

WRITTEN QUESTION E-1421/02
by Karin Junker (PSE)
to the Commission

Subject: Forest dieback in Indonesia

International environmental organisations are concerned at the situation in Indonesia: of the 162 million hectares of forest covering the island state with its rich vegetation 40 years ago, only half still remains. Experts consider the long-term climatic and ecological repercussions to be alarming. Alongside forest fires, local observers believe that the corrupt political system is chiefly responsible for the loss of vital resources. They claim that the region's autonomy has been consolidated since the fall of the former President Suharto, and state control has become powerless. Local administrative authorities with few funds have enriched themselves by illegally felling trees. NGOs are calling for forest reform, clear rules on ownership and more action to combat illegal logging and corruption in order to safeguard the environment and essential resources for future generations.

The EU is Indonesia's second largest trading partner and the main destination for the export of goods. The EU is also the largest external investor in the region. Over a period of four years, EUR 106 million have been allocated to EC development programmes, mainly to support forestry. In its communication 'Developing closer relations between Indonesia and the European Union' (COM(2000) 50), the Commission stresses the need to support Indonesia in its plans for forest reform. It points out that the problems are closely linked to the political process in Indonesia. If that process were improved, EU aid programmes – which chiefly focus on fire prevention, sustainable forestry and preserving the ecological balance – would be more effective.

To what extent is the Commission exerting pressure on the Indonesian Government to carry through the planned reforms?

In what way is the Commission cooperating with local and international NGOs?

Does the Commission see a link between the threat to Indonesia's forests and shortcomings in the local administrative structure?

Does the Commission have any figures on the extent of deforestation and the scale of corruption?

What possibilities does the Commission see for eradicating abuse and preventing illegal logging?