

The Commission's approach towards Cambodia in the field of human rights, as it is towards all countries in the region, is to encourage and support continued progress on human rights and democratisation, and to raise concerns where abuses occur, in the framework of the international human rights instruments. This approach was reiterated in the May 2001 Commission Communication on the EU's role in promoting human rights and democratisation in third countries ⁽¹⁾.

⁽¹⁾ COM(2001) 252 final.

(2004/C 11 E/099)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0599/03

**by Margrietus van den Berg (PSE)
and Dorette Corbey (PSE) to the Commission**

(3 March 2003)

Subject: Setting-up of a pan-European River Water Task Force

Recent floods in the Netherlands and Belgium have, once again, highlighted the importance of transfrontier cooperation between regional authorities in dealing with natural disasters. National protection measures are pointless if regions upstream take no equivalent measures. The Mayor of Maastricht, Mr Leers, recently stated that he wanted to set up a pan-European Task Force, consisting of leading politicians and authoritative flood-protection experts with wide-reaching powers, with a view to ensuring that security measures are taken.

The Framework Water Directive (2000/60/EC) ⁽¹⁾ requires Member States whose territory lies within a river basin district to cooperate with each other and to coordinate their water policies. International river basin districts must be identified and water management plans adopted. The Commission is to act at the request of the Member States concerned in order to facilitate the establishment of programmes of measures.

1. Has the Commission, to date, received any requests to facilitate allocation to an international river basin district?
2. What aid can the Commission offer in such instances to border regions, such as the region bordering the River Meuse to which Maastricht belongs, which want to coordinate not only the quality of the river water but also the quantity of water supplied?

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 327, 22.12.2000, p. 1.

Answer given by Mrs Wallström on behalf of the Commission

(12 May 2003)

The Water Framework Directive ⁽¹⁾ mentioned by the Honourable Members addresses selected aspects of water quantity such as water quantity being a mandatory part of good groundwater status, providing for a sustainable long-term balance between resources available and abstractions. Whilst it will contribute to mitigating the effects of floods and droughts, it does not per se set operational targets for flood prevention and flood protection.

Nevertheless, beyond the formal scope of this Directive a range of initiatives have been taken:

- Firstly, International River Conventions such as those for Maas, Schelde, Rhine or Elbe do now have flood prevention among their statutory objectives and are actively involved in addressing flood prevention and flood protection⁽²⁾. For the Maas basin addressed by the Honourable Member this means high level political commitment by all the countries of this river basin to jointly address the issue of flood prevention and protection. The new Maas Convention was signed in December 2002 and is now awaiting ratification by the Parliaments involved. The Commission representing the Community in the bodies of these conventions is proactively supporting these efforts.

- Secondly, the Commission, Member States and Candidate Countries have in 2002 started comprehensive co-operation on the issue of flooding. Beyond the formal scope of the Water Framework Directive, exchange of information, knowledge and experience on flood prevention and flood protection will lead to a joint document this year on best practices in flood prediction, prevention and mitigation. At the same time the Commission is working on a horizontal initiative addressing environmental risks (forest fires, earthquakes, flood events, and technological risks), with a Commission Communication on this also foreseen during 2003. Following discussion on this Communication and the collating of best practices, the Commission will consider the need and scope of possible legislative frameworks. In parallel, the Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) has developed a flood prediction and modelling instrument for the Oder river basin, this instrument is now to be applied to and made operational for the Elbe and Danube basins as well.
- Thirdly, there is considerable financial support available from Community funding. The Community Initiative Interreg III of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) for the period 2000-2006 can, at the operational level, contribute to support ongoing actions at international level for flood prevention and protection. In particular its strand B, for transnational co-operation, promotes the good management of natural resources, in particular water resources, following an integrated spatial planning approach.

The types of actions that can be funded on a transnational basis include:

- formulation of joint strategies for risk management in areas prone to flooding;
- drawing up and implementation of integrated strategies and actions for the prevention of flooding in transnational river-catchment areas;
- infrastructure investments, for instance for creating retention and overflow areas or for the restoration of the natural course of tributaries and of overflow areas;
- improvement of observation, forecasting, data exchange, monitoring and risk management as well as testing new technologies (e.g. simulation models, meteorological monitoring etc.) on various scales;
- development of new and more efficient planning tools (danger zone plans, models) for the prevention of natural disasters in areas prone to flooding;
- development of information systems for an optimum spreading of information in order to protect population from flooding, thus raising public awareness on risks;
- improving existing forecasting/warning systems; promotion and realisation of good practice, e.g. enhancement of monitoring, warning and protection systems.

