

WRITTEN QUESTION E-1152/03  
by Joke Swiebel (PSE)  
to the Council

Subject: Extortion against holidaymakers travelling through Bulgaria

In recent years, Netherlands residents have very regularly been the victims of extortion and other fraudulent practices by government officials while in transit through Bulgaria on the way to Turkey during the summer holidays. Sums of money are taken from them in various ways, including in the guise of tolls or fines, or for 'visas' at the border. A file containing accounts confirming the existence of such practices, compiled by the Netherlands Foundation entitled 'Participation Body for Turks in the Netherlands', will be forwarded to you.

I believe that the Council is sufficiently aware of this problem, since the Spanish Presidency brought it to the attention of the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry in May 2002. I also gather that EU countries' consuls in Bulgaria are holding or have held consultations to raise this problem with the Bulgarian authorities.

In a few months it will be the summer holidays again and many people will be wanting to travel to Turkey via Bulgaria and the Balkans. Can the Council state what the outcome has been of the above-mentioned consultations? What measures has the Council taken since then to bring the problem of extortion against holiday-makers in Bulgaria to the attention of the relevant Bulgarian authorities? What solution has been found to prevent yet more holidaymakers being the victim of such practices in future? What channels are offered by the embassies and consulates of the EU countries in Bulgaria for hearing complaints and referring people who have been cheated in this way to the Bulgarian courts where they may be able to enter a claim for the money they have lost?