December 2002, the Council (Transport/Telecommunications/Energy) adopted conclusions on ships' safety and pollution prevention. Among other measures, the Council committed itself to immediately examining the Commission's proposal for a regulation on the establishment of a Community fund for the compensation of oil pollution damage in European waters (COPE fund), with the aim of establishing it before the end of 2003, in the case that a supplementary compensation fund for oil pollution is not created by the International Maritime Organization (IMO).

Furthermore, responding more particularly to the recent sinking of the Prestige off the coast of Galicia, and with regard to compensation for the ecological and economic damage, particularly in Northern Spain, the Council (Agriculture and Fisheries) adopted on 20 December 2002 exceptional supporting measures to supplement the actions taken in the context of the interventions of the Structural Funds in Spain for compensating the sector affected by the oil spills from the Prestige accident.

(2003/C 280 E/036)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0121/03

by Bob van den Bos (ELDR) to the Council

(28 January 2003)

Subject: North Korean refugees

The European Union is the UNHCR's second largest donor after the United States. The recently published UNHCR Annual Statistical Yearbook makes no mention of the estimated 200 000 North Korean refugees in China. According to the UNHCR, China is denying the UNHCR access to the region where many North Koreans are hiding, thereby violating international law on refugees. Under a seven-year-old agreement between China and the UNHCR, the latter is supposed to have free access to refugees. So far the UNHCR has refused to invoke the arbitration clause in the agreement.

When making budgets available to UNHCR, donor countries can earmark their contributions. Will the European Union make use of this option in order to make funds available to provide for North Korean refugees in China? If not, why not?

Will the European Union urge the UNHCR to make use of the option of submitting disputes between the UNHCR and China to binding arbitration? If not, why not?

Reply

(21 July 2003)

The Council would remind the Honourable Member that both the EU Member States and the Community make substantial financial contributions to the UNHCR, despite the fact that the Community as such is not a member of the UNHCR.

As far as the use of national contributions is concerned, it is not for the Council to set the conditions for such use, nor is it for the Council to interfere with the UNHCR's evaluation of its bilateral relations with China. With regard to the use of Community contributions, the Council invites the Honourable Member to put his question to the Commission directly.

The EU has on numerous occasions raised the question of China's treatment of North Korean asylum-seekers in the context of its biannual political dialogue on human rights with China. At the most recent round of the dialogue, on 5 and 6 March 2003, the EU also urged China to cooperate with the UNHCR.