In the framework of these programmes, several projects are already addressing these issues and bringing together different actors, working together to improve flood prevention.

Already in the previous Structural Funds programming period (1997-1999), the Initiative IRMA (Interreg Rhine Maas Activities) provided financial support for the prevention of flooding in the Rhine-Meuse basin, i.e. the region addressed by the Honourable Member (around EUR 120 million from the ERDF for a total public funding of over EUR 350 million and a global investment of over EUR 430 million).

In the present period, from 2000-2006, the programme North West Europe has by far reserved the most important budget for flood prevention — its measure for 'The prevention of flood damage' amounts to some EUR 92,3 million, of which EUR 46,2 million from the ERDF. The Cadres programme, in its priority for 'Environment protection' reserves about EUR 28,5 million for possible actions in the field of 'environment protection', 'risk management' and 'integrated water management'. Finally, the Alpine Space programme, in its measure 'Co-operation in the field of natural risks', foresees a total of EUR 17 million, of which EUR 8,5 million from the ERDF.

The Common Agriculture Policy (CAP), through its second pillar (Rural Development Regulation (EC) No 1257/1999 of the Council of 17 May 1999 on support for rural development from the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF) and amending and repealing certain Regulations)⁽³⁾, can already finance measures which have a particular relevance for flood prevention if Member States choose to include such measures into their Rural Development programmes. Currently, some of these programmes foresee direct or indirect measures for the prevention or reduction of environmental risks. Measures that will help to increase the water retention capacity of the soil (e.g. afforestation, maintenance of grassland, organic matter incorporation) will have a direct reduction effect on floods. Likewise, any measure aimed at climate change mitigation (e.g. promotion of renewable energies such as bio-gas, reduction of animal stocking) is likely to have a positive (indirect) effect, since it is suspected that global warming contributes to increasing the frequency of extreme weather events.

For the future, the Commission proposals for a CAP reform, as set out in a Communication⁽⁴⁾ recently published would, if adopted, result in an increased budget being available through pillar II, which Member States could use to increase their support for risk prevention activities. This would be brought about by using modulation to shift money from pillar I to pillar II. The introduction of mandatory cross-compliance for farmers receiving direct payments will reinforce the respect of statutory management requirements and the maintenance of good agricultural conditions, which comprise e.g. anti-erosion measures. It is proposed to exclude changes in the land use of permanent pastures, in particular no conversion to arable land. The single payment scheme will contribute to extensification, which would have positive consequences e.g. on water retention capacity of soils.

⁽¹⁾ Directive 2000/60/EC of the Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy.

⁽²⁾ Rhine: action plan flood protection adopted, implementation ongoing. Elbe: flood protection strategy adopted, draft action programme currently validated following the 2002 flood disaster, adoption foreseen end-2003. Danube river: minimisation of impacts of floods as part of the adopted action programme, follow-up evaluation ongoing. Maas and Schelde: flood prevention and protection is key part of the recently signed new Conventions.

⁽³⁾ OJ L 160, 26.6.1999.

⁽⁴⁾ COM(2003) 23 final.

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WRITTEN QUESTION E-0623/03

**by Johanna Boogerd-Quaak (ELDR)
and Dorette Corbey (PSE) to the Commission**

(3 March 2003)

Subject: Compensation for the costs of cleaning up oil on the Zeeland and South Holland coast

The direct and indirect damage to the Zeeland and South Holland coast resulting from the disaster involving the Tricolor which occurred in December in the Dover Straits is considerable. The costs of cleaning up the oil (cost of hiring equipment and cleaning personnel, cost of removal of the oil) are estimated at EUR 1 million.

1. Does the Commission consider that the European directives in the area of environmental liability must also cover the maritime sector and shipping?
2. Does the Commission consider that the polluter can also be made liable for indirect damage resulting from the Tricolor disaster?
3. Is the Commission prepared to bear part of the costs incurred by the Netherlands coastal provinces as a result of the damage, where the costs cannot be recovered from the polluter, in this instance the owner of the Tricolor?
4. Does the Commission take the view that the Netherlands and Belgian authorities cooperated sufficiently with a view to preventing this environmental disaster?