WRITTEN QUESTION E-4066/03
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to the Commission

Subject: Biometric passports

Among the measures included by the Commission for 2004 in its work programme (COM(2003) 645) is a proposal for a regulation to define the characteristics of the information system for visas.

Meanwhile, as of 5 January 2004 all citizens of certain countries wishing to enter the US have to pass through a scanner identifying a set of biometric characteristics which are used to exercise checks on their stay there. The US will start issuing biometric passports from next year.

Biometric technology offers a number of different options: it can be applied to the face, the hands, and even the eyes. The technologies concerned are, however, still very expensive, and cannot at present be considered completely reliable.

What is the Commission's time-frame for the EU-wide introduction of passports using biometric technology? Does it consider their introduction to be viable in the medium term?