

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0778/04
by Maurizio Turco (NI)
to the Commission

Subject: Violation of religious freedom in Lithuania

In view of the following:

- Article 6 of the EU Treaty;
- Articles 10 and 22 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU concerning religious freedom and cultural and religious diversity;
- the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of 1950 (in particular Articles 9 and 14);
- the Commission's report of 19 February 2003 on the application for accession to the EU submitted by the Czech Republic, Estonia, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia;
- the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council 'The Commission's Legislative and Work Programme for 2004' of 29 October 2003 (COM (2003) 645 final);
- the International Religious Freedom Report for 2003 issued by the US Department of State;
- the Copenhagen political criteria regarding the right to religious freedom;

and the fact that:

- in Lithuania, according to the Constitution, State and local teaching and educational establishments are secular;
- despite this, in February 2003 the Deputy Minister for Education admitted that as a result of an agreement with the Holy See Catholic priests have the final word regarding the employment of teachers giving religious instruction in State schools;
- Lithuania is one of the countries due to join the EU on 1 May 2004;

can the Commission say whether it is fully aware of all these facts and, if so, what view it takes of them?

Since religious freedom and freedom of association are among the priority issues for the Union and since the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council 'The Commission's Legislative and Work Programme for 2004' of 29 October 2003 states that the legal obligations of the European Union and the new Member States vis-à-vis the *acquis communautaire* must be fulfilled from the first day of accession, can the Commission say whether it intends to inform the authorities of these countries of its intentions to this effect? In other words, how will the Commission ensure that these countries comply with the *acquis* from the first day of their membership of the EU if at the same time there is an infringement of the very rights respect for which is strictly necessary for their accession?

Since the political criteria laid down in the Commission's report of 19 February 2003 require the applicant States to ensure the stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities, does the Commission not consider the facts mentioned above as an obstacle in the context of these countries' accession to the EU and hence contrary to the *acquis*, and that the countries where these events have occurred are totally failing to comply with the criteria?

Will the Commission consider using all the means at its disposal to put an end to this infringement of religious freedom and freedom of worship?