

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0012/05
by Antonio De Poli (PPE-DE)
to the Council

Subject: Tsunami in south-east Asia

30 000 people are known to have died and the figure is expected to reach 70 000 (a majority of them children); thirteen Italians have died, 100 have disappeared without trace, and around fifty are being treated in Thai hospitals; 1 500 bodies were found on a train that was swept away by the wave in Sri Lanka and destruction is on a vast scale. These are the appalling consequences of the tsunami that recently hit south-east Asia. Tourists and holiday villages, but also nameless poor fishing communities and poverty-stricken villages were all submerged in an instant and tens of thousands of lives have been torn apart.

Could the disaster have been predicted? Could inhabitants and tourists have been warned that a gigantic wave would engulf them so quickly? Experts claim the answer is 'yes'. According to Japanese scientists it is possible to forecast or at least announce the arrival of a major submarine earthquake. The GPS system makes it possible to ascertain shifts in tide patterns, but in Indonesia - for example - information and monitoring systems are not sufficiently advanced, according to Japanese experts. The United Nations in Geneva has deplored the absence of alert systems in countries on the Indian Ocean, in contrast with countries on the Pacific rim. Indonesia does all it can to forecast tsunamis but does not have the necessary funding and is in a situation similar to that in Japan more than 20 years ago.

What measures will the Council take in the context of the new partnership between the EU and south-east Asia established on 9 July 2003 to offer support, over and above immediate aid, to the populations hit by this overwhelming tragedy and assist the countries involved with reconstruction and development work? What is the total amount of aid that will be sent to these countries to meet the initial and most urgent needs? Does it envisage informing the citizens of Europe of the results achieved by means of the funding? If so, how will this be done?